

CLAUDIO VESCIA ZANINI

**THE ORGY IS OVER: PHANTASIES, FAKE
REALITIES AND THE LOSS OF BOUNDARIES IN
CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S *HAUNTED***

PORTO ALEGRE

2011

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS
ÁREA: ESTUDOS DE LITERATURA
ESPECIALIDADE: LITERATURAS ESTRANGEIRAS MODERNAS
LINHA DE PESQUISA: LITERATURA, IMAGINÁRIO E HISTÓRIA

**THE ORGY IS OVER: PHANTASIES, FAKE
REALITIES AND THE LOSS OF BOUNDARIES IN
CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S *HAUNTED***

CLAUDIO VESCIA ZANINI

ORIENTADORA: PROF^a. DR^a. SANDRA SIRANGELO MAGGIO

Texto de Qualificação de Doutorado em Literaturas Estrangeiras Modernas submetido como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Doutor ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

PORTO ALEGRE

2011

In loving memory of my father, José João Zanini, and of Professor Ana Maria Kessler Rocha,
also known as Lady Bracknell.

“We like to imagine that something which we do not understand does not help us in any way.

But that is not always so.

Seldom does a man understand with his head alone, least of all when he is a primitive.”

Carl Gustav Jung in *Four Archetypes*

“We all die. The goal isn’t to live forever, the goal is to create something that will.”

Chuck Palahniuk in *Diary*

"We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning."

Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*

“Welcome to prime time, bitch!”

Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street – Dream Warriors*, as he sticks a girl’s head into a TV set.

Thank you,

Sandra Maggio, for your guidance, friendship, trust, and guts.

Letícia Germano Zanini Ricardo Stephens Woodhouse-Knightley Bennet-Darcy Fine Draper Roitman Solis Van de Kamp Scavo Delfino Britt Pitstop Bovary Addams. You are many, you are mine and I love you all.

Mom, for listening to my reading of *Guts* and not passing out, and for your untested typing skills.

Professors Jane Thompson Brodbeck, Julio Jeha, Márcia Ivana de Lima e Silva and Rosalia Garcia, for bringing their unique views to my work and making it better.

Jean Baudrillard, for being such an intelligent sourpuss.

And Chuck Palahniuk, for being so sensitive.

RESUMO

Este trabalho tem por objetivo apresentar o romance *Assombro*, de Chuck Palahniuk, como retrato e sintoma do comportamento da sociedade pós-moderna ocidental, cujos valores correspondem, de acordo com palavras do próprio autor, ao “inverso do sonho americano”. A principal característica de tal sociedade é a dificuldade dos indivíduos em lidar com as exigências e constantes mudanças nos âmbitos individual, social e psicológico, o que se configura na obra do escritor estadunidense através de personagens marginais em busca (na maioria das vezes, aparentemente inconsciente) de autoaceitação ou adaptação social. A leitura desenvolvida aqui se baseia principalmente nos escritos do teórico francês Jean Baudrillard, que apresenta o pressuposto de que o mundo contemporâneo encontra-se num estado de “pós-orgia”, assombrado por três fantasmas que o teórico chama de *câncer*, *travesti* e *terrorismo*, os quais simbolizam questões sociais contemporâneas relacionadas à política, sexualidade, comunicação e relacionamentos humanos, entre outros aspectos. Os conceitos de Baudrillard que norteiam a análise são: ‘estado de pós-orgia’, ‘hiperrealidade’, ‘simulação’, ‘virulência’ e ‘sedução’ e ‘fantasmas’. O trabalho também apresenta as características da literatura de Chuck Palahniuk e sua recém-iniciada fortuna crítica, apontando os principais aspectos da sociedade pós-moderna presentes em suas obras e culminando em um cotejo de *Assombro* com o gótico e sua vertente pós-moderna, além de uma comparação entre a dinâmica estabelecida entre as personagens do romance e aquela percebida nos *reality shows* e falsos documentários (*mock-documentaries*). A conclusão retoma aspectos na estrutura, imaginário e conteúdo do romance, que permitem defini-lo como retrato e sintoma de uma nova configuração social, resultado das inevitáveis mudanças por que o mundo passa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura estadunidense; Chuck Palahniuk; Jean Baudrillard; fantasmas; hiperrealidade.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims at presenting Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Haunted* as a portrait and symptom of the behavior perceived in the postmodern Western society, whose values, according to the author himself, correspond to "the opposite of the American Dream". The main characteristic of such society is the individuals' difficulty in dealing with demands and constant changes in the individual, social and psychological spheres, a fact observed in the work of this American writer through the presence of marginal characters in a more often than not apparently unconscious search of self-acceptance or social adaptation. The reading proposed is mainly based on the writings of French theoretician Jean Baudrillard, who presents the assumption that the contemporary world is in a "post-orgy" state, haunted by three phantasies he denominates *cancer*, *transvestitism* and *terrorism*, which symbolize contemporary social issues related to politics, sexuality, communication and human relationships, among other aspects. The concepts by Baudrillard that underlie the analysis are: 'post-orgy state', 'hyperreality', 'simulation', 'virulence', 'seduction' and 'phantasies'. The work also presents the features of the literature produced by Chuck Palahniuk and its newly-started critical fortune, highlighting the main aspects of postmodern society present in his works, culminating with an approximation of *Haunted* to the postmodern variation of Gothic literature, besides a comparison between the dynamics established among the characters in the novel to the one perceived in reality shows and mock-documentaries. The conclusion strengthens aspects in the structure, imaginary and content of the novel that enable the definition of *Haunted* as portrait and symptom of a new social organization, resulting from the inevitable changes the world goes through.

KEY WORDS: American Literature; Chuck Palahniuk; Jean Baudrillard; phantasies; hyperreality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS.....	9
1 BEFORE THE ORGY, OR HAVE YOU EVER RUBBED YOUR EYES WITH BROKEN GLASS IN THEM?.....	10
2 FOREPLAY, OR CHUCK PALAHNIUK AND HIS “UNRELENTING CIRCUS OF PAIN”.....	21
2.1 <i>FIGHT CLUB</i> AND A LOT MORE.....	21
2.2 A PASSION FOR PATTERNS.....	35
2.3 POSTMODERN, ISN'T IT?.....	63
2.4 “I’M THE COMBINED EFFORT OF EVERYBODY I’VE EVER KNOWN”: HORROR AND GOTHIC	72
3 DURING THE ORGY, OR FRAGMENTS OF THEORY.....	93
3.1 “THE CAMERA BEHIND THE CAMERA BEHIND THE CAMERA”: REALITY SHOWS AND MOCK-DOCUMENTARIES.....	93
3.2 “I SHOUTED OUT WHO KILLED THE KENNEDYS”: SEDUCTION, VIRULENCE AND PHANTASIES.....	109
3.3 “LOOKING GOOD AND FEELING GORGEOUS”: HYPERREALITY, SIMULATION AND THE IMAGE	126
4 THE END OF THE ORGY, OR THE PHANTASIES.....	148
4.1 CANCER.....	149
4.2 TRANSVESTITISM.....	178
4.3 TERRORISM.....	209
5 WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO, NOW THAT THE ORGY IS OVER?.....	231
6 REFERENCES.....	243
7 APPENDIXES.....	251
8 ANNEXES.....	255

ABBREVIATIONS

FC	<i>Fight Club</i>
S	<i>Survivor</i>
IM	<i>Invisible Monsters</i>
C	<i>Choke: A Novel</i>
L	<i>Lullaby</i>
FR	<i>Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon</i>
D	<i>Diary: A Novel</i>
SF	<i>Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories</i>
H	<i>Haunted: A Novel of Stories</i>
R	<i>Rant: An Oral Biography of Buster Casey</i>
SN	<i>Snuff</i>
P	<i>Pygmy</i>
TA	<i>Tell-All</i>

Chart based on that designed by Kuhn and Rubin (2009). For the sake of organization and to make the reading process easier, books by Chuck Palahniuk will be referred to by the abbreviations on this list, and not by the year of the edition used, as ABNT recommends. However, the list of references includes all the information about the editions used here.

1 BEFORE THE ORGY, OR HAVE YOU EVER RUBBED YOUR EYES WITH BROKEN GLASS IN THEM?

The title of this introduction is divided in two parts, and both of them deserve – or rather, need – some explaining.

“Before the orgy” refers to one of Jean Baudrillard’s most creative premises being applied to the titles of the parts that form this work. I trace a parallel between the five parts that form the body of the work and the parts I assume form an orgy¹. Such parallel focuses on the function of each of the parts in the work (introduction, first, second and third chapters, and conclusion) and the parts in the unfolding of an orgy (before, foreplay, during, the end and after). Naturally, what Baudrillard has to say about orgies will be discussed in due time.

The second part of the title is a teaser. I allowed myself to play with words and ideas in the titles of my sections under the influence of the two men whose writings have given origin to this dissertation: American writer Chuck Palahniuk and French theoretician Jean Baudrillard. The question “have you ever rubbed your eyes with broken glass in them?” comes from the text *The Fiction of Self-Destruction – Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist*, by Jesse Kavadlo (in SCHUCHARDT, 2008, 13). According to Kavadlo, the sensation caused by the reading of a text by Chuck Palahniuk (in Kavadlo’s text the reference is to *Fight Club*) is equivalent to broken glass in your eyes.

In fact, many metaphors have been proposed by different scholars and writers to show what a reading of a “typical” Palahniuk text feels like. Two of them are displayed in titles of my sections: the broken glass one and the “unrelenting circus of pain” (KUHN and RUBIN,

¹ Not that there is any academic or literary relevance in the fact, but given my apparent proficiency in orgies and their parts, I just want to make clear that I have never taken part in an orgy whatsoever.

2009, 1). If you², reader, are not acquainted with Chuck Palahniuk's work, believe me when I say that those two are very accurate samples of what people have been saying about his books, and they do justice to the author's favorite imagery and themes.

The genesis of this dissertation is in many ways connected to the changes I have been through as a reader, a researcher and teacher in the area of literature, and ultimately, as a human being. Then again, I suppose this is one of the greatest consequences of working with literature: what you study becomes so intertwined with various aspects of your life, and next thing you know, your literary criticism reflects your approval (or bitching) of something, the analysis you deliver turns out to be some kind of self-analysis, and the conclusions you reach are more related to aspects of your own personality than you expect.

The first step towards this dissertation involved the writing of my master's thesis, which consisted of an analysis of the imagery related to blood in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. During the writing and research processes, I was able to plunge into a world of horror, fantasy, supernatural and, obviously, blood. I was absolutely sure that my thesis would bring consequences and labels into my academic and personal life; however, I had never been afraid of them: indeed, I ended up recognized by my students and peers and "the Dracula guy", or "Mr. Vampire", epithets which I earned, embodied and of which I am deeply proud.

My studies of Victorian culture and history, as well as of the creation of Stoker's novel, transported me to realities and worlds I was happy to explore: the fin-de-siècle London and a mythical Transylvania, with their dark alleys, solitary lampposts, steps in the middle of the night, wolves howling somewhere, repressed women and gallant, brave men. More than that, what attracted me the most – and, what I firmly believe, attracts most readers that

² Another display of how Palahniuk's writing has influenced me. Joshua Parker's article listed in the references discusses the multiples uses of the pronoun 'you' in Palahniuk's work. However, let us be just: Machado de Assis used to do that very well more than a hundred years before Palahniuk's first novel was published.

indulge themselves in the pleasure of reading *Dracula* – was the monster: the black cape, the sneaky ways, the exotic accent intended by Stoker and consolidated forever by Bela Lugosi in the 1931 movie version, and, most of all, the evil that characterizes Count Dracula.

When the time came to design the project for my doctoral dissertation, it seemed natural to me and people around me to carry out a deeper research on *Dracula*, or maybe on other works of literature related to vampires. And that is when I came across an article on the Internet that mentioned a short story capable of making people faint and vomit (HANTKE, 2009, 196). The work in question was called *Guts*, and the article showed how the dramatic readings of the story performed by the author would actually make people sick.

Curiosity and a certain self-destructive instinct, which many psychologists have come to believe is typical in human beings, made me go after the book and see if it could gross me out or make me pass out. It did neither. However, it touched me at many levels and for many reasons, which I will explain throughout the sections of this dissertation. *Haunted – A Novel of Stories* is the title of the book written in 2005, and its author is Chuck Palahniuk, better known by the masses as the author of *Fight Club*, which became a well-known movie with Brad Pitt, Helena Bonham-Carter and Edward Norton. I had heard of Palahniuk before just once, precisely because of the movie *Fight Club* and the tragic situation involving a medical student in São Paulo. Matheus da Costa Meira invaded a movie theater at Morumbi Shopping Mall showing *Fight Club* and shot five people, two of which to death. Later, Meira affirmed he had chosen this particular movie because both he and the main character in the story were ‘schizophrenic’³.

My first impressions about *Haunted* were: it was far from being the best book I had ever read, there were stories in it that I did not like, most of the poems did not match my

³ Available at http://veja.abril.com.br/101199/p_038.html. Access on October 24, 2006.

poetic taste, and the quantity of characters – nineteen plus others that are mentioned – made me a little confused at times. In spite of all that, I felt (and I apologize for the infamous yet unavoidable use of the term, but I promise this is the first and last time) haunted: by images proposed by the author, by most of the stories, by the interaction among the characters in a twisted and bizarre kind of reality show (one of my passions) that could be described as *Big Brother* meets *Survivor*, with a little touch of *Lord of the Flies* and *Das Experiment*.

I once read *Guts* out loud to my wife and mother, to see what would happen. They did not have any extreme reactions, but my wife said: ‘it’s too much.’ That made me realize that the reading of *Haunted* will probably cause the same impact on most readers: throughout the book, the thought ‘this is too much’ is very likely to happen. In his twisted reality show / writers’ retreat, Palahniuk provides his readers with several murders, cross-dressing, mutilation, innuendoes of pedophilia, masturbation tips, rape, humiliation, scatology, cannibalism, violence of all sorts, conspiracy theories and mysterious diseases most people have not heard of. My mother became really shocked with the narrator’s masturbatory experiences she had just heard me read. And when I told her about other aspects present in the novel, she sighed and said ‘my son, why do you like this kind of thing? It’s monstrous’.

Well, I love monsters (who doesn’t, I dare ask). And this is the point where it dawned on me that the idea of “monster” had probably changed, when compared to the standards established by Romantic literature (let us remember the zombie crew in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or the ominous being Victor Frankenstein creates) or classic horror stories, such as Count Dracula or the Usher siblings in their respective stories.

People need monsters, be it in literary fiction, a horror movie or the evening soap opera. What is more, most people indeed like monsters, whether they admit it or not. Of course, sometimes they go by the label of “villain” instead, but the essence is the same.

Would the re-run of *Vale Tudo* have been so successful on the web and on television twenty-three years after its original airing if it had not been for Odete Roitman? Would Shakespeare's tragedies retain all of their greatness if the "monsters" in them were to be suppressed? What would happen to the plot in *Hamlet* if Claudius did not exist? How would Macbeth and Othello be influenced and manipulated if it was not for the witches and Iago?

The questions placed above serve to reinforce one conclusion scholars have reached about Shakespeare's relevance and success: his texts are timeless, once they still tell us a lot about the world, even though we are in the 21st century. The monsters in Shakespeare's tragedies are not green or purple, they do not drink blood (in spite of the plentiful bloodsheds we are presented to in the aforementioned plays), and they do not fly, for instance. They have mundane motivations. They want money, power, love. They are needy. They are human.

Apparently, it is this kind of monster contemporary audiences have been searching for. Ogres have become a hit with children due to the *Shrek* series, whereas the most popular among the so-called 'vampire stories' written in recent years present 'vegetarian' vampires, who prefer not to prey on humans because of moral dilemmas. Nowadays, villains and monsters must go unnoticed among the crowds. Black capes and long fangs will not convince or please most readers, who have become too lazy and politically correct to tolerate a creature which is supernatural and essentially evil at the same time, as the ones presented in past centuries. The monster does not live in a castle anymore. But (s)he might live next door to you, and knock on your door for a little sugar on a Saturday afternoon, or even offer to look after your kids while you and your partner go to the theater or the movies.

For the sake of exemplification, I resort to another passion of mine: *Desperate Housewives*. Some of the residents in Wisteria Lane (the fictional space where the series takes place) are representatives of aspects that have been used in the past by biased and prejudiced

people to shun others, such as being non-Caucasian, homosexual, or a single mother. Nowadays, at the age of the politically correct, those categories are what people kindly call “minorities”.

Shunning is a way of categorizing somebody as a ‘monstrosity’ – a person who has an evident characteristic that others do not accept for some reason. The idea of ‘evidencing’ or ‘warning’ becomes important as we analyze the etymology of the word ‘monster’: ‘c.1300, “malformed animal, creature afflicted with a birth defect,” from O.Fr. *monstre*, from L. *monstrum* “monster, monstrosity, omen, portent, sign,” from root of *monere* “warn”’.⁴

Contemporary monsters have twisted this idea. Now, the more concealed crimes and faults are, the more evil the monster can be. *Desperate Housewives* also provides us with excellent examples of that: Wisteria Lane, with its beautiful houses, white fences and immaculate lawns, has been the home for murderers, traitors, torturers, corrupt businessmen, a retarded murderer, womanizers, nymphomaniacs and a pedophile, as well as non-Caucasians, homosexuals and single mothers. Most residents of Wisteria Lane have beautiful bodies, spotless hairdos and prize-winning hydrangeas in the yards. They embody the American Dream and the families from detergent commercials, meaning that indeed, it is becoming more and more difficult to spot monsters in the crowd.

The main difference between *Desperate Housewives* and *Haunted* is the space. Whereas in the former the action takes place in the “real” world, on the street, in the latter, things happen in a locked theater. Whereas in the former characters must worry about their reputation within and without the neighborhood (they have to conceal their monstrosities), in the latter they do not. All the pathetic characters locked up are frustrated writers who feel they do not belong in the social circles they left behind. They have their monstrous features as

⁴ Available at <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=monster>. Access on January 20, 2011.

well; however, they do not need to hide them. On the contrary, the thematic rooms, the confinement and the need to create literary texts serve as the perfect excuse for them to expose the skeletons in their closets. That is one of the greatest merits of the story: the environment invites to full disclosure and, by disclosing their dirt, Palahniuk's characters / writers / outcasts become monsters in the original sense of the word – that is, displays of something. Not green, not ogres, not spectra. They are not even solely evil, once they are, as this work will show, also victims. But let us make no mistake: they are monsters, indeed.

Having all of that in mind, my doctoral dissertation project changed in a very spontaneous and drastic way. At first, I intended to deliver a historical analysis of Gothic literature throughout the centuries, which would mean a deeper dive into classic supernatural. The reading of Palahniuk's *Haunted* at the time of designing my project made me see that that was not what I wanted. The more I tried to focus on ghosts, vampires and ghouls, the more I thought about the many characters in *Haunted* and their richly twisted personalities, and how much *Haunted* itself could be considered a great exemplary of the contemporary (postmodern?) horror story.

The reading of *Haunted* led to my acquaintance with the rest of Palahniuk's work. One of my first discoveries was the existence of something Palahniuk himself calls his 'horror trilogy', formed by *Lullaby* (2002), *Diary* (2003) and *Haunted*. Many characteristics present in *Haunted* can also be seen in his other books (even the ones outside the trilogy), as part two of this work shows. Palahniuk proves through his work to be a critic of American society and the values that characterize it: consumerism, the pursuit for beauty patterns and dysfunctional interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, for instance.

Therefore, the first chapter of this dissertation, entitled *Foreplay, or Chuck Palahniuk and His Unrelenting Circus of Pain*, is divided into four subsections: the first one presents

Chuck Palahniuk and his work, through brief summaries of each of his novels and a discussion on the reception *Haunted* had, particularly when it came out. I also present the phenomenon Palahniuk himself denominates “the *Guts* effect”, which is something I could see firsthand (even at in a lesser degree) through my dramatic reading of the short story. The second part of the first chapter presents common patterns and recurrent characteristics perceived in his novels. These two parts work as a sort of introduction of the author to the academia and they are more relevant than they apparently are, given that this is supposedly the first work in Brazil to study any of Chuck Palahniuk’s works at the graduate level as of September 7, 2011.⁵

‘Postmodern’ is a fundamental term for the purposes of this work. It is often used in relation to Jean Baudrillard’s thought; besides, it is a subgenre within Gothic literature, and, as mentioned before and discussed further ahead, *Haunted* has what it takes to be considered ‘postmodern Gothic’. Ultimately, it is a term used to refer to the time we are living now – hence the necessity of dealing with the concept. Therefore, the third subsection presents the most pertinent characteristics of postmodernism for the analysis of *Haunted* carried on throughout the work.

Finally, the fourth subsection discusses the literary influences perceived in Palahniuk’s novel. At this point the connection between my previous studies and *Haunted* comes full cycle, for there are references in *Haunted* to seminal literary works and episodes pertaining to ‘Gothic’, such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, some of the premises present in the preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the mythical episode of the genesis of *Frankenstein* and *The*

⁵ According to a research carried on the Plataforma Lattes database using the term “palahniuk” in the field ‘subject’. Five names are yielded with the research. In order of relevance, mine is the first, and the four others are professors who have either written shorter articles for newspapers or magazines or made short research on Chuck Palahniuk’s work. However, two undergraduate works which I had the privilege of being involved with are worth mentioning here: one about *Choke*, entitled *The Martyrdom of Saint Me: Choking Victor*, by Andréia Dieter Reis (UNISINOS) and *Fight Club: Clash of Ideas* by Henrique Leonardi de Oliveira (UFRGS).

Vampyre in Villa Diodati. In addition to this, many elements present in the plot, structure, atmosphere and style of the novel allow this association to Gothic literature and its postmodern branch.

A most fortuitous coincidence took place when I first had access to Jean Baudrillard's writing. Author of tens of books and owner of a unique intellectual career, marked by changes of mind and also of theoretical opinions, Baudrillard came across to me as a grumpy old man, in whose nagging and bitching I heard the echo of many of my own opinions about the world, people and the way people relate and connect. Incidentally, Baudrillard is had as one of the main representatives of postmodern theory.

The first of Baudrillard's books I read was *The Transparency of Evil*, which provided me with the basic ideas present in the title of this work and the titles of its sections as well: the phantasies, the end of the orgy, the fake realities and the chaos in human relations. After this reading, and through some research about Baudrillard's life and academic trajectory, I was able to understand he had a significant number of theoretical inspirations, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, sociology, semiology and McLuhan's social investigations of media phenomena (HORROCKS and JETVIC, 1997, 3, 121), as well as significant intellectual partners like Sartre and Lefebvre (HORROCKS and JETVIC, 1997, 6-7). In addition, the amount of concepts discussed and created by Baudrillard along the different phases of his thinking is extremely vast.

Therefore, it is important to observe that this work does not intend to cover all of Baudrillard's work; rather, it focuses on his writings produced in the decades of 1980 and 1990. It is such phase – characterized by the writings of *The Transparency of Evil*, *Seduction* and *America* – that entitled Baudrillard to the epithets “fatal theoretician” or “high priest of

postmodernism”, both of them fitting not only to the works that originated them, but also to the analysis proposed here.

The second chapter, entitled *During the Orgy, or Fragments of Theory*, is divided into three subsections. The first one overviews theory related to reality television and mock-documentaries, which will support the close reading. The necessity of such a study lies on the fact that a lot of the story swirls around the relationship *writers vs. information*. What brings *Haunted*, Reality TV and mock-documentaries together is the possibility of the manipulation of facts, the “claims to truthfulness” (AUFDENHEIDE, 2007, 2), and the fact that they are, somehow, based on what Andrejevic calls “the work of being watched” (2003). Another aspect to be taken into consideration is the setting of the novel, reminding of the confinement that characterizes reality shows.

The second and third subsections present concepts found in Baudrillard’s writing pertaining to the analysis of *Haunted* proposed in the third chapter, being *hyperreality*, *simulation* and *the seduction of evil* the most important ones, given that they are crucial for the understanding of the characters’ behavior in the novel. They are the tools used to discuss the difficulty the characters have to accept themselves and other people’s behavior, leading to distorted views of the world and the people around them, as well as their tendency to manipulate facts and make them more appealing, be it for the sake of their literary production or for the sake of marketing, as they intend to leave confinement, sell their stories and obtain money and popularity. Also, the subsection presents Baudrillard’s view of the contemporary world: it is full of excesses in technology, personal relations, sex and consumerism. Such excesses have led to a state of affairs characterized by a feeling of emptiness and void, typical of a ‘post-orgy’ state. This subsection also introduces the three phantasies that, according to Baudrillard, haunt the contemporary world: cancer, transvestitism and terrorism.

The third and final chapter is entitled *The End of the Orgy, or the Phantasies*, consisting of my close reading of *Haunted* based on the three previously mentioned phantasies that, according to Baudrillard, characterize the ‘post-orgy’ contemporary world, being each of them the basis for the three subsections in part three. A chart with the titles of each short story, its author and main themes is presented in appendix II, in order to provide the reader with some basic reference throughout the work.

My final considerations are gathered in a section called *What are we gonna do, now that the orgy is over?*. In that section I revisit the most important aspects discussed in the work, stating that Chuck Palahniuk’s novel of stories exemplifies and describes in many ways the dynamics of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships of the 21st century.

My final invitation for the reading of this work comes from the opening lines of Victor Mancini in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Choke* (2001, 1-2). These lines do not seem inviting at all. Or do they?

If you’re going to read this, don’t bother.

After a couple pages, you won’t want to be here. So forget it. Go away. Get out while you’re still in one piece.

Save yourself.

There has to be something better on television. Or since you have so much on your hands, maybe you could take a night course. Become a doctor. You could make something out of yourself. Treat yourself to a dinner out. Color your hair.

You’re not getting any younger.

What happens here is first going to piss you off. After that it just gets worse.

2 FOREPLAY, OR CHUCK PALAHNIUK AND HIS “UNRELETING CIRCUS OF PAIN”

2.1 *FIGHT CLUB* AND A LOT MORE

The objective of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the work of Chuck Palahniuk, which has proven to be a difficult task due to several reasons: Palahniuk’s short career, which leads to the lack of a meaningful Palahniukean critical fortune; the mixed (and passionate) reactions his works have had, which can be divided in two categories – fans, who have given to the man and his work the status of “cult” in a very short period of time, and detractors, who focus on his taste for gore and violence to justify the fact that what he does is not “good literature”; and, finally, the fact that the author’s name is excessively connected to his first novel.

Fight Club was published in 1996, and turned into a major motion picture in 1999. In spite of being a book with a well-constructed plot with strong characters and a remarkable twist at its end, it only became known to the audiences due to the movie. The qualities of the novel, allied to the fact it made quite an impression as his debut work, enhanced the reputation Palahniuk acquired, and extended it to the rest of his work.

Palahniuk himself is aware of the fact that he owes a lot to *Fight Club*, which can be seen in his book of memoirs, *Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories* (2004). Some of the stories show his first visit to Hollywood due to the movie making (*Almost California*), the first time he met Brad Pitt and how the latter’s good looks were overwhelming (*The Lip Enhancer*), and the feedback he received from a reader who had been able to relate to some of the characters

in the novel (*Monkey Think, Monkey Do*). For better or for worse, Palahniuk will be labeled as “the author of *Fight Club*”⁶.

The fact is that the impact of *Fight Club* had interesting consequences to the sequence of Palahniuk’s work. He has been able to maintain throughout his writing many of the characteristics⁷ that captivated his early readers, meaning most of the criticism made in the late 1990s and early 2000s directed to *Fight Club* also applies to later works.

In a fifteen-year span, Chuck Palahniuk had a significant amount of criticism and feedback, but not under an academic perspective. Most of the criticism and information available is on newspapers and magazines websites in the book review sections, in addition to blogs and websites, most of which run by fans. Palahniuk’s official website itself was created and is managed by a group of fans, and not coincidentally it is called *The Cult*. Apparently, ‘cult’ is an appropriate term, as Douglas Kellner states, “in the sense that the subject matter is far from mainstream.”⁸ Kellner goes even further, reinforcing this point by stating that “stories about disembowelment don’t belong in the literary canon”.

If the choices of themes, images and plots in Chuck Palahniuk’s work do not guarantee him a place in the more orthodox form of literary canon, the same cannot be said about the numbers regarding his sales and popularity, since Palahniuk is a regular in the bestseller lists. As Andrew Lawless highlights, Palahniuk’s detractors suggest that this

⁶ This is something I have been able to understand as people asked me what my work was about. I told them about *Haunted* and my ideas to analyze the novel, but only when I told them Chuck Palahniuk had written *Fight Club* did people make faces that said “Well, this I can relate to.”

⁷ Sections 2.1 and 2.2 deal with recurrent features in the works by Chuck Palahniuk.

⁸ Available at http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page1/_chuck_palahniuk_haunted_interview.html. Access on January 21, 2011.

happens “because he writes the sort of books that people who don't read books like to read. That part of his audience are not regular 'book readers' is certainly true.”⁹

That leads to the two greatest problems about an academic view of Palahniuk's work: the aforementioned fact that there is not a consolidated critical fortune to rely on, and also that a lot of the existing sources are passionate, and more often than not, radical. That goes for both lovers and haters. Good evidence of the former is in the synopsis of *Lullaby* found on The Cult (annex E), that says the book is “weird and funny and is still a Palahniuk novel that will have non-Palahniuk people lifting an eyebrow in confusion when you tell them what you're reading.” The notion of two kinds of people – “Palahniuk people” and “non-Palahniuk people” – sets the tone. Palahniuk people know what he will present in his stories, and as they proclaim themselves “Palahniuk people” the underlying message is: “I can handle gore, mutilation and violence; I'm strong, and so is my stomach. How about you?” Therefore, claiming to be a “Palahniuk person” might work as a sort of political statement – with possible stronger consequences, such as the writing of a doctoral dissertation.

Conversely, very good examples of what haters have to say can be found in different reviews of *Haunted*: while Ken St Andre from *The Library Journal* calls the novel “a catalog of atrocities” (May 1, 2005), Elizabeth Hand says on *The Washington Post* that it is “kind of repetitive, and it's also really, really gross.”¹⁰

Chuck Palahniuk had to become used to such extreme responses due to the recurrence of extremes in his work: extremely dysfunctional characters, some extremely violent scenes, extreme criticism, and his ability to deliver social criticisms in extremely harsh ways. His career comprises so far eleven works of fiction and two non-fiction books: *Stranger Than*

⁹ The interview with Chuck Palahniuk is in annex W.

¹⁰ The reviews mentioned in this work form annex O.

Fiction and an interesting sort of travel guide called *A Walk in Portland, Oregon: Fugitives and Refugees* (2003). His twelfth novel was published in October 2011, and it is entitled *Damned*.¹¹ It tells the story of an eleven-year-old girl named Madison who wakes up on a given day only to find herself in hell. From this point on, her mission is to understand what had happened to her, and what she might have done to be punished in such a way. Criticism to consumer society remains, as Madison's parents are a billionaire and a Hollywood figure, both of which addicted to alcohol and drugs.

Fight Club (1996) presents the story of an unnamed narrator sometimes referred to as Jack, a typical white-collar mid-class who realizes his state-of-the-art appliances and modern furniture do not fill the void of his life. He has no full name and never stands out, elements which contribute towards the conclusion that he is nothing but ordinary, average. In order to create some sort of bond with other people and also to convince himself that other might suffer more than him, Jack attends meetings of support groups for sick people. In one of these meetings he meets Marla Singer, a loner with an aura of mystery who does not seem to have any kind of stable relationship with anyone.

At a certain point of the story, the narrator comes across the character that turns out to be his counterpart throughout, Tyler Durden. Tyler seems to be the opposite: outspoken, charismatic, boisterous and sexy. The dynamics of the relationship between the two and the triangular relationship they have with Marla dominate the narrative, which describes the creation of the "fight club", an underground organization conceived by Tyler and Jack to gather other men who do not find fulfillment in their ordinary lives. The objective is to provide the members of the club with an opportunity to bond with others and be something other than their pathetic selves, whereas the means through which such bonding happens is

¹¹ A chronological chart with Chuck Palahniuk's work is provided in appendix I, as well as the synopsis for each of the works retrieved from his official website on January 30, 2011 (annexes A to M).

one-on-one fights. The final twist comes through the discovery that Tyler and Jack are the same person, in a modern re-reading of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which comes full cycle with the basic premise of the club – after all, as Jack wants to escape the boredom of his daily life, he also wants to be someone else.

Survivor (1999) tells the story of Tender Branson, a member of a radical church called the Creedish Church, who is on a suicidal mission that includes hijacking an airplane and telling his complicated life story into the black box before crashing the airplane in the Australian Outback. It is interesting to note that the “curse” upon the movie versions of Palahniuk’s books started with the issue regarding a movie version of *Survivor*. The book had its rights bought in 2000, and pre-production was supposed to start in 2001. A few weeks before that, 9/11 took place, and the producers thought that, given the impact of the attack, it would not be appropriate for a movie version of *Survivor* to take place.

In his article entitled *With or Without Us: Chuck Palahniuk’s 9/11*, Jesse Kavadlo points out to the fact that Palahniuk’s two novels to be released before 2001 predicted behaviors and responses to be found both within and without the USA after the attacks: extreme and underground violence, the hijacking of an airplane under the pretext of religious radicalism, and the notion of a war between poles representing completely opposite ideals. One quotation from *Fight Club* exemplifies such idea efficiently: “We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we’ll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won’t. And we’re just learning this fact... So don’t fuck with us.” (FC, 166). Whereas the first part of the quotation (“We’re... we won’t”) places “we” as the victims who have just understood their position as such, the final part (“And... with us”) constitutes a threat excused by self-defense.

Interestingly, the destructive notions present in *Fight Club* were supposed to be Palahniuk's response to the publishing houses which had refused to publish the novel he had written before, *Invisible Monsters*. (KAVADLO, 2009, 103-104). Written in 1996 and published three years later, it tells the story of siblings Shane and Shannon McFarland. Whereas she is overwhelmingly beautiful and works advertising useless products on television, he is a transvestite who is one surgery away from becoming a woman. While she goes insane with having to deal with her beauty in a world where she feels nothing but being "walking sex furniture" (IM, 39)¹², he builds himself as a woman to the perfect image of his sister, in spite of not wanting to be a woman. While she destroys her pretty face on purpose, he undergoes many cosmetic surgeries to create a super feminine face and body for himself. His reason for doing so is a self-destructive instinct ("A sexual reassignment surgery is a miracle for some people, but if you don't want one, it's the ultimate form of self-mutilation" – IM, 259), which ends up being a bond with his sister – the "accident" that mutilated her face had in fact been caused by Shannon herself, as a desperate attempt of reprioritizing things in her life and being looked at as more than a pretty woman ("The truth is that I was addicted to being beautiful, and that's not something you just walk away from." – IM, 285)

In *Choke* (2001) Palahniuk tells us the story of Victor Mancini, who had a twisted childhood, which consisted of going from foster family to foster family, with in-between escapades with his criminal biological mother. Now that Victor is an adult, he has to deal with his sex addiction, his mother's dementia, his brand new love towards the doctor in charge of his mother, plus the possibility of being a direct descendant of Jesus Christ, which would make him the Second Come. To help him with those situations, Victor goes to sex addicts

¹² From this point on, works by Chuck Palahniuk will be referred to according to the list of abbreviations found in Kuhn and Rubin (2009), which has been reproduced on page 9. *Pygmy* and *Tell-All*, which do not appear on the original list, have been included.

meetings and self-induces choking in restaurants, in order to create affective bonds with the strangers who save him through the famous Heimlich maneuver. In spite of the meek connections Victor manages to create with his saviors, he receives recovery and birthday cards and even money.

Lullaby, the first part of Palahniuk's "horror trilogy", was released in 2002, and it tells the story of an African culling song which has the power of killing the children who listen to it. The nursery rhyme can be found in a book with collected lullabies from all over the world which is available in many public libraries across the USA. Carl Streater, who victimized his wife and child by singing the song, allies himself to glamorous realtor Helen Hoover Boyle (who, like Streater, had lost her family because of the lullaby), her hippie secretary Mona, and Mona's boyfriend, Oyster. This leads to the creation of a weird foursome that fights against the will to use the song and acquire power through it.

2003 was the year for two publications: *Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon* and *Diary*, the second part of the author's horror trilogy. It tells the story of Misty Marie Walmot, a very talented painter whose story is basically divided in two parts. The first one consists of her dealing with her husband's long comatose period, which came from an unsuccessful suicide attempt. Peter Wilmot used to be a contractor who left bizarre hidden messages on the walls of the houses he built, and now that the messages are being discovered, Misty has to face all the legal suits against him. The second part focuses on Peter's death and the unexpected death of their young daughter. These losses seem to enhance Misty's creativity, making her painting better, more intense, and more appealing to the public. The whole story takes place in a mysterious island, which Palahniuk cleverly names Waytansea, reminding of Swift's creativity with site names in *Gulliver's Travels*.

One year later, Chuck Palahniuk publishes *Stranger Than Fiction – True Stories*, which is divided in three parts: *People Together*, which tells stories about anonymous people

who have been part of his life; *Portraits*, consisting of stories about famous friends of his, such as singer Marilyn Manson and actress Juliette Lewis; and *Personal*, formed by stories such as the ones mentioned at the very beginning of this section, dealing with the repercussion of *Fight Club* plus stories of an even more intimate character, such as the one dealing with the murder of his father.

In 2005 comes *Haunted*, officially closing the horror trilogy and helping consolidate Chuck Palahniuk's "bad" reputation, mainly because of what Palahniuk himself called the *Guts effect*. It tells the story of a group of people – frustrated writers who do not know each other – who undergo together what is supposed to be a writers' retreat. They all expect to be taken to a sort of idyllic place, where they should be able to relax, be away from their ordinary lives and eventually produce their works of literature. However, they end up being taken to an abandoned theater, full of costumes and thematic rooms. They are locked up there by Mr. Whittier, an old man who organized the retreat, and Mrs. Clark, a sort of second-in-command.

As time passes, confinement and personal issues take their toll, and life in the retreat becomes harder. The interaction among the participants is marked by violence, aggression, mutilation, manipulation of facts and quarrels, and the novel is characterized by three different narrative textures: the first one permeates the entire book, describing the writers' life in the retreat; the second one consists of the short stories they produce, and the third one is formed by anonymous poems introducing each author before the stories.

In many ways, it is one of the most innovative works within Palahniuk's list: for the first time his story does not have a reduced number of main characters – there are nineteen writers, including Mr. Whittier and Mrs. Clark; there is not just one storyline, once *Haunted* is, as its title observes, a "novel of stories" – hence the need for different narrative textures;

and finally, the narrative voice, which is an undefined “we”. All nineteen characters are mentioned by this “we”, leaving no possibility for one of the writers to be the official narrator of *Haunted*, and adding an extra interest to the narrative.

Two years later, in 2007, we have *Rant* and its main character, Buster “Rant” Casey, who leaves his little town in the countryside and becomes involved with an underworld of vandalism, as he destroys cars at night with a group called the “Party Crashers” and starts a rabies epidemic, which ends up killing people all over the USA. Like in other works, such as *Choke* and *Snuff*, an Oedipal touch is added, as Rant has unsolved issues with his mother.

Snuff (2008) takes place during the shooting of a pornographic movie starring Cassie Wright, the greatest diva of the porn market. Her objective is to create an unbreakable record and have sex with six hundred different men in front of the camera, in what is supposed to be her farewell performance. After breaking this record, Cassie plans to die, which explains the title of the novel.¹³ The story is told from four different perspectives: three of the men who are going to participate in the movie, and who are initially called Mr. 72, Mr. 137 and Mr. 600, and Sheila, one of the members of the crew. Mr. 72 is a teenager who thinks he might be Cassie’s lost son (the Oedipal twist); Mr. 137 is a former TV presenter whose career has flunked, and believes that by being in the movie he might have another shot; finally, Mr. 600 is Branch Bacardi, one of the biggest male porn stars and a long-time partner of Cassie on screen. In order to enhance the complicated family ties, a few physical similarities are highlighted between Mr. 72 and Mr. 600, hinting that Branch Bacardi might be the boy’s father.

¹³ “Snuff films depict the killing of a human being – a human sacrifice (without the aid of special effects or other trickery) perpetuated for the medium of film and circulated amongst a jaded few for the purpose of entertainment”. (KEREKES and SLATER, 2007). However, due to the clandestine status of snuff as a genre and the difficulty of finding snuff movies that do not seem fake, developing a concise definition of the term is complicated.

The novel displays another example of Palahniuk (sometimes infamous) creativity when it comes to names and puns. Given the extensive curriculum of both Cassie and Branch, many of the movies they took part of are mentioned, most of which parodies of works of literature or famous TV shows. Therefore, Palahniuk presents to his readers some of his real cultural and literary influences as he mentions fictional pornographic movies such as *Sex With the City* (2008, 2), *To Drill a Mockingbird* (12), *A Tale of Two Titties* (13), *Moby Dicked* (16), *The Ass Menagerie* (29), *The Importance of Balling Ernest* (55) and *Cunt on a Hot Tin Roof* (76), to mention a few.¹⁴

Pygmy, written in 2009, is described in the synopsis at Palahniuk's official website as "*The Manchurian Candidate* meets *South Park*" (annex P). It tells the story of a group of teenagers who come from a fictional communist country. They go to the USA disguised as exchange students, when in reality they form a terrorist group whose mission is to gather information about American habits and later destroy the country. Their leader is Pygmy, whose lack of ability to fit in and poor English skills are responsible for the funniest moments of the narrative.

In his latest novel Palahniuk goes back to the 1950s. *Tell-All* tells the story of Katherine Kenton, a movie diva who mixes characteristics of Bette Davis, Gloria Swanson, Elizabeth Taylor and Judy Garland, who falls in love with bon-vivant Webster Carlton Westward III. Hazie Coogan, Katherine's personal secretary, discovers among Webster's things a draft for the ending of an unpublished biography of Kathie. In it, she dies under mysterious circumstances, which leads to the impression that Webster is a "tell-all", a sensational and dramatic biographer who wants an unforgettable ending for his book. The

¹⁴ Referring to the TV series *Sex and the City*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

story then becomes a battle of power and influence between Hazie and Carlton over Katherine, culminating with another unexpected twist at the end, for it is Hazie who had been planning Kathie's death.

In both *Snuff* and *Tell-All* Palahniuk refers to literature and cinema. In the former, such happens through puns and alterations in titles, and even if the original reference is lost, the readers of *Snuff* understand that movies with Branch Bacardi or Cassie Wright will necessarily be pornographic. On the other hand, in *Tell-All* Chuck Palahniuk makes references that become important for the general understanding of the atmosphere in which the story takes place. The formatting of the book, with names of people in bold typing, probably aims at making the process easier for the reader, once the typical audience of *Fight Club* – male, under thirty, part of the MTV generation – is not necessarily expected to recognize the names of Lillian Hellman, Lucille Ball, James Stewart or Edith Head.¹⁵ Thus, it is possible to see that *Tell-All* brings a shift in the cultural references typically seen in Chuck Palahniuk's works (film noir, black-and-white cinema divas).

The brief presentation of each of Palahniuk's works becomes important to enhance the introduction to the author aimed at, and also to facilitate the discussion of common elements

¹⁵ Lillian Hellman was an American playwright and poet, better known for being the author of *The Children's Hour*. She was also famous for "embellishing" her stories and inventing facts, which made some of her acquaintances really angry with her. The most notorious example of this fact is Mary McCarthy, another American writer who used to be good friends with Hellman until the latter went to a radio show and told lies about her. That led to McCarthy accusing Hellman of being a liar, by saying the famous sentence "every word she's said about me is a lie, including 'and' and 'the'" during The Dick Cavett Show on television. Hellman is actually an important character in *Tell-All*, due to her close relationship with Kathie Kenton. Lucille Ball was an actress/comedienne who made huge success with the TV series *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957), which is mentioned in the section about reality TV. James Stewart was famous for being a constant partner of movie director Alfred Hitchcock. He was the main star in some of Hitchcock's most famous films, such as *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958). Edith Head is one of the most important costume designers in the history of Hollywood. She worked in more than 430 movies, including *Roman Holiday*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. She was famous for her aesthetics and her extravagant clothes. Information available at imdb.com.

and patterns present in *Haunted* that appear in other of his works, proposed in the next section.

Without a doubt, one of the major characteristics of Palahniuk's work in its entirety is the overwhelming presence of graphic scenes, most of them related to violence, vandalism or mutilation (e.g. *Rant*, *Fight Club*, *Haunted*, *Invisible Monsters*), sex (e.g. *Snuff*, *Choke*, *Haunted*) and death (e.g. *Tell-All*, *Haunted*, *Lullaby*). Not accidentally, Palahniuk's work has aroused significant interest in the movie industry, which goes to reinforce the author's reputation as one who has been able "to connect with a generation reared on MTV in a way that few others have".¹⁶

According to a research carried out on Palahniuk's official website and the Internet Movie Data Base (imdb.com), two of Palahniuk's books have been turned into movies: *Fight Club* (in 1999) and *Choke* (in 2008). Four other novels have been optioned, and had their movie versions rumored: *Invisible Monsters*, *Haunted*, *Survivor* and, more recently, *Snuff*. However, there seems to be some kind of curse on the movie versions of Chuck Palahniuk's novels. After the great success of *Fight Club*, *Choke* did not do well in the cinema; as explained previously, *Survivor* had its production interrupted after the 9/11; nothing has been said about the movie version of *Invisible Monsters* for more than three years now; and after two years of unexplained delays, *Haunted* the film has been in its pre-production stage since December 2010, according to imdb.com. As far as the movie version of *Snuff* is concerned, it was rumored that the cast had been defined, with Daryl Hannah in the role of Cassie Wright.

¹⁶ Available at http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page1/_chuck_palahniuk_haunted_interview.html. Access on January 21, 2011.

One day after the information came out, Daryl Hannah made a statement about her shame of being associated to the project.¹⁷

The radicalism perceived in the audience's reception to Palahniuk's books is also perceived in the industry's reception to them. Whereas the two existing movies involved big Hollywood names such as director David Fincher and actors Brad Pitt, Anjelica Huston, Edward Norton, Sam Rockwell and Helena Bonham-Carter, the movie versions to come seem to be designed and made by underground directors and screenwriters. *Snuff*, for instance, has been optioned by the unknown French filmmaker Fabien Martorell, whereas the director of *Haunted* will be the inexperienced Koen Mortier, a former drummer of a rock band whose only experience with movie directing consists of a movie called *Ex-Drummer*.

Once a great deal of this dissertation is based on the writings of Jean Baudrillard – or the “nagging” – and the frustration of the writers / characters in *Haunted* – the “bitching” – I take the closing of this section to do some complaining of my own, and also to praise one specific quality of the author whose work I have chosen to study.

Chuck Palahniuk takes advantage of the graphic qualities of his works and profits from that. Most of his works – maybe all of them – will eventually become movies, which is good for him, due to market reasons: a movie gives a writer more visibility, enabling him / her to reach more people in a shorter period of time; therefore, a movie probably equals more money, more fame and a wider reach; most of the audience, as usual, enjoys the movie and that is as far as they will go (as I mention in the introduction, I cannot help but feel that audiences nowadays are excessively lazy when it comes to getting a book and reading it). In

¹⁷ Available at <http://cinema.cineclick.uol.com.br/noticia/carregar/titulo/daryl-hannah-e-thora-birch-negam-atuacao-em-snuff/id/29663>. Access on July 25, 2011.

contrast, there is always that reduced number of viewers who will watch the movie, like it, read the book and possibly search for other works by the author. Those fortunate ones are the ones who manage – or at least try to manage – to maintain some kind of relationship with the process of reading, which is something many people have been neglecting.

As a reader / viewer, I enjoy both the movie and the book when a story evolves from a work of literature to the screen. What bothers me is having a book on my hands and feeling that instead of a book I am reading a movie script. Maybe that happens because I am a literature teacher who still aims at a little something extra when I read a book – maybe it is what Jakobson and the Russian Formalists used to call *literariness*, or that unique pleasure Jacques Derrida named *fruition*. Maybe I am just obsolete (or ‘Victorian’, as I euphemistically say when the term ‘obsolete’ sounds too aggressive), and the new (postmodern?) kind of relationship general audiences have with works of literature is simply based on the work’s ‘movie qualities’ and on how easy it is to absorb.

The number of ‘maybes’ in the previous paragraph indicate my difficulty of understanding or admitting some things about the contemporary reader and the contemporary writer – all part of my complaint. And that is the point in which I would like to praise Chuck Palahniuk.

Whenever he gives an interview or writes a foreword to one of his books, Palahniuk makes a point of talking about his creative processes, his own relationship with literature, and the kind of reaction he expects from his readers. It shows that we are dealing with a writer who manages to be up-to-date and connected to this public, but also a writer who retains some ‘good old-fashioned’ characteristics that focus on the storytelling per se and the interaction between reader and work. In that sense, *Haunted* and the texts Palahniuk wrote about it are strong evidence of this concern of his, which is fitting, once this is a “novel of stories”. The

structure proposed in *Haunted* invites to discussions about storytelling and literary creation, after all, it is the story of nineteen people who struggle with their creativity, who have stories to tell and want to cause an impact on the audience.

In a way, that concern is reflected in the following observation, in which Chuck Palahniuk thinks about the interaction between work and reader:

Please consider (...) that books are the only form of mass media that address risky, potentially offensive topics. Consuming a book depends on the reader's consent. That effort – compared to the passive nature of watching movies or listening to music – gives books a privacy and permission no other medium has.¹⁸

Palahniuk does not neglect storytelling on screen – not by chance, his stories frequently involve cameras that film or take photographs of moments and facts. However, his concern with telling stories through writing is praiseworthy. He is known for being a regular student in writing workshops, and he seems to appreciate writing – both as an activity and as a conversation topic.

2.2 A PASSION FOR PATTERNS

This is the expression used by Karen Valby in an interview with Chuck Palahniuk on an issue of *Entertainment Weekly* in 2003, in relation to the fact that he tends to listen to one

¹⁸ Available at http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page1/_chuck_palahniuk_haunted_interview_.html. Access on January 21, 2011.

particular song on repeat mode during the writing of his books, for example. In the interview, which was published right after *Diary* was released, Palahniuk admitted that for the writing of that novel, he listened repeatedly to Radiohead's *Creep* or Depeche Mode's *Little 15*.

It could be said that Palahniuk does have a "passion for patterns", and that such patterns or repetitions are (sometimes easily) perceived in his works. They are related to sentence structure, style and register, themes, imagery.

If on the one hand, that might help in the consolidation of a reading public with a taste for what the author repeats, on the other hand, that is a feasible tool for harsh critics, who, for instance, have relied on the fact that some sentence structures have become too frequent in his writing, almost as if he were plagiarizing his own work. The best example is the repetition of certain words in the same sentence, such as "Everything is A copy of a copy of a copy" (FC, 11), "You're a product just as much. A product of a product of a product." (IM, 217), or "Bladder bounce aside, stamping print blood, print blood, print blood across basketball wood." (P, 161) Adam Mamsbach observes that sometimes Palahniuk uses refrains to exhaustion, so that "they shrink until they read like hollow maxims".¹⁹

However, none of Palahniuk's novels is as prolific as *Haunted* when it comes to this kind of repetition. Aiming at a sort of multidimensional and delusional description of the inner state of the confined writers, the mysterious narrative voice in the novel frequently uses structures such as "us against us against us" (H, 27, 89). Nonetheless, the most recurrent of all repetitions in *Haunted* is "the camera behind the camera behind the camera" (H, 27, 104, 255, 292, 328, 357) Critics of Palahniuk have relied on his repetitions (among other aspects) to justify the grudge they hold against him. They must have forgotten that repetition is a device

¹⁹ See annex O.

frequently used in poetry to convey images and feelings, which is precisely Palahniuk's objective in doing so.

If on the one hand the choice of words and syntax seems poor, the use of such repetition proves to be really effective, once it refers to their loss of the notion of reality – which is, ultimately, a consequence of their desperation, the accumulated feeling of rejection and perhaps of the dire effects of confinement. These factors lead them to resort to lies and made-up facts which are supposed to embellish their stories (the ones they write and the ones they live in the abandoned theater), increasing their market potential and making them more interesting to the general public, once they leave the retreat.

However, it is not all desperation and need for attention. The writers seem to understand very well the power of media and how powerful they can become if their stories ever are as successful as they expect. This comes across clearly in Miss America's short story *Green Room*, which is a reference to the room where people wait in television studios before going on air. As she analyzes the young man who is also waiting to advertise products on a typical morning show, she concludes: "That's what this guy wants to be: the camera behind the camera behind the camera giving the last and final truth. We all want to be one standing farthest back. The one who gets to say what's good or bad. Right or wrong." (H, 51) And when confined Comrade Snarky dies, the narrative "we" observes that she "will not be the camera behind the camera behind the camera. We hold the truth about her in our hands. Wedged between our teeth." (H, 255)

Gatherings in which the characters are confronted either with their problems or with others is one of the recurrent images in Chuck Palahniuk's literature. Besides the writers' retreat in *Haunted*, *Fight Club* and *Choke* present this clearly in the form of support groups: while in the latter Victor Mancini attends meetings to recover from his sex addiction, in the

former Jack and Marla Singer go to survivors meetings of all sorts. “This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn’t say anything, people in a group assumed the worst. They cried harder. I cried harder. Look up into the stars and you’re gone. Walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I’d ever felt.” (FC, 22). Also, when Brandy reveals her previous connection to Evie in *Invisible Monsters*, she mentions that they had met in the support group for transsexuals.

The notion of community is crucial in the understanding of Palahniuk’s work as a whole. “If you haven’t already noticed, all my books are about a lonely person looking for some way to connect with other people.” (STF, xv). This can be seen in *Fight Club* through the meetings both Jack and Marla attend and the creation of fight club in itself. Fight club serves as a way for average men – middle class, hardworking, family heads – to bond and share an experience. As he records his final words in the black box of the airplane he hijacked, Tender Branson also tries to reach people in *Survivor*. Being the only person on the airplane is symptomatic of the loneliness he underwent throughout his life, and telling the story is a desperate final attempt to be heard, ultimately to connect: “But if you can hear me, listen. And if you’re listening, then what you’ve found is the story of everything that went wrong. (...) What you’ve found is the story of what happened.” (S, 289)

A similar example is found in *Choke*, through the character Victor Mancini. By choking on purpose in restaurants, Victor relies on the idea that inevitably, a stranger is going to save him, and that is the way through which he manages to establish interpersonal relationships:

Somebody saves your life, and they’ll love you forever. It’s that old Chinese custom where if somebody saves your life, they’re responsible for you forever. It’s as if now you’re their child. For the rest of their lives, these

people will write me. Send me cards on the anniversary. Birthday cards. It's depressing how many people get this same idea. They call you on the phone. To find out if you're feeling okay. To see if maybe you need cheering up. Or cash. (C, 49)

In spite of the dark atmosphere that pervades *Haunted*, the search for communion is not neglected. Several aspects bring the writers together, and it is through them that the communion takes place: the apparent once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of producing literature, their difficulty of fitting in in the real world, even the absence of individuality established by the non-use of their real names. The introductory poem, called *Guinea Pigs*, enlightens that:

And we called each other the "Matchmaker". And the
 "Missing Link."
 Or "Mother Nature." Silly labels. Free-association names.
 The same way – when you were little – you invented
 names for the plants and
 animals in your world. You called peonies – sticky with
 nectar and crawling with
 ants – the "ant flower." You called collies: *Lassie Dogs*.
 But even now, the same way you still call someone "that
 man with one leg."
 Or, "you know, the black girl..."

We called each other:
 The "Earl of Slander."
 Or "Sister Vigilante."
 The names we earned, based on our stories. The names
 we gave each other,
 based on our life instead of our family:
 "Lady Baglady."
 "Agent Tattletale."
 Names based on our sins instead of our jobs:
 "Saint-Gut Free."
 And the "Duke of Vandals."
 Based on our faults and crimes. The opposite of
 superhero names.

Silly names for real people. As if you cut open a rag doll

and found inside:
 Real intestines, real lungs, a beating heart, blood. A lot
 of hot, sticky blood.
 (...)

 It doesn't matter who we were as people, not to old Mr.
 Whittier.
 But he didn't say this at first. (H, 1-2)

Not only do they lose their individuality through the use of pennames, but they also create such names based on their sins, faults and crimes. Some passages have the function of reminding the reader that the characters / writers are indeed individuals: the mention to a naïve childhood habit (inventing names), the discomfort they feel due to the labels (“the man with one leg” or “the black girl”), the use of the phrase “real people”, the rag doll metaphor in association to the images of internal organs (particularly the “beating heart”), and, most of all, the final stanza, which shows that Mr. Whittier’s acknowledgement of their humanity would be important.

The need for communion derives, in many of Chuck Palahniuk’s works, from some kind of loss. Palahniuk himself admits that writing is a way of coming to terms with some of his losses: in *Stranger Than Fiction*, two chapters – *The Lady* and *Consolation Prizes* – focus on the death of his father and its outcomes, whereas *Damned* has been written under the influence of the death of his mother.²⁰

It is fair to say that coming to terms with losses leads to thinking about life and death, presence and absence, surviving and dying, continuation and interruption. In Chuck Palahniuk’s fictional worlds, the characters that must go through this process find in art a solution to their problems, to keep on with their lives.

²⁰ Available at <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ChuckPalahniuk> Access on January 21, 2011.

In *Lullaby*, Carl Streater and Helen Hoover Boyle lose their children because of an ancient African culling song with the mysterious power to kill those who listen to it. When the two of them first meet, the reader learns that Helen is a realtor – more specifically, an expert in older houses, with precious and artistic furniture.²¹ Helen suggests the location of their first meeting, which means that the first impression she causes on both Streater and the reader is closely connected to the everlasting beauty and history of those objects. The following quotation indicates not only that, but also Helen’s hard-learned awareness of the passing of time and how those antiques seem to be stronger than time itself:

The Rococo vitrines, the Jacobean bookcases, the Gothic Revival highboys, all carved and varnished, the French Provincial wardrobes, crowd around us. The Edwardian walnut curio cabinets, the Victorian pier mirrors, the Renaissance Revival chifforobes. The walnut and mahogany, ebony and oak. The melon bulb legs and cariole legs and linenfold panels. Past the point where the corridor turns, there’s just more. Queen Anne chiffoniers. More bird’s-eye maple. Mother-of-pearl inlay and gilded bronze ormolu.

(...)

And she says, “Don’t you feel, somehow, buried in history?”

(...)

“Do you realize that anything you can do in your lifetime will be meaningless a hundred years now? (...) “People tear down houses. But furniture, fine, beautiful furniture, it just goes on and on, surviving everything.” (L, 51)

²¹ Big houses and environments are also present in *Invisible Monsters* (Brandy, Shannon and Manus visit rich people’s houses to steal drugs from their cabinets), *Fight Club* (Tyler’s headquarters/soap factory), *Haunted* (the abandoned theater), *Diary* (the Waytansea island) and *Survivor* (the airplane).

Misty Marie Walmot, the main character in *Diary*, must come to terms with the death of her husband Peter after a long coma, and later on, with the death of her young daughter Tabbi. She lives on the Waytansa Island, a mysterious place with some traditional local families. The founders of the island had among them an artist whose art attracted many tourists, granting the local people money and survival. After her death, the inhabitants of the island decided a new artist should arise, or else the island would not survive. Therefore, the Waytanses established this tradition and manipulated the lives of many women according to the diary written by the first artist – Misty being the most recent one.

Waytansa Island is the perfect metaphor for the association between art and life. It is the literal case in which the absence of the former implies the end of the latter. The final part of *Diary* shows how Misty learns that her losses have all been staged by the older inhabitants of the island (including her mother-in-law), who had hidden Peter and Tabbi. Communion here seems impossible, and the feeling of loneliness perceived in the novels mentioned previously is once more present. Misty's art, which is supposed to be her salvation and relief, turns out to be a crucial part of her misery, as the irony in the final sentences of the following passage reveal:

She's doomed to fame. Cursed with talent. Life after life.
 She's been Giotto di Bondone, then Michelangelo, then Jan Vermeer.
 Or Misty was Jan Van Eyck and Leonardo da Vinci and Diego Velázquez.
 (...)
 And now she's Misty Marie Wilmot, but only her name changes. She has
 always been an artist. She will always be an artist. (...) Poor Misty Marie
 Kleinman, the greatest artist of all time, their savior. Their slave. Misty, the
 karmic cash cow. (D, 242-243)

In *Haunted*, communion and art go together in the retreat whose outcome is supposed to be works of literature. Communion is achieved in a twisted way, due to the experiences the nineteen characters share: the bizarre retreat, their need for attention, the struggle represented by the phrase “us against us against us”, and the possibility of leaving their condition of outcasts behind and interact in a community where they stand for the rule, not the exception.

They have all had their share of losses as well. All of them have their artistic impulse hindered by ordinary life, which becomes very clear in the advertisement for the retreat: “Leave behind everything that keeps you from creating your masterpiece. Your job and family and home, all those obligations and distractions (...) Before it’s too late, live the life you dream about.” (H, 83-84)

Individual losses also become clear: Mr. Whittier and Saint-Gut Free, as revealed in their respective stories *Dog Years* and *Guts*, were rejected by their families; Miss Sneezzy is contaminated with a rare virus, and is forced to live in a military base on Columbia Island, which she ironically calls “The Orphanage” (H, 364); Mother Nature, the Earl of Slander and Lady Baglady are runaways; Miss America, Director Denial and Baroness Frostbite are loners; and Mrs. Clark endured the loss of her daughter Cassandra.

Life in the retreat was supposed to help them leave behind the aspects mentioned in the advertisement not because those were hindrances to their artistic gifts, but because those were the very proof of their inadequacy and incapability of living within society. Writing the stories was supposed to be their psychological, artistic and financial healing. But it is not so. This pathetic aspect of their lives is even more highlighted by the stories they make, as they reveal frustrating, traumatic life experiences they had had. The embellishments they think of for their days of retreat – hardships, tortures, tyrannical villains – also bring them together. In that sense, it can be said that their art does not help them forget, but it certainly helps them

find their peers. And that is where the typical “search for communion” in Chuck Palahniuk’s work appears.

Their communion through art is symbolized by the recurrence of the phrases “the Mythology of Us” (H, 83, 255, 292, 329, 404) and “the Museum of Us” (H, 175, 176, 329, 404), which is another display of Palahniuk’s capacity of being ironic: in the real world, they are far from interesting, but if put together and improved with dramatic lies, their lives mount up to the genesis of a mythology. The feasibility of this idea is corroborated by Baudrillard when he affirms that “No matter how marginal, or banal, or even obscene it may be, everything is subject to aestheticization, culturalization, museumification. Everything is said, everything is exposed, everything acquires the force, or the manner, of a sign.” (2002, 16)

If some make sacrifices for art in a collective way, others do the same in isolation. That is the case of actress Kathie Kenton in *Tell-All*, whose life is marked by the typical excesses associated to archetypal movie divas: alcohol, drugs, parties, sex and, naturally, the focus on her appearance and her *simulated image* (section 3.3), in order to look “more beautiful than beautiful”: “Miss Kathie’s goal: to reduce until she becomes what **Lolly Parsons** calls nothing but “tan and bones.” What **Hedda Hopper** calls a “lipstick skeleton.” A “beautifully coiffed skull” as **Elsa Maxwell** calls **Katherine Hepburn**.” (TA, 33)

The same references to movies and television present in *Tell-All* are present in Cassie Wright’s pornographic saga in *Snuff*. Cassie herself is a great example of an artist who aims at sacrificing for her art, thus surviving in her public’s memory – even if it takes her to death after having sex with six-hundred different men in a row. However, Palahniuk’s references to non-rated movies are clearer in that sense:

... That same *Wizard of Oz* movie, the actor Buddy Ebsen almost died from an allergic reaction to aluminum dust, part of his costume as the Tin Woodsman. The actor Margaret Hamilton was supposed to leave Munchkinland in a ball of flames, only the flash fire ignited her green copper-oxide makeup, setting fire to her face and right hand.

Buddy Ebsen lost his part to Jack Haley. Margaret Hamilton lay in bed for six weeks, wrapped in gauze and Butesin Picrate.

(...)

She says a real movie star is willing to suffer. In that *Singin' in the Rain* movie from 1952, the actor Gene Kelly danced the title song, take after take, for days, with a fever of 103 degrees. To make the rain look right on film, the production used water mixed with milk, and there was Gene Kelly, dog-sick but splashing and soaked in sour milk, smiling happy as the best day in his life.

(...)

Dick York trashed his spine while filming a movie called *They Came to Cordura* in 1959. Kept acting despite the pain until 1969, as the witch's husband in *Bewitched*. Spent fourteen episodes in the hospital and lost the role. (SN, 71-73)²²

However, no movie star seems to be as symptomatic of sacrifices to Chuck Palahniuk as Marilyn Monroe. Besides being mentioned in *Snuff*, she plays a fundamental role at the end of *Tell-All* and is the main topic in Countess Foresight's *Something's Got to Give* in *Haunted*, in a reference to "the baby Monroe lost while shooting *Some Like It Hot*, when [director] Billy Wilder made her run down the train-station platform, take after take, wearing high heels." (H, 322) Interestingly, Marilyn Monroe also appears in sections 3.2 (cinema and image) and 4.2 (the transvestite).

The concern with one's image is also a recurrent theme in Palahniuk's novels. In four of them the camera acquires enormous importance: *Tell-All* and *Snuff*, both with the world of cinema as a background; in *Invisible Monsters*, through the recurrent references Shannon makes to the flash of the camera and to the photographer talking to her; and in *Haunted*, in

²² A tribute to the artists mentioned by Cassie Wright and their sacrifices is presented in annex Q.

which the structure of the story recalls a reality show; in addition, there is the writers' intention of selling their stories in the future, which necessarily involves being photographed and filmed for TV programs. In all four stories this concern leads to bizarre appearances and have negative outcomes: Cassie Wright and Branch Bacardi enhance their bodies with artificial suntan, silicone, and lotions, whereas Kathie Kenton smokes and drinks in excess; none of the efforts mentioned are healthy, but they are condoned and repeated by people in general (Shannon's case is obviously excluded here), because they aim at pre-approved physical or psychic beauty standards; the basic difference between *Haunted* and the three others is that in the novel of stories the characters aim at displaying bruises and scars in order to prove their dramatic stories, and that is not supported by the public. The difference, however, stands only on the surface, once the results in all of the cases is disgraceful.²³

As seen, the manipulation of one's appearance tends to lead to a negative result within Palahniuk's universe of characters. However, that does not prevent them from pursuing such changes, given that "in Palahniuk's writing, the human body is the site for inscription of a search for modes of authentic living in a world where the difference between the fake and the genuine has ceased to function." (SLADE, 2009, 62) The porn stars in *Snuff* and the movie star in *Tell-All* are examples of individuals who do that for the sake of their professions, whereas the frustrated writers in *Haunted* do so to seek people's acceptance. The same could be said about the members of the Fight Club, who show up in their offices and homes after fighting and display their bruises as trophies of their recovered masculinity.

²³ The twisted aesthetics present in *Haunted* is discussed in detail in section 4.2, entitled *Transvestite*. As a matter of fact, many of the points discussed here in relation to the manipulation of appearances have a strong connection with the concept of Transvestite established by Baudrillard, presented further ahead.

However, the most interesting case of appearance manipulation is in *Invisible Monsters*. Shannon believes her brother Shane is dead because of AIDS complications, when in reality he has become a transvestite called Brandy Alexander, and is one surgery away from changing his gender. Shannon is a very beautiful woman, and uses her beauty as a model and in making TV commercials. Nevertheless, she does not have a healthy relationship with her overwhelming looks: “The truth is I was addicted to being beautiful, and that’s not something you just walk away from. Being addicted to all that attention, I had to quit cold turkey” (IM, 285)

Her self-awareness leads to the manipulation of her looks, but in a fashion more similar to the one found in *Haunted*. She wants a change, and it has to be a definitive one:

I could shave my head, but hair grows back. Even bald, I might still look too good. Bald, I might even get more attention. There was the option of getting fat or drinking out of control to ruin my looks, but I wanted to be ugly, and I wanted my health. Wrinkles and aging looked too far off. There had to be some way to get ugly in a flash. I had to deal with my looks in a fast, permanent way or I’d always be tempted to look back. (IM, 285-286)

Therefore, she decides to shoot herself in the face and blame it on a car accident, so that she would not have to deal with people’s judgment. When confronted about that, she explains that she “wanted the everyday reassurance of being mutilated. The way a crippled deformed birth-defected disfigured girl can drive her car with the windows open and not care how the wind makes her hair look, that’s the kind of freedom I was after.” (IM, 286)

As the transvestite Brandy Alexander, Shane undergoes innumerable cosmetic surgeries and builds his face to the image of his sister’s, which proves to be a successful

endeavor: “Brandy is so attractive you could chop her head off and put it on blue velvet in the window at Tiffany’s and somebody would buy it for a million dollars.” (IM, 57)

At the end, Brandy has full permission to officially become Shannon: “Shane, I’m giving you my life, my driver’s license, my old report cards, because you look more like me than I can ever remember looking.” (IM, 295) The ideal happy ending here would be Shannon’s death and Brandy taking over, resuming his sister’s successful career as a top model. However, Brandy is the one who dies, and there is nothing left to Shannon but reclusion. Now she cannot take part of society the way she used to, due to her irreversible facial mutilation.

Brandy and Shannon configure a binary opposition that is also very easily perceived in Chuck Palahniuk’s work. Two characters who either struggle for something or go in different directions or fight for control over one another. Apart from the typical sibling binary opposition, Palahniuk has presented us with Jack and Tyler in *Fight Club*. Apparently two different characters, they turn out to be two halves of the same individual – or rather, Tyler ends up being the irascible, reckless half of Jack that had always been suffocated.

At this point, a psychoanalytical reading of *Fight Club* and the other binary oppositions presented and yet to be presented should be natural. However, I choose not to take this path, given that the objective in this subsection is to present a few coincidences and patterns perceived throughout my readings of Chuck Palahniuk’s works. Bringing Freud into the discussion would necessarily require an amount of space and a shift in the direction of this work. Psychoanalytical readings of Palahniuk’s work include Kirsten Sterling’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jackass* (in SCHUCHARDT, 2008) and Alex E. Blazer’s *The Phony ‘Martyrdom of Saint Me’* (in KUHN and RUBIN, 2009).

Tell-All's Kathie Kenton and Hazie Coogan also form an interesting binary opposition, even if in a diverse way. Whereas the pairs Brandy/Shannon and Tyler/Jack seem to be formed by poles with apparent equivalent strength, in Kathie's and Hazie's relationship there seems to be no doubt of who the boss is. Hazie is the maid/secretary, whereas Kathie has money and fame. However, Hazie is also the narrator of the story, and that leads to an interesting twist at the end of the story, as in *Fight Club* (the discovery that Jack and Tyler are the same person) and *Invisible Monsters* (Shannon shot herself and Brandy turns out to be the "dead brother"). The twist in *Tell-All* comes at the very end, when we learn that Hazie is the one who had been scheming and committed murder in order to have Kathie Kenton's money: "The surprise ending: that my role is not so much best friend or maid as villain. **Hazie Coogan** played the role of murderess. Perhaps in that last instant, Miss Kathie's violet eyes will register the full realization that she's been duped all along." (TA, 174)

The first impression in this binary opposition – Kathie as the mistress and Hazie as the subordinate – is not confirmed. The latter justifies her crimes by calling Kathie Kenton her "life's work" (TA, 172), and by stating that "Miss Kathie was mine. I invented her, time and time again. I rescued her." (TA, 172). The imbalance in terms of power is clear from the very beginning; nevertheless, the heaviest share of this power is not where it apparently is at first; the binary opposition Kathie/Hazie turns out to be another case of the struggle between creator and creature. More famous literary examples of such dynamics of relationship include Dr. Frankenstein and his creature, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

Palahniuk's creativity comes across in many ways, and the names of his characters is one of them: masculine identities are reinforced in subliminal ways in names such as *Survivor's* Tender Branson ("son"), *Choke's* Victor Mancini ("man"), or even *Fight Club's*

Tyler Durden (“dude”). Curiously, for the three characters mentioned their masculine identity is an important aspect of their personalities: Tyler is the ultimate ultra-man, with his manhood exploding in all senses: in his drinking, his fighting, his swearing and his excessive sex-making with Marla. Victor is an only child, and as his is a single mother, he has to be “the man of the family”. Lastly, Tender Branson, who is the second man born child in his family. That is a crucial aspect in his life, because, according to his church doctrine, “only the firstborn son, Adam, would ever marry and grow old in the church district. When we turned seventeen the rest of us, me and my seven brothers and five sisters, would all go to work.” (S, 274). Being five minutes younger than his twin brother – therefore, not the oldest male child – he is supposed to stay around his family working and supporting them (literally being a “tender”), as well as being forever a “son”.

Rant, in the eponymous novel, owes his nickname to the multiples meanings of the words, all of them in agreement with his explosive personality and evil acts. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, “rant” is a verb that means both “to talk in a noisy, excited or declamatory manner”, or “to scold vehemently”. It is also related to bombastic speaking and to the sound children make when they vomit.

In addition, names of drinks have been used twice – Brandy Alexander (*Invisible Monsters*) and Branch Bacardi (*Snuff*). In both cases Palahniuk plays with the reputation of both transvestites and porn actors, who choose flamboyant (and perhaps artistic) names. “Brandy” is indeed a woman’s name, and “Bacardi” gives an Italian flavor to the artist.

Given that the fictional country where the secret agents in *Pygmy* come from is a mixture of North Korea, Communist China, Cuba and Nazi Germany, it makes sense for them to have names popular in Germany (Magda) and in Asia (Tibor and Ling). The main character, in spite of not having his name revealed, goes by the nickname “Pygmy”, due to his

short stature. Echo Lawrence (*Rant*), Fertility (*Survivor*), and Oyster (*Lullaby*) are other suggestive names.

The big quantity of characters in *Haunted* allowed Palahniuk to put his creative irony into practice, especially due to the fact that most of them have pennames. Basically, the pennames in the novel are divided in two categories: reversed expectations and stereotypes.

Mother Nature (a hippie masseuse), Miss America (a beautiful girl obsessed with exercises), the Missing Link (who comes from an Indian reservation) and Lady Baglady (a wealthy woman) represent stereotypes associated to their social conditions. Conversely, Saint Gut-Free's masturbatory adventures do not remind us of holiness, Reverend Godless' name is a contradiction in itself, and the nobility title in Baroness Frostbite's penname does not match her status as a bartender.

Two specific similarities between *Choke* and *Haunted* are worth mentioning. During his research for the writing of *Choke*, Palahniuk attended meetings for sex addicts, and during one of those meetings he heard stories of men who had had unfortunate masturbatory experiences (H, 405). He did not use those in *Choke*, but included them in Saint Gut-Free's story *Guts*. Also, like the Saint, Victor's best friend Denny in *Choke* is a compulsive masturbator.

The second coincidence is based on the choking act itself. In *Choke* it is a vital piece of the plot. In *Haunted*, the Missing Link decides that he wants to taste the head of the Matchmaker's penis (which had been cut by the Matchmaker himself), once it "will get him extra prime-time exposure on every late-night talk show in the world. (...) After that will be the product endorsements for barbecue sauce and ketchup. After that, his own novelty cookbook." (H, 359) As he does so, he chokes to death.

The Matchmaker's genital organ is not the only case of deformity, disembowelment or mutilation in Palahniuk's work. One of the author's favorite is the face, as seen in *Fight Club's* Jack and *Invisible Monsters's* Shannon, who shoot themselves in the face, plus Baroness Frostbite and her disgusting lipless mouth, "with her teeth loose and rattling in her gums, each big white tooth tapering to show its thin brown root." (H, 294)

Diary provides us with another crucial example at its end, with the sacrifice of Misty's body and the consequent restoration of prosperity and wealth in Waytansea Island. Here the connection between sacrifice, survival and art becomes more blatant: Misty's body is no longer alive, but she will remain forever in the minds and hearts of those who know her work.

Pointing the similarity between the endings of *Diary* and *Haunted* here is unavoidable: in the former, there is the sacrifice of one body, Misty's. In the latter, there is the sacrifice of many bodies in a festival of mutilation: Saint Gut-Free is already mutilated when the story starts (he had lost his intestines); Lady Baglady inflicts mutilation onto herself, which leads to her death; the Duke of Vandals suffers a skull fracture, whereas Mrs. Clark is stabbed in the stomach and has part of her left leg eaten by her fellow confined writers; the Matchmaker cuts off his own penis; Miss Snezy is stabbed, and, last but not least, Comrade Snarky has part of her buttock cut off when she is apparently dead. When she surprisingly wakes up from the torpor she had been in, she takes a piece of a steak from a plate, only to recognize her tattoo on the meat and realize she had eaten her own flesh – which leads to her real death.

Some of those events take place by accident, and some others are suicide attempts; nevertheless, most of them are calculated attempts of self-inflicted scarring intended to be useful in the future. In order to obtain media space, "Director Denial has already hacked off fingers. So has Sister Vigilante – plus some toes, using the same paring knife that Lady Baglady borrowed from Chef Assassin to slice off her ear." (H, 149-150). As Slade affirms, in

the work of Chuck Palahniuk “the practice of mutilation is the sublime figuration of survival.” (2009, 71) And, after all, “How they act inside here, it won’t matter, but once those doors come open they’ll need to be kissing and hugging every time a camera turns their way. People will expect a wedding. Maybe even children.” (H, 149)

Another ending that integrates the ideas of destruction of the body and survival is *Lullaby*’s. The surprise here consists of the discovery that the grimoire – the book which contains the lethal culling song and other spells – also contains an “occupying spell”, which allows a person to take over someone’s body. Oyster, whose bad nature had already been revealed, occupies Helen’s body. Helen, who had suspected that this could happen, poisons herself and occupies a policeman’s body, thus dying physically and surviving spiritually. In a way, that is exactly what happens to Shannon in *Invisible Monsters* when she grants her brother Shane permission to resume her life and career in the body of Brandy Alexander.

Helen’s ending shows another trace of Palahniuk’s fiction that manifests itself from time to time: playing with physical death. In *Snuff*, the second-to-last chapter suggests that Cassie Wright and Branch Bacardi die during their sexual intercourse due to an electric shock, only to come back four paragraphs before the end of the story.

And once again, *Haunted* provides us with Palahniuk’s creative peak when it comes to fooling death. Firstly, Comrade Snarky, who is believed to be dead, but wakes up and really dies due to the shock of having eaten her own flesh; finally, Mr. Whittier, whose apparent death makes the other writers dispose of his body. Towards the very end of the story, Mr. Whittier returns in the best Jigsaw²⁴ style to everyone’s surprise: “It’s old, trembling,

²⁴ John ‘Jigsaw’ Kramer is the idealizer of the twisted and deadly games in the first movies of the *Saw* franchise (*Jogos Mortais* in Brazil). Most of the action of the first movie takes place in a small bathroom, with two men chained to each extremity of the room, and a corpse on the floor between the two of them. At the very end of the movie, the corpse – Jigsaw – stands up and walks away, making a tremendous and surprising impact on the audience.

teenaged Mr. Whittier. Our dying skater punk. Our spotted little devil. Walking. A cadaver in tennis shoes. A stereo headset looped around the back of his withered neck.” (H, 379)

Palahniuk is a very inventive writer also when it comes to the structure of his works. In many works we see the division of chapters or formatting designed to bring some kind of extra information – or at least in avoidance to the traditional linear structure. In *Survivor* the chapters and pages are numbered backwards. Therefore, the first chapter in the book is number 47. *Diary* is in the form of a diary, which in fact would not be a really creative idea if it was not for one detail: at the end, a letter addressed to Chuck Palahniuk is reproduced, giving the impression that the diary mentioned in the novel – or rather, the novel itself – is an existing text that was sent to Palahniuk by a woman for publication.

Tell-All is divided into acts, which are divided into scenes, recalling the typical division of a play. This seems a good idea only by taking into consideration the dramatic aura of the story; however, it comes full cycle with the ending and the revelation that Kathie’s entire life had been a lie, almost like a play.

At the same time, *Pygmy* consists of memoranda, or dispatches, as Pygmy calls them. That makes the story funnier, because Pygmy reports to his superiors as formally as he can; nonetheless, his domain of English is non-existent, and his attempts of being formal collide with his grammar issues and inverted structures.

Rant is an oral biography, which requires a different kind of narrative structure. To avoid any kind of strangeness on the reader’s part – and also to suggest close attention – the following note opens the story: “This book is written in the style of an oral history, a form which requires interviewing a wide variety of witnesses and compiling their testimony. Anytime multiple sources are questioned about a shared experience, it’s inevitable for them occasionally to contradict each other.” The story is then delivered in chunks, each identified

with the name of the person who gave the testimony. The idea seen in *Rant* is somewhat similar to the narrative in *Dracula*, which is all based on diary and phonograph entries, newspaper cuts, memoranda, telegrams and letters.

In the case of *Haunted*, the narrative experimentation ranges from the narrative voice (the undefined “we”) to the narrative “textures”, as Palahniuk calls them: one bigger story intertwined with poems of unknown authorship and short stories.

Another peculiarity in Palahniuk’s prose is the recurrent use of the pronoun ‘you’. As Joshua Parker discusses, almost all of Palahniuk’s works, be it fictional or not, violate narrative levels through the use of the second-person narration (2009, 89). That, according to Parker, happens so that “the identities of the reader, narrator, and characters are often completely transposed.” (2009, 89)

Parker (2009, 93) identifies in the opening scene of *Fight Club* different functions for the use of the pronoun, which he denominates:

a) *Indefinite, general or conversational*, such as “Tyler’s ... saying, the first step to eternal life is you have to die”;

b) *Instructional*, such as “To make a silencer, you just drill holes in the barrel of a gun” or “You take a 98-percent concentration of fuming nitric acid and add the acid”;

c) *Imperative*, such as “... we hear glass breaking. [You] Look over the edge.”

d) *Double deixis*, or the reference to two terms through the use of one pronoun, such as in “With a gun stuck in your mouth and the barrel of the gun between your teeth, you can only talk in vowels.”

While the frequent use of ‘you’ (and ‘your’) seems to be unconscious, merely a feature of Palahniuk’s writing style, it has important functions in the reading process. Firstly, it increases the informality and the conversational tone, making the reader feel more comfortable. This is important, given the difficulty of assimilating, or ‘digesting’, many of his favorite themes and images as seen so far; the use of ‘you’ also brings the readers into the story by creating a hard-to-break bond between the characters and the reader, who is transported into the story without a warning:

Around the one hundredth floor, the sweat is parting your hair all over. The boring mechanics of how your body works are all too clear, your lungs are sucking air to put in your blood, your heart pumps blood to your muscles, your hamstrings pull themselves short, cramping to pull your legs up behind you, your quadriceps cramp to put your knees out in front of you. The blood delivers air and food to burn inside the mito-whatever in the middle of your every muscle cell. (S, 151, emphasis added)

This is an example of how effective this technique can be. When Tender Branson describes his feelings and body reactions, he does so by using the reader’s own body, in a passage full of pronouns with double deixis.

Invisible Monsters is also full of examples of uses of the pronoun conveniently placed throughout the narrative. The story opens in what proves to be a wedding reception gone disastrous, with death and destruction. The first sentence brings an effective example of a double deixis ‘you’ (“Where you’re supposed to be is some big West Hills wedding reception in a big manor house with flower arrangements and stuffed mushrooms all over the house, p. 1). This works as a sort of invitation both to the party and all of the unfolding of the story. By

doing so, Shannon (the narrator) creates a bond with the reader that is difficult to break. The same happens when she shares immoral or politically incorrect ideas with the reader (“You know how you look at ugly hunchback girls and they are so lucky. Nobody drags them out at night so they can’t finish their doctorate thesis papers”, p. 286). The conversational ‘you’ adopted here shows that the narrator is not the only one who underestimates ugly girls, and that narrator and reader are “partners in crime”.

Another use of ‘you’ is in Palahniuk’s direct addressing to the reader, such as in the imperative opening of *Choke* mentioned in the introduction (page 20), or in *Fugitives and Refugees*. In the latter, the use of the imperative second-person makes even more sense, due to his suggestions and recommendations during a visit to Portland, Oregon. For instance, when he describes the Portland Memorial, he advises that “within the minutes, you’ll be confused and lost. After fifteen minutes you’ll panic. But while you’re hunting for the way out, [you] look for the crypt of Mayo Methot, Humphrey Bogart’s first wife.” (FR, 61)

If “playing (and insisting) on a repetitive series of second-person addresses is one of the author’s simplest tools for encouraging the reader to identify with a character’s situation” (PARKER, 2009, 91), it is fair to say that in *Haunted* this device is used to its fullest. Identification is constantly required, or, in the case of the confined writers in *Haunted*, begged for.

One of the primary objectives is, naturally, to bring the reader into confinement. In the long term, and with the constant use of conversational or indefinite ‘you’, the reader feels compelled to think about his/her own frustrations in life, thus sympathizing with the characters: “Mr. Whittier would tell you, “You cannot be the person they [family, friends, society] know and the great, glorious person you want to become. Not at the same time.”” (H, 7) That sentence works not only as an invitation into the abandoned theater, but also as a *carte*

blanche to condone the actions they perform. If the characters/writers must forget good manners and conventions, so must the reader, in order to enjoy the story in all its nuances.

Guts, the short story that epitomizes the rule-breaking and scatology present in the novel, provides the reader with some strategic uses of ‘you’ that aim at the identification with Saint Gut-Free and his traumatic experience. The story, which unfolds during his teenage years, and deals with experiences he and his friends had with alternative methods of masturbation, opens with a series of warnings, which require the use of the imperative ‘you’: “Take in as much air as you can. This story should last about as long as you can hold your breath, and then just a little bit longer. So listen as fast as you can.” (H, 12)

Once the topic is uncovered and the implications of dealing with it are understood, the use of ‘you’ becomes stronger. When Saint Gut-Free speaks on the phone to a friend who is in the hospital due to an accident with a carrot, it is the reader who actually listens. This happens only through the insertion of an indefinite ‘you’: “This kid talking on the phone from his hospital bed, in the background you can hear bells ding, people screaming. Game shows.” (H, 15)

Having an accident while masturbating with a carrot is normal, it could happen to anyone. That is what Saint Gut-Free wants to convince his readers of, by introducing some conversational pronouns ‘you’: “Sticking stuff inside yourself. Sticking yourself inside stuff. A candle in your dick or your head in a noose, we knew it was going to be big trouble.” (H, 16).

The closeness of danger is explicit in the warnings spread all over the story, all of which include a ‘you’: “In the end, it’s never what you worry that gets you. (...) Still, one minute you’re just a kid getting off, and the next minute you’ll never be a lawyer.” (H, 16)

And, as far as danger is concerned, nothing in the story tops the climax, which is Saint Gut-Free's accident in the swimming pool, resulting in the loss of his intestines. The description of the accident starts with the pronoun 'I', working as a sort of indicator that masturbation while sitting on the water pump was his own choice. However, he shares his pain and trauma with his reader by shifting from 'I' to 'you' repeatedly:

Knotted inside the snake, you can see corn and peanuts. You can see a long bright-orange ball. It's the kind of horse-pill vitamin my dad makes me take, to help put on weight. To get a football scholarship. With extra omega-3 fatty acids.

It's seeing the vitamin pill that saves my life.

It's not a snake. It's my large intestine, my colon pulled out of me. What doctors call "prolapsed." It's my guts sucked into the drain. (...)

What I can tell you is, your guts don't feel much pain. Not the way your skin feels pain. The stuff you're digesting, doctors call it fecal matter. (...)

You let go for a second, and you're gutted.

You swim for the surface, for a breath, and you're gutted.

You don't swim, and you drown. (H, 18-19)

The passage shows Palahniuk's obvious intention: to highlight Saint Gut-Free's personal issues (the expectations his father puts on him, the shock of the moment) through the use of the first person, and to make sure that the reader will not feel indifferent by using 'you' in a few strategic moments, which are either disgusting (seeing the intestine and what is inside it, the link to fecal matter, the pain) or related to the climax of his anguish (facing the fact that he is either going to die or destroy his body). The passage "What I can tell you is" marks the shift from one pronoun to the other, and the subtlety of the shift forms an interesting contrast with the seriousness of Saint Gut-Free's peculiar situation.

Finally, one remarkable example of the instructional 'you' presented by Parker can be found in the description of the narrator's escape: "Otherwise, what you have to do is – you

have to twist around. You hook one elbow behind your knee and pull that leg up into your face. You bite and snap at your own ass. You run out of air, and you will chew through anything to get the next breath.” (H, 20)

The mixture between writer and reader is so intense that, at the end, Palahniuk/Saint Gut-Free feel the need to restore the separation between the categories, through the closing lines: “Now you can take a good, deep breath. Because I still have not.” (H, 21)

Saint Gut-Free wants, as virtually every teenager does, to explore his body, but he will not be satisfied with “standard” methods. He overdoes it, and pays for it. As a typical Palahniuk character, Saint Gut-Free trespasses barriers established by common sense, becoming one of Palahniuk’s “extreme” characters.

In *Fight Club*, Jack and the other members of the club only find relief and motivation when they engage in an activity that involves physical violence and brainwash. *Survivor*’s Tender Branson symbolizes religious radicalism and how far people would go to fight for their beliefs – the same beliefs that usually lead people to develop psychological issues, as they did to Tender. At this point, it is impossible not to remember 9/11, and the fact that the real hijack took place only two years after the release of *Survivor*.

In *Invisible Monsters*, the main characters are in different stages of body change: Shannon goes from pretty and complete to deformed, Shane goes from man to transvestite (and on the verge of a sex change surgery), Evie is a transsexual and Manus has been given female hormones without knowing, which means that he is also going through a body change. Therefore, their extreme actions comprise permanent deformity and permanent sex change.

Naturally, in *Pygmy* the extremism depicted is political. The fictional country where the operatives come from is a totalitarian mix of “North Korea, Cuba, Communist China and Nazi Germany” (P, jacket), all of which symbols of some sort of historical radicalism.

Victor Mancini has too much sex, and here is where his extreme lies in *Choke*. Unable to build serious relationships with people and full of unsolved issues with his demented mother, he hides behind the shallowness one-night stands allow him. Buster Casey, the hero whose oral biography is presented in *Rant*, goes through a severe change: from living a quiet life in a small town by the countryside, he goes to the big city, joins the group of the “party crashers”, and starts a life of uncertainty and vandalism.

The movie divas presented to us in *Snuff* and *Tell-All*, as well as the confined writers in *Haunted*, take their extreme actions in relation to their art and the reputation they will build up or have built up based on such art: Cassie Wright is a queen of porn cinema; nevertheless, she wants to establish an unbreakable record: sex with six-hundred different men for the same movie. Kathie Kenton falls in love with Webster Carlton Westward III, and when Hazie Coogan, who claims to be the inventor of the myth of Kathie Kenton, sees in this relationship a hindrance to the maintenance of Kathie’s stardom, she does not hesitate to kill both of them, preferring to see her masterpiece destroyed rather than changed.

The reader of a work by Chuck Palahniuk who desires to go beyond the thin cover of radical rebellion will be impressed. Palahniuk’s literature might be so easily labeled ‘gross’, ‘pushy’, ‘bad’ or ‘violent’. But none of these labels makes his work devoid of meanings and messages, both hidden and explicit. Palahniuk’s characters are able to shock and inspire anger; however, they invite to reflections upon individual and collective issues – most of which skeletons in people’s closets, topics most people are never willing to discuss.

One might see Pygmy only as a terrorist. Yet, he is also full of national pride and discipline; Cassie Wright, the woman of six-hundred intercoursés, is the average whore – and also a devoted mother, who thinks about the future of her offspring, and a broken-hearted woman, who has not been able to enjoy real love; Tender Branson is a hijacker, who should probably go to prison for that; on top of that, he is also a frightened young man unable to cope with his religious and family obligations and the dissatisfaction originated in that.

In that sense, *Haunted* is a self-explanatory title: the writers are ignored or ridiculed in their original social environments; each of them have seen something go wrong in their lives, such as getting a job, having a baby, or even protecting a doll. The will to share these stories is justified by their greed and their desire of fame; but also, or rather mostly, by their sheer need of being heard and making a difference, which becomes clear at the end of the novel:

“You’re so busy telling your stories to each other. You’re always turning the past into a story to make yourselves right.”

What Sister Vigilante would call our *culture of blame*.

“But the stories that you can digest, that you can tell – you can take control of those past moments. You can shape them, craft them. Master them. And use them to your own good.

Those are stories as important as food.

Those are stories you can use to make people laugh or cry or sick. Or scared. To make people feel the way you felt. To help exhaust that past moment for them and for you. Until that moment is dead. Consumed. Digested. Absorbed.

It’s how we can eat all the shit that happens.” (H, 380)

Chuck Palahniuk has not only a taste for patterns, but also for beauty. Such statement might come as an enormous contradiction, given that disembowelment, dismembering and feces, among others, have been on the list of topics discussed in this section. For Palahniuk, beauty comes through art, and art comes through suffering. His acknowledgement that part of

his work comes from coping with losses, and the significant number of conflicting artists in his works are indicative of that.

There is a model (Shannon McFarland in *Invisible Monsters*), a painter (Misty Walmot in *Diary*), actresses (Kathie Kenton in *Tell-All* and Cassie Wright in *Snuff*), actors or pretenders (Branch Bacardi in *Snuff* and Victor Mancini in *Choke*), and the writers in *Haunted*. All of them embody the sacrifices artists are bound to make for their art, which is a topic recurrently discussed in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, possibly the work of literature that best presents artistic struggles. In the preface to his novella, Wilde affirms: "The artist is the creator of beautiful things. (...) the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium. (...) The artist can express everything. (...) Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art. (...) It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors." (WILDE, 1991, 3-4) Likewise, the Duke of Vandals affirms that "What matters, he says, is what the artist leaves behind, the artwork." (H, 126)

2.3 POSTMODERN, ISN'T IT?

Charles Jencks, an authority on postmodern architecture and art, affirmed in 1986 that

one of the great strengths of the word, and the concept [of postmodernism], and why it will be around for another one hundred years, is that it is beyond the world-view of modernism – which is clearly inadequate – without specifying where we are going. That is why most people will spontaneously use it, as if for the first time. But since "Modernism" was coined apparently in the Third Century, perhaps its first use was then. (APPIGNANESI and GARRATT, 2003, 3)

Jencks' quotation presents two impossibilities pervading the theorization of the postmodern: tracing back the beginning of the use of the term and setting the end of it. As David Antin affirms, "From the modernism you choose you get the postmodernism you deserve." (WOODS, 1999, 1), which means that studying the term implies making choices, given that it seems impossible to cover all that has been said so far about the term. Therefore, I would like to begin this section by defining on what terms 'postmodernism' is defined and discussed in this work.

The necessity of contextualizing postmodernism comes from the multiple associations of Jean Baudrillard's theories to the postmodern scene. Known for not liking the labels others gave him (although he gave himself quite many throughout his life), Baudrillard could not escape being called "the high priest of the new epoch" (BEST and KELLNER, 1991, 111), in reference to the many links between Baudrillard's writings and the cultural idea of postmodernism. In spite of Baudrillard's unwillingness to accept the label of postmodernist, I believe (and probably so did he, although he would never admit it) that such association is pertinent and relevant, as the integrated reading of this section and the next chapter aim at proving.

Therefore, it is important to highlight that the aspects of postmodernism present in this section do not intend to cover the theme in all of its particulars. They have been chosen based on their recurrence in the bibliography studied, and also on their fitting to the theories of Baudrillard discussed in the next chapter and employed in the analysis of *Haunted* in chapter 4. The point of view from which postmodernism is approached here is the one of a Westerner. That is an important aspect, given that I am a Westerner, and so are Chuck Palahniuk, his characters, Jean Baudrillard and any other critic mentioned here, as well as most of my imagined reading audience.

Due to that fact, the first aspect of postmodernism brought to this analysis is the overwhelming versatility of the word regarding its areas and ways of application. For Dick Hebdige, “the term gets stretched in all directions across different debates, different disciplinary and discursive boundaries, as different factions seek to make it their own, using it to designate a plethora of incommensurable objects, tendencies, emergencies.” (HEBDIGE, 1988, 181) Likewise, Woods affirms that “although the term takes on very specific cultural significations within particular discourses, in its wider popular reception it appears to be a rather vague, nebulous, *portmanteau* word for everything that is more modern than modern.” (WOODS, 1999, 3)

The multiplicity of interpretations – which instead of taking us to a definite place seems to waylay us even more from time to time – is not the only problem to deal with. Different sources have approached the term in diverse ways, which leads to another choice. However, it seems that previous definitions of postmodernism approach the issue in a more conservative perspective that focuses on literary movements and their isolate characteristics. A good example is the entry for the term ‘post-modernism’ in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*:

A general (and sometimes controversial) term used to refer to changes, developments and tendencies which have taken place (and are taking place) in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy, etc. since the 1940s or 1950s. *Post-modernism is different from modernism, even a reaction against it. (...) To talk of post-modernism is to imply that modernism is over and done with.*” (CUDDON, 1998, 690, emphasis added)

Two aspects are notable in the passage above: firstly, the fact that the prefix ‘post’ is added to the word with a hyphen, which might indicate a sense of strangeness the word

caused in previous times; secondly, the fact that it emphasizes the difference between modernism and “post-modernism”, implying that the existence of the latter necessarily involves the death of the former.

The shift from J.A. Cuddon’s approach to Tim Woods’ is clear: Cuddon sees *modernism* and *post-modernism* as complete opposites, whereas Woods believes that postmodernism (without the hyphen, perhaps denoting that critics have become more comfortable with the new word and its meanings) is a natural continuation of modernism. In fact, he goes as far as to say that

The ‘post’ can be seen to suggest a critical engagement with modernism, rather than claiming the end of modernism, or it can seem that modernism has been overturned, superseded or replaced. The relationship is something more akin to a continuous engagement, which implies that *postmodernism needs modernism to survive*, so that they exist in something more like a host-parasite relationship. (WOODS, 1999, 6, emphasis added)

Regardless of the differences between the two definitions cited, they both bring important contributions towards a definition of the term. The idea of pointing to a time as the beginning of postmodernism should make things easier, but even here the authors go in different directions, for Woods mentions the decade of 1960 as the time when the term started being roughly used (1999, 10). He also points out the different dates for the emergence of postmodernism in different areas – the late 1950s for art, the late 1960s for architecture²⁵, the

²⁵ Snipp-Walmsley states that “American architect Charles Jencks famously declared that postmodernism began on 15 July 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing scheme in St Louis, Missouri, was destroyed by an explosion.” (in WAUGH, 2006, 405).

early 1980s for cultural theory, the late 1980s for many social sciences. (1999, 12) Trying to establish the end of one in order to define the beginning of the other aims at practicality and organization; however, more complex definitions agree that those boundaries are not easily perceptible, given that postmodernism depends on modernism to exist. Snipp-Walmsley points out that other critics have made the issue even more complex: Ihab Hassan retroactively included the Marquis de Sade, James Joyce and William Blake in his explanation of the term, while Umberto Eco states that the postmodern phenomenon cannot be defined chronologically, as it constitutes a mode of representation present in every epoch. (2006, 405)

Such intricacies lead to two other features of postmodernism: it is paradoxical and contradictory. At the same time it cannot be dissociated from the present time, it depends on beliefs and standards established in the past, even if such dependency happens by means of criticism or rejection. It focuses on deconstruction and the difficulties of representation, and yet, critics and scholars have struggled to give it a hermetic definition. In consonance with Eco's aforementioned observation, Woods points out another aspect of the paradox, which lies in the indiscriminate use of the term about contemporary cultural production, as he claims that "it is possible to distinguish two particular uses: first, as a term which designates the contemporary cultural context as a whole; and second, as a description of a set of characteristics which are evident in selected texts." (WOODS, 1999, 49)

Jean-François Lyotard, one of the most important theoreticians of postmodernism, published in 1979 a book called *The Postmodern Condition*, in which he says that

The Postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share

collectively the nostalgia for the attainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (LYOTARD, 1979, 81)

It is interesting to note that Lyotard does not ignore the contradictory aspect of postmodernism through the notion of presentation versus unrepresentability, and also of the contrast between modern and nostalgia; more contradictory than presenting the unrepresentable is the reason why the unrepresentable is sought: not for enjoyment, taste or fruition, but for impact, shock and extreme experiences – a notion that comes full cycle with the Postmodern Gothic, *Haunted* and Palahniuk's literature as a whole, for that matter. Moreover, one of Lyotard's ideas seems particularly pertinent for the reading of *Haunted*: "The question (overt or implied) now asked (...) is no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?' In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to: 'Is it saleable?' And in the context of power-growth: 'Is it efficient?'" (LYOTARD, 1979, 51)

In spite of its obvious existence in the present, a feature of postmodernism that has become clear with what has been presented so far is its connection to the past. The extreme impact referred to by Lyotard echoes what Burke says about the capacity horror has to elicit the sublime ("the strongest feeling the mind is capable of producing"), which also allows the link between the postmodern and traditional horror stories. Concerning that, Woods affirms that postmodern fiction is fascinated with artifice, schlock and kitsch, devices that have been used by fiction creators for a long time. If that is indeed true, critics of *Haunted* have neglected to call Palahniuk 'postmodern' (a term that is not to be found in any of the reviews included in this research), since most of the negative criticism was based on the novel's ugliness, dirty irony and bad taste for imagery and themes.

That leads to a pertinent series of questions: if we are to understand that postmodern culture is obsessed with the “ugliness” and “poor taste”, is it not fair to say that this happens because a significant share of the postmodern audience shares the fascination?²⁶ And if that is the case, and Umberto Eco and Tim Woods are right when they affirm that postmodern is present in every single different epoch, is it not the case to admit that both the obsession and the fascination have taken place for, to say the least, a long time? These questions lead to another part of the paradox: if “postmodern fiction is rather an ongoing process of problematization or subversion of realist (mainstream) aesthetic ideology” (WOODS, 1999, 50), the subversion has reached a peak rather unbearable for the most conservative part of the intelligentsia, given that “artifice”, “schlock” and “kitsch” have penetrated the mainstream. They are not all the mainstream (not even a lot of it), but they are a feasible option for part of the audience.

Postmodernism rejects totalizing views of the world and discourses. That might be seen as a rejection to the modernist obsession of summarizing things and explaining them to their fullest. As a consequence, postmodernism has developed an obsession of its own – for fragments and fragmentary thought and expression, as Baudrillard’s writing exemplifies. The next section, which discusses some of his ideas, also points to his fragmentary writing style.

The excesses perceived in postmodern literature originate in what John Barth calls ‘literature of exhaustion’, emphasizing how literature has ‘used up’ the conventions of fictional realism under the pretense of the virtual impossibility of writing an original work – it

²⁶ Over the last three decades, the *Friday the 13th* franchise had eleven movies and one remake, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* had eight movies, one remake and one TV series, *Halloween* had ten movies (including two remakes), and *Saw* had seven movies. According to the IMDb (imdb.com) and the website *The Numbers* (www.the-numbers.com), these four franchises together grossed over 3.6 billion dollars worldwide. In addition, their main characters – Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers and John ‘Jigsaw’ Kramer (see footnote 23), respectively – have become pop icons recognized all over the world, which accounts for another significant amount of money in merchandise, such as posters, action figures, T-shirts, costumes, books and others.

is supposed to be the ‘end’ of writing. On the other hand, Robert Scholes proposes the use of the term ‘fabulation’ to define the postmodern branch of fiction characterized by the blatant and openly admitted use of unreality (WOODS, 1999, 52-3)²⁷. These two terms prove to be fitting to the novel analyzed here, which takes place in an environment meant for writers who admit to not being capable of writing, and by doing so question their very status as literature producers. At the same time, the writers in the story rely on false, artificial experiences, a fact that comes across clearly in the narrative layer describing their interaction in the retreat.

The artificial experiences present in *Haunted* are a core part of the discussion proposed here. The structure of the plot depends immensely on them; given that they are invented, they are obtrusively exaggerated towards horror, hence the connection to classic Gothic; they appear recurrently in the section about Baudrillard’s postulates and in chapter 4 under the name of *simulations*; and for the sake of a theorization of the postmodern, the fake experiences are important due to their intended objective – publicity for the writers via television, newspapers and magazines. Mass media plays a crucial role in the analysis of “the transgression of cultural boundaries erected between high and popular culture” (WOODS, 1999, 57). Interestingly, the writers in *Haunted* gather under a “noble” excuse (the production of literature, representing the “high culture”) while aiming at exposure in popular means of communication.

Woods summarizes some of the key characteristics of postmodern fiction as follows:

²⁷ As examples of the literature of exhaustion, Woods suggests works by Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett and Jorge Luis Borges. ‘Fabulation’ is exemplified by the contributions of Italo Calvino and Gabriel García Marquez.

1. a preoccupation with the viability of systems of representation;
2. the decentering of the subject by discursive systems, and the inscription of multiple fictive selves;
3. narrative fragmentation and narrative reflexivity; narratives which double back on their own presuppositions;
4. an open-ended play with formal devices and narrative artifice, in which narrative self-consciously alludes to its own artifice, thus challenging some of the presuppositions of literary realism;
5. an interrogation of the ontological bases of and connections between narrative and subjectivity;
6. an abolition of the cultural divide between high and popular forms of culture, embracing all in a *mélange*;
7. an exploration of ways in which narrative mediates and constructs history, e.g., Graham Swift's preoccupation with the relationship between story and history in *Waterland* (1983);
8. the displacement of the real by simulacra, such that the original is always already linguistically constructed: novels incorporate 'historical' fictions as fact. (WOODS, 1999, 66-7)

All of these aspects have been or will be dealt with in the analysis of *Haunted* presented here; however, it is possible to affirm that all of them contribute to different extents towards corroborating Chuck Palahniuk's novel as representative of postmodern fiction. The relationship between the real and the hyperreal through simulacra (characteristic number 8) is discussed in detail in the next chapter; the term 'hyperreal', or the 'realer than real', as Baudrillard calls it (1990, 29), accounts for the construction of history perceived in *Haunted* and the writers' fixation with dealing with their fake realities as if they were the absolute truth (characteristic 7), whereas the central role of mass media in the novel and its relationship with literature lead to feature number 6. The concern about the viability of the systems of representation (number 1) comes across in the writers' constant care in making extreme yet (minimally) feasible stories which must have the potential to become either works of literature or television material, whereas the self-acknowledgement of the fakeness of their stories stands for the allusion to artifice (characteristic 4).

Furthermore, the narrative "we" that represents all the writers and, at the same time, does not represent any of them especially accounts for characteristic number 2; the existence

of different storytellers, different narrative layers and even different genres (poems, short stories and the novel itself) account for number 3; the presence of multiple narrators and a displaced, undefined narrative voice in the first person in the plural challenges (or enriches?) the notion of subject, which interferes in the narrative (feature number 5). Those three features have been listed separately because they all focus on fragmentation, one of the focal points of the postmodern identity. The pronoun “we”, which plays a fundamental role in Palahniuk’s novel and is indicative of fragmentation, is also used by the critic Steven Bruhm in his text entitled *Contemporary Gothic: why we need it*. What Bruhm says about the Gothic is, at the same time, the closure to this section and a sort of introduction to the next.

The “we” who needs the Gothic is by no means a unified, homogeneous group. I do not necessarily take the same things from a Gothic narrative as do the others who have bought the book or the theatre ticket. (...) the basis of need and desire is not only a theme in Gothic narratives but a theoretical quandary for the spectators and readers who consume those narratives. (2002, 260)

2.4 “I’M THE COMBINED EFFORT OF EVERYBODY I’VE EVER KNOWN”: LITERARY INFLUENCES IN *HAUNTED*

Shannon McFarland’s words in *Invisible Monsters* are perfect to summarize the fact that *Haunted* is a byproduct of Chuck Palahniuk’s previous literary experiences. There is nothing unusual about authors, works and literary movements serving as inspiration for a writer; nonetheless, the case of Palahniuk’s novel of stories deserves close attention: interviews with and articles about Chuck Palahniuk show the author’s concern with the building and telling of a story. In *Haunted* that becomes even more evident: not only do the confined characters produce literature, but they also discuss the reasons for telling stories and

make open references to literary works and episodes. That being said, this section discusses the references Palahniuk makes in his novel to classic literary works and events from the past, mainly the ones associated to the Gothic canon, in addition to an analytical exercise consisting of a reading of *Haunted* as representative of what critics have denominated *Postmodern Gothic*.

The very title of Palahniuk's novel evokes a feeling of horror typical of works labeled "Gothic". Haunting implies the presence of a tormenting element that is either supernatural or difficult to explain or understand rationally, and at least one character who suffers the consequences of such haunting. The oppression that characterizes the atmosphere comes from strong impressions, as seen in classic Gothic (Edgar Allan Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* or *The Black Cat*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, to mention a few), or in other contemporary literary varieties, such as the Southern American Gothic, represented by Flannery O'Connor's short stories (such as *Good Country People* and *A Good Man is Hard to Find*), and the theater of Tennessee Williams (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Suddenly Last Summer* or *The Glass Menagerie*) and Lillian Hellman (*The Children's Hour* and *The Little Foxes*), or in the Canadian variety of Gothic, represented by the works of Alice Munro, for instance. In all the works mentioned – *Haunted* being included – perceptions and impressions are of the essence.

For *Haunted*, the idea of perceptions might be analyzed taking into consideration the writer(s) and the intended audience, which leads to two possibilities: firstly, Chuck Palahniuk and his readers, and secondly, the fictional writers who are also the characters in Palahniuk's novel and their intended audience. For the first scenario, Palahniuk simply does what is somehow expected from him, based on what he had already provided his readers with before

Haunted: gore, violence, social criticism and taboos, all of which aiming at some kind of impact (let us not forget that the novel is intended to be the final part of a horror trilogy, which justifies even more the intention of impacting); the second case – the relation between the fictional writers and their intended audience – is very curious: the writers in *Haunted* are fictional, which means that on a secondary level the one who is actually telling stories is their creator – Palahniuk. Concomitantly, the intended audience is not found within the text, given that the writers never leave confinement. The actual reader is constantly reminded of the existence of an intended audience, the public who will consume “the national talk shows (...) a memoir. A movie.” (H, 85)

In the absence of the imaginary audience, the actual reader fills in and becomes the intended audience – therefore, the strong impressions the writers in *Haunted* depend on are the very impressions of the people reading Palahniuk’s novel. To sum up, the approach to the issue of impressions and perceptions in the novel is two-leveled, but the secondary level ends up being an unfolding of the primary one thanks to Chuck Palahniuk’s creative metanarrative. Regardless of the level, the importance of impressions for the particular stories told in *Haunted* fits the Gothic definition, once “[t]hroughout Gothic fiction terror and horror have depended on things not being what they seem (...) Gothic texts have always played along the boundaries between fictional forms and social rules.” (BOTTING, 2004, 170)

Few terms in the area of literary studies have been as broad and difficult to frame as “Gothic”. Defining the term constitutes an unsolved problem that has persisted for over two hundred and fifty years, a time during which it has been applied to literature, cinema, architecture, painting and decoration, among others. In addition, the term has become so broad that literary subgenres (the aforementioned Southern American, Southern Canadian,

Victorian and Postmodern, for instance), have been devised in order to keep up with the changes and also to adapt it to various geographical, social and historical realities.

In the introduction to his critical work *Gothic*, Botting calls the genre “a writing of excess.” (2004, 1), which, based on previous observations, also works for Palahniuk’s writing. In addition, he points out to the fact that the genre tends to display “the underside of enlightenment and humanist values”, which, once again, comes full cycle with Palahniuk’s characters. If the Enlightenment was characterized by a unified, centered and well-balanced subject, who was well aware of his individuality (HALL, 2006, 10), then the Gothic will explore its darkest aspect: the loneliness that leads to misinterpretations and intense impressions, the craziness that comes from self-absorption and the corruption or degradation of the spirit and the mind. This “darkest aspect” turns out to be the an intricacy to Enlightenment subjectivity, for it is contained in the subject, and it might come forth at any time: “the Gothic can be a claustrophobic, paranoid literature, profoundly skeptical of the Enlightenment faith that humanity can be perfected and anxiously aware of the damage inflicted by its schemes for achieving perfection.” (TRUFFIN, 2009, 74)

One possible approach to this issue in *Haunted* is in the short story *Slumming*, written by Lady Baglady, which deals with the unorthodox way some rich people (the Lady and her husband included) have found to overcome the boredom in their lives by pretending to be homeless. The inversion of values that is recurrent throughout the story shows how the subjects described lack the well-established notion of subjectivity mentioned before: “Poverty, Inky says, is the new wealth. Anonymity is the new fame. “Social divers,” Inky says, “are the new social climbers”. (H, 71) “Looking bad, she says, is the new looking good.’ (...) “Insanity”, Inky would say, “is the new sanity.” (...) ‘Dressing down, Inky says, is the new dressing up.’” (H, 73) In spite of perpetuating the inversion of values as she tells

her story, Lady Baglady conveniently puts herself in the position of a victim, as it becomes clear in the story that she is negatively influenced by her socialite friend Inky.

At its very core, Gothic finds “imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption” (BOTTING, 2004, 2), as well as social properties and moral laws transgressed by passion, excitement and sensation (BOTTING, 2004, 3). The plot in *Haunted* is inviting to all these feelings, due to the mixture of tormented characters and artistic struggle. Combined, they culminate in a frenzy of mutilation and a collection of stories whose imagery and themes are based on the aspects pointed out by Botting. Truffin agrees by stating that “[i]n response to their traumatic experiences, they [the writers in *Haunted*] become paranoid and monstrous, ultimately transgressing the bounds of law, reason and good taste.” (2009, 73)

One of the first texts associated to the Gothic tradition is entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, written in 1757 by the British philosopher Edmund Burke, in which he connects the notion most commonly perceived in Gothic texts (horror) to a noble state, the sublime. Burke affirms that

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure.²⁸

²⁸ Available at <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/burkesublime.html>. Access on April 10, 2011.

The writers inflict on themselves and their peers pain, mutilation and humiliation, always aiming at achieving a state of sublime literary creation or public recognition. The means through which they try to attain such a state are questioned and refused by most people (as can be seen in Ken St Andre, the critic who calls *Haunted* “a catalog of atrocities”²⁹), precisely because of the recurrence of terror and danger Burke points out. However, if one chooses to see the actions in *Haunted* as an attempt to achieve the sublime, Steven Bruhm’s words sound more appropriate:

As we confront this underlying terror of our times, after all, the Gothic provides us a guarantee of life even in the face of so much death. Who is more alive than Regan [the girl possessed by the devil in William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist*] when she is hurling a priest across the room? Who is more alive than Carrie [the main character in Stephen King’s eponymous novel] when she is incinerating her graduating class? Who is more alive than I when I am thoroughly gripped by a horror story that actually changes my physiological condition as I read or watch? (2002, 274)

Another aspect Botting highlights is the presence of transgression. It does exist in Gothic texts, but not for the sake of it, or just because this idea is usually taken for granted in Gothic works. Transgression plays an important role, namely, activating “a sense of the unknown and project[ing] an uncontrollable and overwhelming power which threatens not only the loss of sanity, honour, property or social standing but the very order which supports.” (BOTTING, 2004, 7) The order in question is the one that regulates social activities and interaction. The prerogatives mentioned by Botting had been lost by the writers before the retreat, given that all of them had transgressed somehow before their confinement. Thus, what

²⁹ See annex O.

Palahniuk presents in his novel of stories is a group of outcasts who have their potential for transgression amplified by a series of factors: each other's company, distorted perceptions of themselves and of the world, a reputation that precedes them, and an ideal environment.

A "highly unstable genre" (HOGLE, 2007, 1), Gothic has resisted as a sort of literature with blurred characteristics and a series of labels and misconceptions attached to it. Critics who hold some kind of grudge against it claim that it is a kind of "lower", or "bad" literature, enabling an analogy between Gothic and Palahniuk's novel. As Hogle observes, a Gothic tale usually unfolds in an

...antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, *a large old house or theater*, an aging city or urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building... (2007, 2 – emphasis added)

More than being an abandoned theater, the environment in *Haunted* provides its temporary inhabitants with thematic rooms, such as the Italian Renaissance lounge, the French Louis XV lobby (H, 41), the black mohair Egyptian auditorium (H, 175), the Arabian Nights gallery, the red imperial-Chinese promenade. (H, 176), and, not surprisingly, the Gothic smoking room (H, 81). The absence of windows is symptomatic of the darkness typical of the Gothic aesthetics, once "shadows, indeed, were among the foremost characteristics of Gothic works. (...) Darkness, metaphorically, threatened the light of reason with what it did not know." (BOTTING, 2004, 32) The lack of this "light of reason" is a symbolic explanation for the extreme acts of (self-)mutilation and homicide unfolded during the confinement, and they are symptomatic of the typical Gothic environment, that serves

both as a refuge or as a place of incarceration, a trap: “it [the Gothic castle] figures loss of direction, the impossibility of imposing one’s own sense of place on an alien world.” (KUHN, 2009, 38)

Another detail worth mentioning is that the castle or huge property where a Gothic narrative usually takes place tends to bring along characters who hold a nobility title or high social status: Dracula is a Count who descends from Attila the Hun, Ruthven (in Polidori’s *The Vampyre*) is a Lord, and both Jekyll and Frankenstein are doctors – not to mention real life characters who were crucial to the history of Gothic, such as the Marquis de Sade and Lord Byron, “his satanic majesty”. That comes across in *Haunted* as Palahniuk plays with the moral and social decadence of his characters by giving them “noble” pennames: Baroness Frostbite, the Duke of Vandals, Lady Baglady, the Earl of Slander, Countess Foresight and Miss America (a nobility title within the world of beauty pageants). Other names evoke their professions, such as Director Denial and Chef Assassin, or are simply respectful, such as Mr. Whittier or Mrs. Clark.

The setting also plays an important role in the Gothic sense for some of the short stories in *Haunted*, which take place in environments such as a prison on an island (Miss Sneezzy’s *Evil Spirits*), a retirement home from which the character/narrator cannot leave (Mr. Whittier’s *Dog Years*), a disheveled planet Earth with nowhere to hide from the collective hysteria (Mr. Whittier’s *Obsolete*) and a closed room full of enraged women (Comrade Snarky’s *Speaking Bitterness*), to mention a few.

Within these spaces, “are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story.” (HOGLE, 2007, 2) The haunting referred to in the title of the novel originates in an event from the past of each one of them that eventually leads them to their state of outcasts

within their social circles. By writing short stories about those traumatic events, the confined writers try to come to terms with their problems, which eventually reappear, represented by what the writers themselves denominate ‘ghosts’: “‘Our ghost, again,’ says the Baroness Frostbite. Saint Gut-Free’s two-headed baby. [He gets his own sister pregnant by masturbating in the swimming pool – hence the fear of a two-headed, defective baby] The Countess Foresight’s antiques dealer. Agent Tattletale’s gassed and hammered private detective. [Both the Countess and the Agent murdered people]” (H, 378)

The constant presence of the ghosts has an important function within the organization of the novel: they serve to remind the reader of stories that have been presented, and also to give hints of stories to come, since each ghost is related to the topics explored in the stories. “‘Around here, every power surge, every cold draft or strange noise or food smell, we blame it on our ghost. To Agent Tattletale, the ghost is a murdered private detective. To the Earl of Slander, the ghost is a has-been child actor.’” (H, 194)

This is the first occurrence of the term ‘ghost’ in the novel, and it appears at a point in which perhaps Palahniuk himself felt that some referencing would be necessary for the readers to be reminded of past stories and teased about future ones in an objective way. This passage is particularly interesting, because it not only introduces the idea of the ‘ghosts’, but it does so in a strategic and objective way, since the two stories preceding the passage are precisely Agent Tattletale’s and the Earl of Slander’s.

Conversely, the following passage shows how the author mixes ghosts that the reader already knows with other that are yet to be presented:

To the Countess Foresight, the ghost is an old-man antiques dealer, his throat slashed with a straight razor. (...)

To Saint Gut-Free, the ghost is an aborted two-headed baby, both heads with his skinny face.

To the Baroness Frostbite, the ghost wears a white apron around his waist and curses God. (...)

To Sister Vigilante, the ghost is a hero with the side of his face caved in.

To Miss Sneezy, the ghost is her grandmother. (H, 196)

The passage above is between the tenth and the eleventh short stories. Countess's story is the nineteenth one in the sequence, whereas Saint Gut-Free's opens the book; Baroness Frostbite's is number twenty in the sequence, and Sister Vigilante's story, like Saint Gut-Free's, has already been presented at this point. Miss Sneezy's ghost (story) is the twenty-second to be presented.

The use of the term 'ghosts' by Chuck Palahniuk echoes to some extent Baudrillard's use of the term 'phantasy'. The translation of both terms in Portuguese is the same ("fantasma"), and the viewpoints regarding the ghosts/phantasies is the same: if Palahniuk's writers are haunted by their private ghosts, Baudrillard affirms that cancer, terrorism and transvestite are phantasies (ghosts) that haunt all of us.

The traumas perceived in the writers in *Haunted* derive from what critics call "anxieties", an important feature of the postmodern world and its Gothic literary variation: "The twentieth-century's escalating anxiety regarding modernity as a combination of civilization, progress and rationality has become focused on the way that social, historical and individual formations are bound up with the organizing effects of narratives." (BOTTING, 2004, 169) The key aspect is the loss of the notion of organization, since the postmodern world is not as explicable and hermetic as the modern world is believed to be, which might be seen as a consequence of the collapse of old ways of thinking and seeing social relations.

‘Haunted’ is a word that tends to remind of specters and supernatural creatures. However, the ‘ghosts’ referred to in Palahniuk’s title find their materialization and symbology in objects and actions, all of which related to an individual trauma, loss or anxiety. The confusion perceived in the writers’ behavior and stories is, according to Bruhm, typical of the postmodern Gothic: it is a symptom of “a triptych of mirrors in which images of the origin continually recede in a disappearing arc.” (2002, 259) This is what Palahniuk calls throughout *Haunted* “the camera behind the camera behind the camera”, and what Baudrillard refers to as “xerox-degree reproduction”, discussed in section 3.1. The lack of references, be them cultural, social, affective or familiar, interferes with their notions of individuality and subjectivity, leading to the extreme actions they resort to in their pursuit of a good story.

The “extreme actions” are so many that it becomes difficult to define them. Based on that, it would be fair to say that the quote “Lust, murder, incest, and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature, brought together, without the apology of probability, or even possibility for their introduction” sounds like part of a negative review of *Haunted* based on the ghosts mentioned before. Indeed, it seems that all the aspects mentioned are present in the novel – at least the ones mentioned nominally. In fact, those are the opening lines of an article released on *The British Critic* in 1796 about *The Monk*, in which the author criticizes M. G. Lewis’s seminal work based on the levels of morality and monstrosity in the story. (BOTTING, 2004, 21)

The presence of morality in *Haunted* underpins the discussion proposed throughout chapter 4, as Jean Baudrillard himself admitted the possibility of being a moralist³⁰ (KELLNER, 1). As far as monstrosities are concerned, it is possible to quote Cynthia Kuhn and the list of Gothic conventions she identifies in *Fight Club*, all of which present in

³⁰ Available at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>. Access on February 10, 2011.

Haunted: “decrepit mansion, mysterious stranger, ancestral curse, clandestine behavior, raging madness, eerie doubling, astonishing grotesqueries, and unavoidable monsters.” (2009, 36)

Kuhn also discusses the framing of monsters within the category of “other”, which is a typical feature of both traditional Gothic and *Haunted*. As the story establishes who the monster is in a way that the reader will not have the slightest doubt, the process is automatic: I, as a reader, do not see myself reflected in the monster. Monsters are warnings, displays. Gothic texts show what happens to those who break rules or dare to trespass boundaries of social convention (the warning), who, most of the time, have some kind of handicap or physical difference (the display).

In the Postmodern Gothic, that does not come across so simply. The handicap and the difference are not necessarily visual, and the placing of otherness on a character depends on his/her identity and how I, as a reader, connect or not to such identity. The first issue to be pointed out here is the hindrances towards a clear definition of “identity”, as discussed in previous passages of this section: the fragmentation, the difficulty of framing one’s identity, the absence of steady references, and other personal aspects, such as one’s definition of what is right or wrong, moral, immoral or amoral, pleasant or unpleasant. The difficulties go both ways, in the sense that the reader has to make conclusions about his own identity and the characters’ as well.

Such impasses are bound to collapse the whole notion of identity. If identities are so hard to see, then there might be no identity at all. Not by chance, Sherry R. Truffin frequently uses the terms ‘dehumanization’ and ‘dissolution’ in her reading of Chuck Palahniuk’s work as representative of the postmodern Gothic. Thus, labeling the writers in *Haunted* solely as “monsters” would be equivalent to reducing the reading possibilities to a bare minimum filled

with an irrelevant Manichaeic obviousness. They might be monsters in relation to what part of the audience thinks a monster is (maybe a warning of what happens when the loss of referentials is too much to deal with), but they are much more than that.

Even though Gothic texts do not have as their main objective to teach something to the reader, they eventually do so. The pedagogical functions of a Gothic text are to show that those who break the rules undergo some kind of punishment, and to delimit categories – for instance, readers, who tend to (or should) support social conventions and rules, and monsters, who stand for what the readers are not, or should not be. In earlier stages of Gothic, such as the beginning of the nineteenth century, or in late Victorian period, the monster has a physical difference that marks this separation even more: Victor Frankenstein's creature is made up of pieces of corpses, Dorian Gray is handsome in a bizarre way due to his not aging, and Count Dracula is pale and has long fangs. In *Haunted*, only one writer starts out as a “monster” – Baroness Frostbite, who does not have lips. Saint Gut-Free is also deformed, even though his deformity is internal (he does not have most of his intestines). As far as the others are concerned, there is nothing to characterize them as “monsters” in the orthodox, classical-Gothic sense of the word: one of them is too old (Mr. Whittier), one other is too sick (Miss Sneezy), one seems to be oversexual due to her big breasts and big lips (Mrs. Clark), one is too rich (Lady Baglady), but the physical difference does not exist. Interestingly, the dehumanization perceived in their psyche becomes physical as well, as mutilation takes place and their bodies acquire diverse forms, or become “deformed”.

This strangeness that the monster brings is what Sigmund Freud calls the *Unheimlich* (what is not familiar), or what Julia Kristeva denominates *abject*.

a 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguard. (1982, 2)

Abjection turns out to be an interesting tool for the understanding of the Gothic literary tradition. One of the many aspects that draws the readers' interest to standard Gothic texts (and to *Haunted*, for that matter) is the possibility of transversing from complete emotional opposites – a process that involves things had as 'bizarre', 'gross' or 'scary' more often than not. A great deal of speculation has taken place over the last centuries in terms of trying to understand why people indeed read – and like – these texts, and each critic or theoretician brave enough to try to answer the question has a different viewpoint. Burke's focuses on the relation between the sublime and the terrible; Freud's depends on the premise that whatever causes any sort of unfamiliarity does so because it is familiar – therefore attractive – somehow; Kristeva's, on the other hand, does not explain much. It simply points to the fact that there is an attraction, which is at the same time too repulsive to be conventionally accepted and too strong to be ignored. Naturally, the three approaches mentioned here have been arbitrarily chosen, and do not intend to exhaust the topic. Their aim is to exemplify the multiplicity of possible interpretations, which serves to increase both the polemic and the analytical richness swirling around the genre.

The three approaches might be linked to *Haunted* through the criticism to consumer society, one of Palahniuk's most recurrent motifs. Consumerism takes place because it is supposed to fill in a void in the consumer's life, be it through the simple act of acquiring something or through the psychological importance the acquisition may have, which stands for the pursuit of the sublime state Burke refers to. The horrible aspect of this particular kind

of sublime lies in the idea that “[w]hen humans are reduced to commodities, they may respond by turning themselves into monsters.” (TRUFFIN, 2009, 75) This is Palahniuk’s point: the kind of society that characterizes the postmodern world makes us lose our individuality somehow (the triptych of mirrors that distorts and leads to the idea of the “camera behind the camera behind the camera”), and that might lead us to becoming something we do not want to be – something “abject”, using Kristeva’s nomenclature. Finally, despite the degree of distortion, there will always be familiar elements in the monster (unfamiliar) to remind us of its origin.

The strong capacity of adapting to different contexts Gothic literature has displayed does not come as a surprise. The core aspects of the genre – the relationship between reader and work, the imagery and themes it has explored, and the feelings and responses it might originate – are all connected to deep human needs, fears and anxieties. Not by accident, the one writer who is said to have explored all sides of human nature has also been connected to the genre. In the essay *The Genesis of Gothic Fiction*, E. J. Clery highlights the fortunate contributions of William Shakespeare to what has become known as Gothic fiction: his value for the romance revival in Britain (Gothic is a genre fixated on the past (TRUFFIN, 2009, 74), that revisits traditions and revives sensations), his resorting to popular folklore and superstition, and even the inclusion of comic scenes in the tragedies. As Clery affirms, “[Horace] Walpole adopted this practice in *Otranto*, and it was to remain a feature of Gothic romance through to Ann Radcliffe, “Monk” Lewis and beyond.” (CLERY, 2002, 31) Botting also mentions previous attempts of locating Shakespeare within a Gothic tradition (in PUNTER, 2001, 4). More obvious connections between Shakespeare and Gothic are to be found in his tragedies, through the constant presence of violence and death, the exploitation of the “dark side” of human nature, and even with the supernatural in *Hamlet* (the ghost of Hamlet’s father) and *Macbeth* (the three witches and the ghost of Duncan).

The possibility of tracing the presence of the Gothic to before its own establishment as a genre is due to the themes, emotions and anxieties it explores. They are inane, universal and everlasting, which means that they might be easily adapted to different realities and contexts, which is exemplified through the subgenres of Gothic mentioned in the beginning of this section. One aspect, however, has not changed: the focus on the story and storytelling. The creation of the desired atmosphere and effects, like the misleading present in mystery stories or in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Castle of Otranto* or the emphasis on impressions, such as in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, requires a lot from the storyteller.

Palahniuk's books prioritize storytelling. His characters constantly ask others to tell them stories, or to share secrets, which is an aspect manifested in the recurrence of support groups and small communities in his novels, as section 2.2 discusses. Palahniuk is publicly indebted to writers' workshops and meetings he attends, as seen in the dedication of *Survivor*, where he admits that "this book would not exist without the Tuesday Night Writers' Workshop at Suzy's house". Among his novels, *Haunted* seems to be the one that gathers those two aspects in the most creative way: the theater is the perfect environment, and writing stories is the perfect objective (according to Bruhm, "the very act of storytelling itself has the resonance of multiple traumas that we (...) cannot integrate into a coherent whole." (2002, 270) The union of these elements results in a group of people who are going to tell horror stories, no matter how hard they try to avoid that (in fact, they do not try to avoid it at all). In that case, Palahniuk does what is expected from a horror writer influenced by classic horror stories: he makes a reference to the mythical 1816 episode of the genesis of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*:

It was a summer house party in 1816, where a group of young people spent most days trapped in a house because of rain. Some of them were married, some not. Men and women. They read ghost stories to each other, but the books they had were terrible. After that, they all agreed to write a story. Any sort of scary story. To entertain each other. (...) "So what did they write?" Miss Sneezzy says. Those middle-class, bored people just trying to kill time. People trapped together in their moldy-damp summer house. "Not much," Mr. Whittier says. "Just the legend of *Frankenstein*." Mrs. Clark says, "And *Dracula*" (H, 62-63)

The passage above displays how Palahniuk makes aspects of typical Gothic literature blend in with his contemporary style of writing and approaching the genre, as he brings in his metatext authors who are going through their own creation processes as they remember and discuss others' creation processes and ways of making literature. (ZANINI, 2008, 207) In reality, the Villa Diodati episode has become a fundamental part of literary folklore, particularly for English and Gothic literature. Therefore, Palahniuk uses this in the introduction to chapter 5 of *Haunted* as follows:

The summer at Villa Diodati, Mrs. Clark tells us, it was just five people:
 The poet, Lord Byron.
 Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his lover, Mary Godwin.
 Mary's half-sister, Claire Clairmont, who was pregnant by Byron.
 And Byron's doctor, John Polidori.
 Listening, we're sitting around the electric fireplace in the second-balcony smoking room. The Gothic smoking room. (H, 81)

Palahniuk's cleverness lies in the strategic use of the episode – the moment and the way it happens. Chapter 5 comes after five short stories have been presented – therefore, the reader already understands at this point that *Haunted* is a story about telling stories. The

character who mentions Villa Diodati is Mrs. Clark, which also proves to be a wise choice: she is older, anguished, artificial and complex, which makes her a typical Gothic character. In addition, she holds a unique position within the social structure in the theater, as Mr. Whittier's secretary and a person of his trust. Her telling the story of Villa Diodati seems to be an extra ingredient towards setting the tone for all the storytelling and the social interaction that takes place after this point of the narrative. Also, it is important to highlight that, of all the thematic rooms available in the theater, they are conveniently located in the Gothic smoking room while this conversation unfolds.

After days of heavy rain and boredom, the party of five at the Lake Geneva house discovers a collection of German ghost stories entitled *Fantasmagoriana*, which leads the poets to challenge each other towards writing the best scary story. (H, 82) The challenge must have been Byron's and Shelley's idea of self-indulging and ego-boosting, given that they were the only people in the group who had had some kind of experience with writing. Presumably for the sake of sportsmanship, Shelley and Byron allowed the others to participate in the competition, and, as Mrs. Clark explains,

Byron said there was more talent in the room than in the book they were reading. He said they could each write a better horror story. They should, each of them, write a story.

This was almost a century before Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, but out of that summer came Dr. John Polidori's book *The Vampyre*, and our modern idea of a bloodsucking demon.

On one of those rainy nights, with the thunder and lightning over Lake Geneva, eighteen-year-old Mary Godwin had the dream which would become the Frankenstein legend. Both monsters the basis for countless books and movies that followed. (H, 82)

The Vampyre was published in 1819 and later on served as one of Bram Stoker's main sources of inspiration for *Dracula* (ZANINI, 2007, 55), whereas *Frankenstein* was first

published in 1818. As far as classic horror stories are concerned, *Dracula* seems to be a relevant influence for Chuck Palahniuk in *Haunted*. Other than the obvious reference to the book and the author, there are aspects in the work's structure that allow a connection between the two novels: the multiplicity of narrative dimensions in Palahniuk's work (poems, short stories and the longer narrative about the writers' interaction) reminds us of the multiplicity of media in *Dracula*, whose chapters include diary entries (personal and professional), telegrams, letters, newspapers articles, notes and a ship log. (ZANINI, 2007, 26)

The presence of multifaceted narrative levels in both stories has relation to giving credibility to their stories, all of them too extreme to be taken seriously: in *Dracula* the story is unbelievable because it is supernatural, whereas in *Haunted* the stories are unbelievable because they are artificial. The existence of three different layers in the narrative seems to be a mechanism the writers rely on to cope with the unbearable lack of interest that characterizes their lives, and the more layers they create, the more they are able to embellish their stories, even if that leads to a simulated reality.

A comparison worth making is between *Haunted* and *The Canterbury Tales*. In both cases there is a multiplicity of storytellers, all of which represented by names that refer to their social status rather than their individualities. If Palahniuk presents Miss America (vain and futile), Chef Assassin (his job and his psychopathic tendency) and Miss Sneezy (a sick girl), Chaucer's narrators are the Wife of Bath, the Knight and the Nun, to mention a few. The idea of people gathering for one specific reason and achieving a sort of communion also connects the two works: spiritual communion in Chaucer's work, and artistic in Palahniuk's.

Noite na Taverna, published by Brazilian author Álvares de Azevedo (1831-1852) presents some features seen in *Haunted* as well: one main storyline involving the main characters, who are also narrators of supposedly real stories they share with each other.

Another common aspect is the presence of controversial topics and imagery in both works: *Noite na Taverna* and *Haunted* bring stories about incest, cannibalism, murder and fratricide. In addition, both present stories dealing with unorthodox sexual practices (pedophilia in *Haunted* and necrophilia in *Noite na Taverna*). If the reunion in *Haunted* takes place in a claustrophobic environment pervaded by vice, in Azevedo's story the storytelling occurs in a tavern where people have their senses compromised by heavy use of drugs (opium, smoking, drinking). Not by chance, Azevedo's writing was heavily influenced by authors such as Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, illustrious members of the Diodati party referred to by Mrs. Clark in *Haunted*.

Perhaps "communion" is too strong a term to define what happens in the plot of *Haunted*. Communing involves understanding oneself, knowing what one is capable of giving and sharing. The characters in Chuck Palahniuk's novel – in all of his novels, as a matter of fact – do not know exactly what their roles and their places in the world they come from are – hence their fragmented, undefined personality. This kind of character is supposed to represent the postmodern subject – therefore, it is one of the basic features of the Postmodern Gothic.

Scholars and critics seem to use the term "Postmodern Gothic" as a synonym of "contemporary Gothic". Both terms are used to define the literature produced after the turn of the twentieth century in which the Gothic tradition is perceived – and it seems there are more similarities than differences: "the central concerns of the classical Gothic are not different from those of the contemporary Gothic: the dynamics of the family, the limits of rationality and passion, the definition of statehood and citizenship, the cultural effects of technology." (BRUHM, 2002, 259) Another important similarity is pointed out by Botting, when he affirms that "in the questioning of narratives of authority and the legitimacy of social forms, what can

be called postmodern Gothic is akin, in its playfulness and duplicity, to the artificialities and ambivalences that surrounded eighteenth-century Gothic.” (2004, 157)

If the concerns of contemporary Gothic are not different from the classical one, the approach to the subject is. While the first Gothic works of literature arose under the influence of the Enlightenment and its well-defined, established subject, contemporary Gothic deals with an individual in constant search for his/her place in society. Social roles and positions are not as well-defined as they used to be, as Palahniuk’s work shows brilliantly: genders are mixed up through transvestitism, cross-dressing and sex change surgery, artistic ideals are not the same as in Renaissance or the Enlightenment, and the notions of good and evil are not easily defined anymore, which makes evil even more dangerous than in the past: “This is the reappearance of the principle of Evil in a new guise. No morality or guilt is implied, however: the principle of Evil is simply synonymous with the principle of reversal.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 65)

Those changes start at an individual level, but they do not happen to only one individual. The feeling of helplessness is collective, and leads to “an immoral process, beyond good and evil, and hence reversible. It must be said, moreover, that we greet both worst and best with the same fascination.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 69)

Fragmentation, new boundaries, questioning of standards, multiplicity, a fixation with the past, consumerism, contradictions, paradoxes, and the notions of reality are put to question. These are the main ideas presented in the two last sections, aiming at a contextualization of the postmodern world – a world that is mine, yours, and Chuck Palahniuk’s as well.

That being said, the orgy is about to start...

3 DURING THE ORGY, OR FRAGMENTS OF THEORY

3.1 “THE CAMERA BEHIND THE CAMERA BEHIND THE CAMERA”: REALITY SHOWS AND MOCK-DOCUMENTARIES

Nineteen people, ten being women and nine men. They have different backgrounds and life stories, and they end up locked in one big building, where there are rooms with exotic decorations and costumes that are supposed to influence their forced interaction. Throughout their conversations, it is noticeable that they are not friends, and that the others' demise is seen as a rather convenient event. Most actions seem to be planned or staged. Backstabbing and blindsides are not out of the question, and their interaction is defined by artificiality, occasional aggressiveness and a rather desperate need of attention. The inmates certainly do not display any of the so-called traditional family values, and conflicts are bound to arise amid all these factors.

These nineteen people want to be famous, and they idealize their post-confinement newspaper interviews, as well as their appearances on morning TV shows. A closer look into their lives and interaction during confinement suggests that there is nothing special about them: no great talents, no significant cultural production, ideas that are not necessarily good. Nonetheless, they want to be heard, acknowledged. As a matter of fact, their apparent lack of self-awareness is so intense that they all think that their life stories are worthy of museums and movie adaptations.

The description above might be seen as a regular criticism of the next season of *Big Brother* in any of its innumerable national variations (in Brazil this would certainly be the case); in fact, the text is a concise depiction of the writers' retreat that serves as the backbone for the plot in Chuck Palahniuk's *Haunted*. Instead of sending videos to TV stations and talking to producers in order to be selected, they responded to the following mysterious note:

ABANDON YOUR LIFE FOR THREE MONTHS

Just disappear. Leave behind everything that keeps you from creating your masterpiece. Your job and family and home, all those obligations and distractions – put them on hold *for three months*. Live with like-minded people in a setting that supports total immersion in your work. Food and lodging included free for those who qualify. Gamble a small fraction of your life on the chance to create a new future as a professional poet, novelist, screenwriter. Before it's too late, live the life you dream about. Spaces very limited. (H, 83-4)

Due to its range and international popularity – Angola, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Spain, Thailand, the USA and Ukraine are on the list of over 70 countries that have had versions of the show – *Big Brother* tends to be seen as the epitome of *reality television*. In fact, the genre comprises many other shows and formats that do not include confinement. Holmes and Jermyn (2004, 2) state that Reality TV could be conceived as

- recording ‘on the wing’, and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals and groups;
- the attempt to simulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction;
- the incorporation of this material in suitably edited form into an attractively packaged television programme which can be promoted on the strength of its reality credentials.

The basic premise that justifies the presence of theory about reality television in this analysis is that the interaction of the writers during the retreat in *Haunted* is configured by Palahniuk in a fashion very similar to the one in a reality show like *Big Brother*. The recording of events is under the responsibility of the Earl of Slander and Agent Tattletale, who own the tape recorder and the video camera, respectively. Palahniuk’s choice was not an

accident: both of them have professions that involve information, reality and their manipulation. In their short stories this becomes clear: the Earl of Slander is a sensational journalist who kills a former TV star and plants false evidence of suicide, whereas Agent Tattletale denounces (and records) people who claim to be handicapped only in order to collect pension.

Simulation, present in Jermyn and Holmes, is paramount in Jean Baudrillard's theory, and the many ways in which it appears in Palahniuk's novel is discussed in detail in the next section.

The importance of television, the last item in Jermyn and Holmes's description, comes across easily in *Haunted* due to the constant reminder to the reader that the writers are concerned with "the movie-book-T-shirt story" (H, 86), "[t]he book. The movie. The television miniseries" (H, 103), and "television and radio crews, newspapers and magazine reporters." (H, 312)

By creating such an environment, Palahniuk proves to be tuned in to the postmodern audiences, once "[a]s we embark upon a new century of broadcasting, it is clear that no genre form or type of programming has been as actively marketed by producers, or more enthusiastically embraced by viewers, than reality-based TV." (JERMYN and HOLMES, 2004, 1) According to the author, however, the synchronicity was an accident. "I never intended *Haunted* to parody reality television, - Palahniuk counters. - The last such show I saw was *An American Family* in the 1970s. I haven't owned a television since 1990." (interview in annex W)

The "discursive, visual and technological *claim* to 'the real'" (JERMYN and HOLMES, 2004, 5) is what brings together reality television and *Haunted*. In both scenarios, there is the relationship between the truth and the manipulation of information. The primary

basis of the negative criticism towards reality television lies in the fact that it “manipulates and constructs ‘the real’, and hence the contested nature of the term ‘Reality TV’ itself (‘the two words are mutually exclusive’)” (JERMYN and HOLMES, 2004, 11). That explains, for instance, why viewers of *Big Brother* contest the final result when the winner is not a cast member they like: they blame it on manipulation, image editing and on some kind of preference on the part of the producers for one particular cast member over others.

What constitutes reason for audience complaints is a crucial part of reality television making for Andrejevic: “The appeal of the real, in this context, becomes the promise of access to the reality of manipulation, which the jaded viewers already knew to be the reality of entertainment programming” (2003, 121), a fact also acknowledged by Jermyn and Holmes’ recurrent use of inverted commas in the expression ‘the real’. Jean Baudrillard also points to that when he affirms that “‘TV verité’ [is] a term admirable in its ambiguity, does it refer to the truth of this family or to the truth of TV? In fact, it is TV that is the truth of the Louds, it is TV that is true, it is TV that renders true.” (1994, 28-9)

Baudrillard refers to the Loud family, the protagonists of the 1973 show *An American Family*, mentioned by Chuck Palahniuk in his interview. The show, which was supposed to merely display the daily life of a typical American family, became famous for showing on air the parents’ divorce and the eldest’s son decision to reveal his homosexuality.³¹

³¹ The variations within reality television are overwhelming: sitcoms from the 1950s, such as *I Love Lucy* (starring Lucille Ball, mentioned in footnote 15 – p. 31), might be considered predecessors of reality television by “relying upon scenarios based on the daily, domestic routines of fictional families” (ANDREJEVIC, 2003, 65-6); *An American Family* also plays an important role for being the first attempt of capturing on film the daily life of a so-called average American family. More traditional formats started in late 1990s/early 2000s, being *Big Brother* and *Survivor* the most successful ones. It turns out that reality television has become such a profitable niche that virtually every area of human life has a reality show related to it, such as fashion designers (*Project Runway*), cooks (*Top Chef*), hairdressers (*Shear Genius*), motor bikers (*American Chopper*) and even celebrities (*The Osbournes*, *Hey Paula*, *Celebrity Apprentice*), which is a contradiction: at first, recording the rhythm of daily life was supposed to show average people what their lives are or could be like. Now, celebrities (usually decadent ones) use reality television to show how “average” they can be, aiming at going back to celebrity.

(ANDREJEVIC, 2003, 66) Not only does Baudrillard highlight the impossibility of something called “reality television”, but he also blames television for the disappearance of reality³² and, more specifically, for the collapse of the Loud family: “the camera lens that, like a laser, comes to pierce lived reality in order to put it to death. “The Louds: simply a family who agreed to deliver themselves into the hands of television, and to die by it.” (1994, 28)

Chuck Palahniuk twists our perspective of truth and manipulation as viewers of reality shows: while reality television denies its viewers access to editing and backstage, the open ending in *Haunted* does not reveal whether the writers’ intended interviews and TV apparitions actually occur³³. Therefore, editing and backstage are the only things readers of the novel have access to.

If the writers are prone to believe that their life stories and make-believe tortures are “television material” (the “apparent lack of self-awareness” mentioned on p. 93), that is because the postmodern world fosters that kind of thinking somehow. This is a time in which information is crucial: it abounds, it flows fast, it makes the difference. Everything seems to be worth telling, and communication often seems to happen for the sake of it, without much concern for source credit or accuracy. That is part of the phenomenon Baudrillard calls *culture degree Xerox* (2002, 9), which is characterized by the predominance of the virtual, the easy spread of news and rumors, and the indefinite exploitation of the image, all of which leads to the emptiness of information: “[n]othing inscribed on these screens is ever intended to be deciphered in any depth: rather, it is supposed to be explored instantaneously, in an abreaction immediate to meaning.” (2002, 54)

³² The next section discusses in depth Baudrillard’s views about the disappearance of reality through the notion of simulation.

³³ This aspect is crucial for part of the analysis proposed here: the novel does not show the writers telling their stories in public in any ways whatsoever. The revelation of their stories to the audience is nothing but an unrealistic hypothesis, which explains the modalization through ‘would’ of some passages.

Postmodern images are shallow, and Baudrillard's general impression is that all human production is faded to mere reproduction, and not to inspiration: all "new" things seem to feed of the originality of the past, a reality that has already been experienced. This explains why every new season of *Big Brother* resembles the previous ones: cast members try to reproduce behaviors seen before, giving up their individuality and relying on pre-determined and seemingly pre-approved forms, a fact represented in *Haunted* through an effective metaphor: "Agent Tattletale tapes Mr. Whittier's decay over Lady Baglady's death: "Replacing yesterday's tragic scene with today's. The Earl of Slander holds his tape recorder close, using the same cassette, betting this horror will be worse than the last." (H, 106) By taping events one over the other, Agent Tattletale and the Earl of Slander remind us that today's tragedy replaces yesterday's and will be replaced by tomorrow's.

If copies are as effective as the original in terms of fulfilling postmodern needs (perhaps more effective, because they are more easily and quickly consumed), the way is open for fraud, plagiarism, mass production and lack of exclusivity. Therefore, in the postmodern world "the opposite of knowledge is not ignorance but deceit and fraud" (APPIGNANESI and GARRATT, 2007, 136). Walter Benjamin expressed a similar concern in the 1930s, even though his focus was the *work of art during the age of technological reproducibility*:

In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. (...) In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place (...) that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. (BENJAMIN, 2008, 20-1)

In spite of being an interesting option, the comparison between *Haunted* and the dynamics of a reality show does not cover all the issue, because it only focuses on the description of the writers' interaction in confinement.³⁴ An analysis of their hypothetical storytelling on the media proves to be more prolific if compared to another media product that is also committed to the truth: documentaries.

While there are similarities between the two forms (claims to truthfulness, manipulation of information through editing, real life and real people as the background), there are crucial differences. Aufdenheide affirms that “we do expect that a documentary will be a fair and honest representation of somebody’s experience of reality” (2007, 3) and that “[a]udience expectations are built of prior experience.” (2007, 2-3) Based on those two premises, the writers in the novel create fake tortures that sound too strong to be true. However, due to the absence of other witnesses, there would be no possibility of contradicting their version of the story, which in a certain way validates their effort: the vast majority of their hypothetical audience would not have similar prior experiences to relate to, given that reality “is not *what* is out there but what we *know, understand, and share* with each other of what is out there.” (AUFDENHEIDE, 2007, 5) If the story were told as a true one, it would put them in a high position as owners of a unique experience, one that only they would be able to tell.

Another aspect that brings reality television and documentary together is “consumer entertainment” (AUFDENHEIDE, 2007, 5), that is, for both media the topic must be of public or general interest – and, without a doubt, sensationalism, sex and violence seem to be appealing to masses in general. In the approach of *Haunted* to documentaries, that translates

³⁴ As section 2.4 discusses (p. 89), there are three different story dimensions in *Haunted*: the description of the retreat, which reminds of a reality show, the short stories produced by them, and the poems that introduce each of the writers.

in the uniqueness of the experiences claimed to be true that would be retold; in the comparison of the novel to reality television, the focus is on the enhancement of the audience's voyeur instinct, or, as Baudrillard calls it, "the perverse pleasure of violating someone's privacy", leading to "a sort of frisson of the real, or of an aesthetic of the hyperreal, a frisson of simultaneous distancing and magnification, of distortion of scale, of an excessive transparency. The pleasure of an excess in meaning..." (1994, 28)

In *Haunted*, reality television and documentaries, the impossibility of representing the real is based on the 'eye of the camera': as Aufdenheide states, "[t]he fact that filmmakers have a wide variety of choices in representing reality is a reminder that there is not transparent representation of reality." (2007, 25) For Reality TV and documentaries, that literally depends on the eye of the camera: firstly, the selection of scenes, which might be based on relevance, appeal or footage quality; secondly, the order in which the selected scenes appear in the final cut; thirdly, individual factors, such as the filmmaker's/editor's/storyteller's preferences, biases and state of mind. In the novel, the 'eye of the camera' parallel may be traced under two perspectives: seeing both the group of writers and Chuck Palahniuk as storytellers.

The first case is peculiar because the storytelling per se does not happen. Even though the writers do not appear in the media, the reader is able to form a very clear picture of what their story might have been, given that the description of the retreat displays many moments of speculation and simulation. By having a massive audience in mind, they prepare what they imagine would be a sellable story, which is summarized by the closing lines of the novel: "And someday soon, any day now, the world will come open that door and rescue us. The world will listen. Starting on that sun-glorious day, the whole world is going to love us." (H, 404)

Another aspect left to speculation is why the surviving writers choose to remain locked inside after Mr. Whittier unlocks the door. Mother Nature's cold remark – "Not yet" (H, 403) – is supposed to indicate that the writers still have not reached what they consider the ideal level of marketability for their story. However, I believe their procrastination is nothing but fear – of not being able to reintegrate to society, of not being accepted, but, most of all, fear of not being believed. The ending left me with the impression that the remaining ones would never find the ideal tone and amount of atrocities to tell in their stories, leading them to stay in the theater until their death by lack of food, weakness or, more probably, by murder, mutilation or suicide (as Palahniuk himself points out, "I'd like to gently remind people that we create most of our own problems."³⁵)

Therefore, not leaving the confinement might be read as a sign that the eye of the camera still has not found the reality it wants to show, expressing the tension between representation and reality that Aufdenheide acknowledges as a recurrent characteristic of documentaries (2007, 9-10). The writers' perspective to tell the story is one of drama, sensationalism and victimization, in consonance with the fact that "TV news and documentary [in postmodern times] assume more and more the form of entertainment, using dramatic and melodramatic codes to frame their stories." (BEST and KELLNER, 1991, 120)

An analysis of the eye of the camera under Chuck Palahniuk's perspective is different. First of all, he does know that his audience is not as general as the hypothetical mass audience of his characters. His scene editing and metaphorical filming are summarized in the following statement:

³⁵ See interview about *Haunted* in annex R.

Consider that we're moderately afraid of some topics, (...) and we can discuss those and give ourselves a little thrill and goosebumps. But also consider that we're so afraid of other topics that we'll never discuss them. Some fears are so threatening that we can't allow them into our minds. My goal is to cross that line, and depict the fears we can't face (...) In my horror, I want to deal with personal humiliation and failure – a kind of internal monster, where the villain and victim are the same person".

By turning people into the content of the stories he and his characters tell, Palahniuk proves to be once again in agreement with postmodern audiences. As Baudrillard observes, "Such is the last stage of the social relation, ours, which is no longer one of persuasion (the classical age of propaganda, of ideology, of publicity, etc.) but one of deterrence: "YOU are information, you are the social, you are the event, you are involved, you have the word, etc." (1994, 29) In *Haunted*, this is best translated by the recurrence of the ideas of the "Museum of Us" and the "Mythology of Us", as mentioned in section 2.2, p. 44.

If we indeed live in a time when image is more important than substance, than the efforts seen in the writers' retreat towards mutilation would probably not have been in vain, if they had wanted to leave confinement. The (minimal) feasibility of both stories – a horrendous retreat where people are submitted to tortures and a group of people who get together and invent such a hideous scenario – is justified by a general demand for stories and information that seems to be endless. Moreover, anything and anybody can become a news topic or a source of entertainment: Baudrillard affirms that "[y]ou no longer watch TV, it is TV that watches you" (1994, 29), whereas Best and Kellner claim that we live in the time of 'infotainment'. (1991, 121)

Why does TV watch us? Probably because it is constantly searching for new objects of display: "[i]n the camera lens, and on-screen in general, it is the object, potentially, that

unburdens itself – to the benefit of all media and telecommunications techniques.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 56) In *Haunted*, the displayed objects are the writers themselves. Baudrillard’s definition applied to the reading of Palahniuk’s novel stands for what Andrejevic calls *the work of being watched*, that is, “a form of production wherein consumers are invited to sell access to their personal lives in a way not dissimilar to that in which they sell their labor power.” (2003, 6)

One great merit Reality TV has in terms of captivating the audience is the idea that it should be easy to relate to cast members of a reality show because of their average qualities – in other words, that person struggling for votes on *Big Brother* or sleeping in the jungle in *Survivor* is not me, but it could be me. If others can be news, so can I.

The recurrent phrase in *Haunted* “the camera behind the camera behind the camera” represents many of the ideas discussed so far. Firstly, the fact that whenever a story is told, there is a camera that exerts some influence on the way we see things. Baudrillard goes even further on that direction by saying that “The camera is thus a machine that vitiates all will, erases all intentionality and leaves nothing but the pure reflex needed to take pictures.” (2002, 56) In other words, the camera erases a significant part of the process of looking – the choice of what to look at.

This influence exerted by the camera leads to the second aspect “the camera behind the camera behind the camera” symbolizes, namely, the ability of “giving the last and final truth. We all want to be one standing farthest back. The one who gets to say what’s good or bad. Right or wrong.” (H, 51) The third aspect is connected to the impossibility of absolute reality implicit in the use of the camera; on the one hand, “[t]elevision is an image which no longer dreams, no longer imagines, but nevertheless has nothing whatsoever to do with reality.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2005, 30); on the other hand, the use of the camera necessarily

implies image editing and choice making, reinforcing what Baudrillard calls the “omnipotence of manipulation” (1994, 22), which he exemplifies by questioning the occurrence of the Vietnam War:

...and it is necessary for us to believe in this: the war in Vietnam “in itself” perhaps in fact never happened, it is a dream, a baroque dream of napalm and of the tropics, a psychotropic dream that had the goal neither of a victory nor of a policy at stake, but, rather, the sacrificial, excessive deployment of a power already filming itself as it unfolded, perhaps waiting for nothing but consecration by a superfilm, which completes the mass-spectacle effect of this war.” (1994, 59)

Despite being polemic, the idea is applicable to the writers’ retreat: the experience is amplified at all costs, events and tensions are embellished by lies and scars, with the careful production one expects from a movie production. The writers’ final objective is to create a sensational script made up to be on screen, pleasing mass audiences: “We’d turn our lives into a terrible adventure. A *true-life horror story* with a happy ending.” (H, 85, emphasis added)

A “true-life horror story” is the motto that introduces the final part of this section. In spite of being based on actuality, both reality television and documentaries suffer with the manipulation of facts, which makes their total commitment to the truth unfeasible. However, there seems to be one genre in which manipulation and commitment to the truth seem to coexist in harmony – the *mock-documentary*, which has become a stable – and profitable – branch within the movie industry through a variety of films supposedly based on “true-life horror stories”.

Over the past twelve years, a significant amount of horror movies have explored the niche, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which tells the story of three youngsters who

go into a forest to investigate the existence of a witch and never return; the Spanish *[REC]*(2007) and *[REC] 2* (2009), about a building in Barcelona contaminated by a strange virus that turns people into zombies³⁶; *Paranormal Activity* and its sequels (2007, 2010, 2011) portraying the hardships of a family haunted by a dangerous spirit.

However, the greatest evidence that mock-documentaries have become a strong tendency within the horror cinema is the fact that even American zombie movies – a consolidated horror subgenre in itself – have flirted with the documentary format: the final minutes of the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) consist on a some lost footage that had been found, whereas *Diary of the Dead* (2007) is shaped as a documentary in its entirety.

Roscoe and Hight allude to the fact that the genre has had several names, such as ‘faux documentary’, ‘pseudo-documentary’, ‘mocumentary’, ‘cinéma vérité with a wink’, ‘cinéma un-vérité’, ‘black comedy presented as in-your-face documentary’, ‘spoof documentary’ and ‘quasi-documentary’. (2001, 1) However, they defend the use of the term ‘mock-documentary’

1 because it suggests its origins in copying a pre-existing form, in an effort to construct (or more accurately, re-construct) a screen form with which the audience is assumed to be familiar.

2 because the other meaning of the word ‘mock’ (to subvert or ridicule by imitation) suggests something of this screen form’s parodic agenda which we argue is inevitably constructed (however inadvertently by some filmmakers) from mock-documentary’s increasingly sophisticated appropriation of documentary codes and conventions. (2001, 1)

³⁶ *[REC]* was such a huge success in the American market that in 2008 it gained an English-spoken remake called *Quarantine*. Another aspect worth mentioning is that the title *[REC]* refers to the simultaneous recording of the events on the video camera, reinforcing the documentary aura of the movie.

The mock-documentary “seems to be symptomatic of a subversion of the continued privileged status of documentary itself”, thus representing an external (fictional) challenge to documentary. (ROSCOE and HIGHT, 2001, 4) This premise is applicable to the reading of *Haunted* in the sense that both mock-documentaries and the novel toy with the possibilities factuality provides: when a spectator watches a mock-documentary, there is a series of elements that reinforce the story’s veracity (amateur footage that has apparently been lost and then discovered, fake interviews and even the acting of the players, which must be convincing). Nonetheless, the viewer is aware of the fact that the movie being watched is a work of fiction.³⁷

Haunted, on the other hand, cannot be read as a mock-documentary in writing, but there are aspects that allow the parallel. While mock-documentaries work with the idea of veracity, Palahniuk’s novel works with the idea of feasibility. The overall effect of feasibility on the reading is very similar to the one of veracity on mock-documentaries. In addition, the plot of the novel displays a series of elements committed to veracity, even if an artificial one: the constant presence of recording equipment (tape and camera), the writers’ journalistic concern and convincing acting, evidenced by their will to mutilate themselves. Finally there is the radicalism in their actions (murders, bruises, mutilation, lying, dissimulating and simulating), which works both towards veracity and mockery: all their actions put together are possible, in spite of being highly improbable. The improbability is the element that entitles movies such as *[REC]* and *Diary of the Dead* (and books such as *Haunted*) to the title of ‘mock’ (subversion or ridicule by means of imitation).

³⁷ In this respect, one of the most interesting case studies is the 1980 movie *Cannibal Holocaust*, made by the Italian director Ruggero Deodato. Set in the Amazon forest, it tells the story of four American researchers who are interested in one particular tribe that fosters cannibalism. When they finally find the tribe, they are caught and eaten up. Most of the movie consists of the lost-and-eventually-found footage made by the researchers. The make-up and scenes were considered so realistic at the time that Deodato had to take the cast to a TV show to prove they were alive. The fact, naturally, boosted popular interest in the movie.

It is fitting that the documentary (and its unfolding, such as the mock-documentary) has become such an important part of the postmodern world, given that it “is intimately tied up with the scientific project and the advancement of technology.” (ROSCOE and HIGHT, 2001, 9) Contrary to Baudrillard and Aufdenheide, Roscoe and Hight do not acknowledge the virtual impossibility of depicting pure reality on camera; as a matter of fact, they admit that “[t]he camera became an apparatus through which the natural world could be accurately documented and recorded and, in this way, was able to capitalise on the new thirst of facts” (2001, 9) – the same thirst that, according to Baudrillard, we quench with empty and meaningless facts.

They go even further in the matter by stating that the claim that a documentary is capable of “present[ing] a truthful and accurate portrayal of the social world is not only validated through the association of the camera with the instruments of science but also depends upon the cultural belief that the camera does not lie.” (2001, 11) I see two problems in Roscoe and Hight’s claim, both of which connected to a bias that, to a certain extent, is necessary for their definition of mock-documentary. The first problem is their use of the term ‘cultural belief’, which for me sounds more like ‘common sense’. By applying this term, Roscoe and Hight support their point of view on a superficial generalization, whereas Baudrillard and Aufdenheide go deep into the matter.

The second issue is the claim that “the camera does not lie”. By focusing on the technological quality and reach of the camera as an electronic device, they affirm that it does not lie, when in fact they probably mean that whatever the camera focuses on, it will show accurately. Therefore, they choose to overlook a very important aspect pointed out by Aufdenheide and Baudrillard, which is the choice-making on the part of whoever controls the

camera. In fact, they admit that “[documentary]’s reliance on the distinction between truth and falsity no longer holds if we accept Baudrillard’s thesis.” (2001, 29)

I understand and respect Roscoe and Hight’s point of view. They feel compelled to reinforce the connection between factuality and documentary, as they propose the mock-documentary as a variety that twists this premise. Nonetheless, they do have one point of agreement with Baudrillard and Aufdenheide, as they affirm that “[p]ostmodernism can be crudely characterised as being concerned with surfaces (rather than depth) and style (rather than content).”³⁸ (2001, 29)

Despite the different media and approaches presented, there are some unanimous aspects among the theoreticians studied: contemporary audiences are eager for information, the media plays a fundamental role in the dissemination of information, and all of us are entitled to the roles of content receivers and content producers (being YouTube the most evident example of that), a fact with which Baudrillard agrees: “Whereas art was once essentially a utopia – that is to say, ultimately unrealizable – today this utopia has been realized: thanks to the media, computer science and video technology, everyone is now potentially a creator.” (2002, 16) While there seems to be a lack of depth or emptiness in information, contemporary audiences are obsessed with factuality and evidence – in other words, it does not matter what you say, as long as you can prove it or give to it an aura of factuality.

Because of this very obsession, some genres such as Reality TV, documentaries and mock-documentaries have explored the relationship between the spectator and veracity in all its possibilities, be it through a serious commitment to the objective truth, be it by presenting

³⁸ “In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.” Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, that is, *Being Earnest* (1895).

works of fiction shaped as documents of the truth, or by promising the chance of seeing real people interacting in real contexts – and nowadays, with pay-per-view services, the spectator also has the chance of controlling his/her own amount of reality on TV. *Haunted* does not ignore any of these aspects – not even a 24-7 access to a reality show: Mr. Whittier’s fake death enables him to disappear from the retreat and observe the other writers’ interaction through hidden cameras.

One of the aims of this section was to introduce a discussion about the notions of reality or its absence, crucial elements in Jean Baudrillard’s theories and views of the world. The next two sections aim at going deeper into some of Baudrillard’s writings, thus forming the theoretical basis under the close reading of *Haunted* presented in the final chapter.

3.2 “LOOKING GOOD AND FEELING GORGEOUS”: HYPERREALITY, SIMULATION AND THE IMAGE

When it comes to theory and analysis of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard’s name is paramount. As previously mentioned (p. 64), he always refused labels, which helped to build his reputation as an ill-tempered, grumpy man. Ironically, “postmodern” was one of the most recurrent labels attributed to him, and also the one that bothered him the most: “One should ask whether postmodernism, the postmodern, has a meaning. It doesn’t, as far as I am concerned.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2007, 5)

For Hegarty, “Baudrillard himself rejects the idea that his own work is postmodern, and reserves his use of the term for descriptions of fairly inane cultural practices.” (2007, 4) Still according to Hegarty, the connection between Baudrillard and the postmodern is

superficial: his writings are fragmented, and some of them focus on aspects easily associated to the “fairly inane cultural practices” of contemporary times, such as simulation, the virtual and the frailty in human relations. Finally, Hegarty confirms the idea by pointing out that “[t]he postmodern has been interpreted in many ways, but coalesces around notions of loss of depth (critique, meaning, truth, ‘metanarrative’ in general, affect).” (2007, 4)

If on the one hand lack of depth is the argument used by Hegarty to pull Baudrillard apart from the postmodern, on the other hand we must remember that lack of depth is precisely what some of Baudrillard’s opponents claim to be his greatest fault. Therefore, Hegarty’s point might be read as a connection between Baudrillard and the postmodern, rather than a reason for repulsion. In addition, there are the complications of defining postmodern dealt with in the previous chapter, and the complications of dealing with Baudrillard presented in this chapter. Both the theoretician and the phenomenon are characterized by a wide range of possibilities and interpretations, which makes categorical statements of refusal impossible.

Another aspect pointed out by Hegarty is the fact that the association of Baudrillard to the postmodern is not based on all of his writings, but only on part of them. Likewise, this analysis focuses not on all of his work, but only part of it – the part dealing with cultural practices and modes of behavior conventionally described as postmodern. Given all the reasons exposed, and in spite of Paul Hegarty’s point of view (or Jean Baudrillard’s, for that matter), for the purposes of this work the link between Baudrillard’s ideas and the postmodern are not only feasible but also necessary – which does not invalidate at all the fact that plenty of other theoretical and critical perspectives when reading Baudrillard’s work are possible.

Originally from the French town of Rheims, Baudrillard was born in a family of civil servants in 1929, just after the Wall Street Crash, “the first great crisis of modernity”.

(HORROCKS and JETVIC, 1997, 6) The turmoil in which he was born and raised might have accounted for his tendency to question the world and see it under the negative perspective that characterizes his writing and thinking.

Without a doubt, France was a suitable and inviting environment for intellectual activities and philosophical thinking in the first sixty years of the twentieth century, a fact evidenced by the significant amount of thinkers born there during the period: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Paul Sartre, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard. Jean Baudrillard's involvement with cultural and intellectual spheres is vast: he was a German teacher, majored in sociology and completed his doctoral thesis in the same area, and became an assistant professor at the University of Nanterre, in Paris. He also worked writing literary and cultural reviews for Sartre's journal *Les Temps Modernes* in the early 60s.

In 1968, Paris was under enormous political and cultural agitation. The social revolt was headed by a group of undergraduates who became known as the *Enragés* (maniacs), some of which taught by Baudrillard. The protest, which became known as the May 1968 Revolt, began with non-violent marches and strikes that involved a total of ten million workers. However, drastic police repression led to violent confrontation and vandalism.

The *Enragés* claimed to have drawn the inspiration for their revolt from the *Situationists*, a group of radical writers and artists all over Europe who confronted the bureaucratic regimes. For Baudrillard, the students' motivation was valid; however, the way the students managed the situation was not. Half of the "maniacs" seems to have given up the revolt because of the summer vacation (HORROCKS and JETVIC, 1997, 13), showing obvious lack of engagement with the cause, whereas the other half preferred to focus their efforts on violence rather than debating.

The revolt turned out to be fruitless in terms of its political achievements, but it ended up being the starting point for Baudrillard's theorization and subsequent writing. According to him, the basis of the revolt was foolish, owing to the fact that the students thought that "capitalist repression meant aggression, but in fact it encouraged **participation**." (HORROCKS and JETVIC, 1997, 13)

The disappointment of seeing students (some of which his own) resorting to violence made him think about the roles of people in society, and it probably contributed towards the negative tone pervading his texts. At this point, keywords such as "spectacle of consumption", "repression", "accumulation" and "object" become crucial for his theories. He was acquainted with Guy Debord and his idea of the *society of spectacle*, in which the spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relationship among people, mediated by images. (DEBORD, 1997, 14) The mediation of human relations through images constitutes the strongest idea underpinning Baudrillard's ideas of hyperreality, simulation and seduction presented here.

Establishing 1968 as the beginning of Baudrillard's path as a theoretician is easy; on the other hand, tracing all of his theoretical affiliations and points of views is not. Until his death in 2007, Baudrillard wrote innumerable texts and for different media, addressing "virtually all phenomena of the contemporary world: war, celebrity, information and communication technology, the end of Marxism, reality TV, the fate of history, graffiti, 9/11, photography, architecture, cloning..." (HEGARTY, 2007, 1)

Defining any concept proposed by Baudrillard turns out to be a challenge for a series of reasons, such as his prolific and multiple writing, with releases and republications through books, interviews, magazines, newspapers and websites, making it very difficult for a researcher to map all of the texts in which a given concept is discussed or revisited. Another characteristic of Baudrillard's writing that hinders understanding is the aforementioned

fragmentation, pervaded by metaphors and a unique use of vocabulary. While his sentences tend to lack objectivity, his tone is straight-forward and, most of the times, polemic, in the sense that groups of people might feel misrepresented or even revolted by some of his comments.

However, his views of the world are unique. The very “problems” mentioned above make the enterprise of understanding his texts worthwhile and enriching. In this section and the next I present concepts developed by Baudrillard that are crucial for the close reading of *Haunted* presented in the next chapter. The choice made for the analysis proposed in this work is to focus on Baudrillard’s writings that deal with broad topics that are closely related to the structure and plot in *Haunted* – the media in general (with close attention to television, particularly Reality TV), flow of information, sexual excesses, and mass culture.

I present the concepts pertaining to my reading of the novel through a significant number of quotations allied to a constant approach to Chuck Palahniuk’s novel. In addition, there are times when the idea presented by Baudrillard is interesting for my analysis, but the topic or the focus originally given is not. When that is the case, I make adjustments and analogies that are specified in the text.

The first among these analogies is in the title of this subsection. More than an attempt to sound fun, the quotation “looking good and feeling gorgeous” is indirectly linked to other topics presented in this work, and it brings together hyperreality, seduction and simulation through their common features – their focus on appearance and their importance in the mediation of human relations.

Looking Good, Feeling Gorgeous is the title of a song by RuPaul, a famous American drag queen/performer/singer, and, at the same time, “transvestite” is a recurrent word in the next chapter, given that it is one of the phantasies that, according to Baudrillard, characterize

the modern world perceived in Palahniuk's novel. In addition, it was the opening song for the first season of *The Greatest Loser*, an American reality show (a main topic in section 3.3) where obese contestants lose as much weight as they can, aiming at health and "fitness"³⁹.

The main concepts presented in this section and the next (simulation, simulacra, seduction and hyperreality) are the backbone of Baudrillard's writing between the 1980s and the 1990s, when his concerns about images and their social functions become consolidated. Baudrillard focuses on them in *Simulacra and Simulation* (originally published in 1981) and *Seduction* (published in 1979). Alongside *The Transparency of Evil* (1990), these three books constitute the main sources cited in this chapter.

In order to understand the concepts hence presented, one premise must be taken for granted: for Baudrillard, *reality is over*. It does not exist (maybe it has never existed) as we have always conceived it – the absence of artificiality, purity, the opposite of fake or lie. Reality does not emit signs that guarantee its existence; now the signs build the real as *simulations*. That interferes with our notions and representation of things, given that no system of analysis can refer to something that does not exist (reality). That means that all we can depend on is images and processed ideas to represent things.

Among all possibilities of analysis, the one that perhaps serves best to this purpose is sex. What are the representations of what (or who) is sexually enticing? What really "turns us on"? In order to understand the representations of sex in the media, Baudrillard relies on the most sexual among media forms: pornographic movies and sexual phone services. The people seen in pornographic films usually have exacerbated sexual features – big breasts, muscles, penises, lips and buttocks, more often than not altered by implants, surgeries, cosmetics and

³⁹ The Brazilian version of *The Biggest Loser* is called *O Grande Perdedor*.

drugs. Such exacerbation leads to an undeniable feeling of artificiality, and referentials – in this case, sexual – are lost.

Where do professionals of sex – movie players, prostitutes and dancers, for instance – obtain their referentials? To whose likeness do they build themselves up? Those are tricky questions for a tricky situation, considering that “the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 2) The fact is that most people in the “real world” do not have the looks seen and stimulated in those movies, which means that whatever the parameters are, they are based on simulations and processed images whose source cannot be identified: the “postmodern pornography, if you will, where sexuality is lost in the theatrical excess of its ambiguity.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 22)

Examples of that are easily perceived in *Haunted*: Miranda, the transsexual in the short story *Speaking Bitterness*, and Mrs. Clark and her husband, who undergo significant body changes because they want to star in a pornographic movie. When the Clarks see themselves on camera, they realize that there is an enormous difference between their real appearance (old, ugly and artificial) and what they think they look like, or the simulated image they thought they had been able to reproduce. Mrs. Clark actually says that “The difference between how you look and how you see yourself is enough to kill most people.” (H, 144) A deeper discussion of the simulated images of sex is presented in section 4.2.

For Baudrillard, simulation begins with an implosion of meaning (1994, 31). Due to the fact that the postmodern world is characterized by “a process of social entropy leading to a collapse of boundaries, including the implosion of meaning in the media and the implosion of media and the social in the masses” (BEST and KELLNER, 1991, 121), simulation becomes the defining characteristic of contemporary society, and not only within the sexual sphere. Other examples of simulation are to be found in the general parameters for success and

happiness, archetypically depicted in detergent or margarine commercials, for example: a family formed by two parental figures (a man and a woman, necessarily), (not many, probably two) children, a pet, a beautiful and clean house, and objects that have a strong symbolic meaning: a modern car, state-of-the-art appliances, designer clothes.

Those elements together form the visual representation (the simulated imagery) of ideals such as the American Dream. The name turns out to be appropriate – it could never be anything more than a dream – that is, something unrealistic. Miss America’s words echo these ideas, when she says that the American Dream is about “mak[ing] your life into something you can sell.” (H, 52) Not coincidentally, the bitter description is delivered by the pretty model ironically referred to as “Miss America”. If on the one hand she is supposed to embody the same values reinforced by the American Dream, on the other hand she has already learned (the hardest way) that the dream will never come true in its fullest.

Other examples of that include typical pieces of advertisement of house appliances from the 1950s and 1960s, where the housewife appears doing housework with a smile on her face. (annexes R and S). That is also noticed in movies and television shows, such as in the movie version of Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, through Laura Brown’s house and behavior (annex T). The character played by Julianne Moore is exemplary of the target public of the advertisement mentioned before, and also of how strong the media’s power of suggestion is: being a perfect housewife/wife/mother/woman at that time involved reproducing images and behaviors presented by the media. Thus, women were not expected to be just housewives – they were expected to be domestic Wonder Women.

In the pilot episode of *Desperate Housewives*, one of the characters, Bree Van de Kamp, is depicted as the perfect housewife (annex U). But how does one define “a perfect housewife”? In the series, the narrator defines Bree as somebody who does her own cooking

(usually cuisine), who tends her immaculate garden, who does her own reupholstering and makes her own clothes; naturally, she has a beautiful house, a husband and two kids. Needless to say, the hardships Bree faces to sustain her ideal of a housewife take their toll on her, pulling her apart from the perfection she aimed at and showing her in the hardest way that her life was an endless simulacrum: her marriage collapses and right after that, her husband dies, her son reveals to be gay, her daughter turns out to be promiscuous and becomes a teenage mother, and Bree ends up an alcoholic. Not coincidentally, in *The Hours* Laura Brown undergoes as many problems as Bree, which lead her to a frustrated suicide attempt followed by a permanent abandonment of her house and family.

Of all possibilities on screen of references to Baudrillard's concept of simulation, none is as perfect as *The Truman Show* (1998): Jim Carrey is Truman Burbank, an insurance salesman with an apparently happy life: he has a good job, he is happily married, his house is satisfactory, and his material needs are fulfilled. However, he discovers that since his birth (that is, over thirty years), his life has been filmed and shown on television. Perhaps that is as real as Reality TV gets: his life is a literal simulation, and all of his environments (house, neighborhood, work place) are literally simulacra. The discovery, at the end of the movie, that all of his life had been a script questions Truman's referentials of truth and reality, in the most Baudrillardian sense. Annex V shows a photo of Truman's wife in one of the many moments of advertisement present in the show.

For Baudrillard, there is no true reality, just a series of representations and simulations that perpetuate themselves as they are constantly reproduced. The more complete and frequent simulations become, the more we have a feeling of being immersed in reality (HEGARTY, 2007, 49), leading to the existence of "a world of simulation, of the hallucination of the truth,

of the blackmail of the real, of the murder of every symbolic form and of its hysterical, historical retrospection.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 9)

The *simulacra* are the sources of simulation, or the symbolic places where simulations emerge, exemplified by the reality show in *The Truman Show*. Baudrillard divides the simulacra in three orders associated to different historical periods, and, apparently, his definitions of the first and second orders serve as introductions for him to reach the third order, which characterizes contemporary times and is more suitable for discussions Baudrillard proposes about current topics. However, my presentation of the orders consists of an analytical exercise: I identify aspects in *Haunted* representative of each of them.

The first order of simulacra is: “Simulacra that are natural, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit, that are harmonious, optimistic, and that aim at the restitution or the ideal institution of nature made in God’s image.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 121) The first order was typical of the period starting in the Renaissance up to the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century.

In *Haunted*, the first order of simulacra could be represented by the recurrence of copies and reproduction of behavior and images. However, for Baudrillard’s definition to make sense, some terms must be submitted to the writers’ “twisted aesthetics”. For them, the ideal image implies bruises, missing parts and scars. Within the small community they form, the notions of “harmonious” and “optimistic” are completely distorted, aiming at the destruction of the body – or, as Baudrillard points out, “a chemical prosthesis, a mental surgery of performance, a plastic surgery of perception” (2002, 49) that characterizes the postmodern (post-orgy) world.

The aesthetic ideals seen in *Haunted* are so twisted because they are the result of too much simulation. It is clear that the writers are all aware of the fact that audiences tend to like

tragedies and shocking stories – let us remember that the writers themselves have been part of the audience. Their overdoing of bruises and mutilation derives from their effort to simulate what they think is best to suit their commercial purposes, in a similar way to someone who reproduces images and behaviors of a porn star or an archetypal perfect housewife.

The use of the word ‘counterfeit’ by Baudrillard in the definition of the first order of the simulacra suits *Haunted* perfectly. Other than the false accidents and traumas they intend to display on the media, there are some writers whose lives and stories focus on copying and false reproductions: the Duke of Vandals earns his living by copying works of art and killing artists and Agent Tattletale is a detective whose job is to identify people who pretend to be disabled to collect pension. Likewise, there are writers who pretend to be something they are not: Lady Baglady pretends to be homeless when in fact she is a millionaire, Mr. Whittier pretends to be an elderly man when in fact he is a teenager with a rare condition (progeria) and the Earl of Slander is a reporter who kills a decadent TV star and plants false evidence of suicide, in order to have a good story to write about.⁴⁰

The second order of simulacra is: “Simulacra that are productive, productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by machine and in the whole system of production.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 121) The second order is characteristic of the Industrial period in the nineteenth century.

In Chuck Palahniuk’s novel, the writers’ retreat might be considered a simulacrum of second order, given that it has a very utilitarian character: it aims at the production of stories that are supposed to provide them with money and fame. The system of production they

⁴⁰ The notion of ‘counterfeit’ is recurrent in Chuck Palahniuk’s work, and it frequently manifests itself through impressions that prove to be wrong towards the end of the story: in *Invisible Monsters*, Evie turns out to be a transsexual; in *Fight Club*, Tyler and ‘Jack’ are the same person; in *Survivor*, Tender Branson does not die at the end in spite of all the evidence pointing to the contrary, and in *Tell-All* Hазie Coogan is the one who plots against Katherine Kenton, rather than Webster Carlton Westward III.

regard has as its ultimate objective marketing their disheveled, destroyed selves as products. Producing, advertising and selling (core notions of the Industrial period) appear in some of the short stories: *Green Room* is written by Miss America, who works in TV commercials, and focuses on infomercials (a theme that had already been tackled by Palahniuk in *Invisible Monsters*), whereas Chef Assassin's story *Product Placement* toys with the idea of mass production and negative advertisement – the story consists of a letter the Chef writes to a cutlery industry describing how he uses their knives to kill people, and how easily he can destroy their reputation if he divulges that.

Finally, there is *the third order of simulacra*: “Simulacra of simulation, founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game – total operationality, hyperreality, aim of total control” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 121), characterizing contemporary times. Examples of the third order abound in the novel, taking into consideration the fact that every event that takes place during the retreat is fake – simulations based on what the writers believe would be a marketable story: “In earlier times an event was something that happened – now it is something that is designed to happen. It occurs, therefore, as a virtual artifact, as a reflection of pre-existing media-defined forms.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 41)

“Information” is a crucial idea, given that the writers’ actions (writing, mutilating, pretending) aim at the media and merchandise. “Total control” is also related to the media: by manipulating the facts, the writers try to put themselves in a position of “content producers” (ANDREJEVIC, 2003, 5), which gives them power: they become owners of the (simulated) truth, the only witnesses of extreme acts that will interest the audiences. The power they have as content producers is part of the discussion proposed in section 3.3, about reality shows and documentaries.

The intended visibility is supposed to give the writers some kind of power, even if temporary. At this point, it is impossible not to relate that to people who participate in reality shows, become news for a short period of time, and then disappear due to their general inability and personalities devoid of interest. As Andrejevic points out, “the promotional apparatus (...) can transform a mediocrity into a superstar.” (2003, 5), and in consonance, Baudrillard states that

we manufacture a profusion of images *in which there is nothing to see*. Most present-day images (...) are literally images in which there is nothing to see. They leave no trace, cast no shadow, and have no consequences. The only feeling one gets from such images is that behind each one there is something that has disappeared. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 17)

One word Baudrillard uses in his description of the third order of the simulacra is *hyperreality*. The term is recurrent in his theory, and for the analysis of *Haunted* proposed in this work it is paramount. Given the loss of referentials characteristic of the postmodern world, there is no way to identify an authentic source of reality; therefore, our models of the real are generated without a distinguishable origin or reality, they are based on processed and simulated images, leading to what Baudrillard calls the ‘realer than real’ (2002, 18), with the prefix ‘hyper’ meaning ‘more than’. Therefore, Bree Van de Kamp, Laura Brown and the women depicted in pieces of advertisement from the 50s and 60s represent the “more perfect than perfect” housewives, whereas porn stars represent “the more sexual than sexual”.

The best examples of hyperreality in the novel are the products the writers try to turn into: “the more hurt than hurt”, “the more victimized than victimized”, “the more broken than broken”. As Baudrillard affirms, “present-day simulators attempt to make the real, all of the

real, coincide with their models of simulation.” (1994, 2) Such a fact is possible due to the absence of concrete referentials of reality, and this is exactly what happens in *Haunted*: the theater is a symbolic simulacrum (the place that enables simulation), the events are all simulated, and the overall situation (the retreat, the recordings of the events and the (self-) infliction of bruises, for instance) constitutes the hyperreality they are immersed in.

The idea that simulators try to adapt the real to their own models becomes clear in the innumerable moments when the writers affirm that they are going to sell the story they are simulating as if it had happened naturally, which is exemplified by the constant election of a new villain among them: as the organizer of the retreat and apparently the oldest person in it, “Mr. Whittier, our villain, our master, our devil, whom we love and adore for torturing us” (H, 88) is unanimously chosen the villain of their simulated story. When he (once again, apparently) dies, they conclude that even though his death might be an extra ingredient for their tragedy, they need a new dominating evil figure to arise: “we need for him to die. We can still make Mrs. Clark the evil villain.” (H, 106) The choice is natural, given that Mrs. Clark has been Mr. Whittier’s “secretary” since the beginning of the story. When she dies, and no obvious candidates to the role of the “bad guy” appear, the remaining writers think about how to manipulate, or simulate, the facts according to their needs:

“Excepting that our version will say Mrs. Clark cut off the penis and forced the Link to eat it whole.⁴¹ The truth is so easy when everyone agrees who to blame.”

“Not to be a killjoy”, says the Baroness Frostbite, “but we’ll need a new villain.”

The devil is dead – we need a new devil. (H, 361)

⁴¹ As mentioned on page 51, the Matchmaker decided to cut his own penis off to enhance his personal drama. For the same reason, the Missing Link decides to swallow the Matchmaker’s penis head.

The hyperreal is also defined as the elimination of the subjective point of view, the suppression of the look, the fact that the object of perception is always already there, already seen, thus preventing the act of seeing. These aspects lead to the intense victimization, a crucial element in the writers' hyperreality, as the following quotation attests,

When that alley door opens, we'll be famous. When we hear the lock turn, then the sliding rollers squeak, then the click-click and click-click of someone trying the light switch, then we'll have our story ready to sell. Our death-camp cheekbones ready for our best profile close-up.

We'll say how Mr. Whittier and Mrs. Clark fooled us into coming here. They trapped us and held us hostage. They bullied us to write books, poems, screenplays. And when we wouldn't, they tortured us. They starved us." (H, 377)

Jean Baudrillard also highlights the difference between simulation and dissimulation: "To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending." (1994, 3) The first stages of the narrative in *Haunted* seem to be about dissimulation – frustrated writers who pretend to be victims and who seize what they think is a good opportunity of selling a good story. The impression is sustained as they sabotage facilities that are not necessary for immediate survival, such as the washing machine, phone lines, the front door and the fire alarm. In addition, they ruin their food and their heating in the hopes that they will be found before they start missing those things. "Of course, we each wanted to leave enough food to last until we were almost rescued. Those last couple days, when we were really fasting, hungry and suffering – we could stretch that to a couple weeks in the retelling." (H, 102)

The turning point is the realization that the rescue will not be as quick as imagined, when dissimulation becomes simulation and their perception of reality becomes altered. As

they notice they are bound to stay trapped for a long time, they decide to take advantage of the situation:

Already, we were making matters worse. Exaggerating. We'd say how the place was freezing-cold. There was no running water. We had to ration the food.

None of that was true, but it does make a better story. No, we'd warp the truth. Blow it up. Stretch it out. For effect.

We'd create our own incestuous orgy of people and animals for the world to gossip about." (H, 84)

That is the starting point for the "mutilation frenzy", which is supposed to be an embellishment for the simulation mentioned in the previous passage, and also the mark of the transition from dissimulation to simulation. The basic difference is that "pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: (...), whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary." (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 3)

Another important aspect in the theory of hyperreality is the four successive phases of the image: "it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum." (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 6)

Each case is analyzed as follows: the first stage stands for a good appearance, something Baudrillard calls the representation of the sacramental order (for instance, the general image of writers that might be evoked when the reader of *Haunted* learns that it is a story about writers); the second stage is an evil appearance, associated to the order of maleficence (the stories invented by the writers seen as mere lies); the third order plays at

being an appearance, or the order of sorcery (the devices the writers use to simulate events and their awareness of the fact that their inventions might actually become marketable stories); finally, the fourth order is no longer related to appearances, but only to simulation.

A significant part of Baudrillard's critique to hyperreality in the consumer society concerns Walt Disney and Disneyland. Provided that adaptations are made, some of his remarks fit Palahniuk's novel. For instance, Baudrillard affirms that Disneyland is "first of all a play of illusions and phantasms" (1994, 12), in reference to the world of fantasy supported by the many environments and fictional creatures. The abandoned theater where the writers' retreat takes place in *Haunted* is filled with different thematic rooms (as mentioned in the section about the Gothic, p. 78) and costumes, which are supposed to enable the creation of an atmosphere of art and creation. Both settings – Disneyland and the theater – might be the home for phantasms: just like Disneyland aims at inviting to a world of intense fantasy through its atmospheres, the setting (darkness, seclusion, isolation, costumes and decorations) in *Haunted* intensifies feelings and fantastic thoughts, which ultimately become the writers' simulations.

Baudrillard states that the attraction Disneyland exerts on people is based on its being a "social microcosm, the *religious*, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys" (1994, 12). Therefore, through the fantasy it provides, Disneyland reminds its visitors that whatever is out of Disneyland is real and authentic, even if such authenticity is already simulated, nostalgic (HEGARTY, 2007, 87), or, "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real." (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 12) Here, the relationship between the writers' fake stories and the response they expect from audiences is expressed. Why do we have interest in tragic stories? Because of the reinforcement it provides us – bad things might happen to me (I am not in Disneyland, I am

not in the theater), but worse things are happening to others, such as a hypothetical group of poor people who are submitted to terrible tortures by a demented old man and his evil secretary.

Possibly Baudrillard sees in Disneyland an epitome of the excessive consumerism typical of postmodernity and its negative consequences – regulation of human relations through images and appearances, hyperreality, simulation and the loss of referentials. He goes further by comparing Disneyland and the cinema, affirming that

...what is offered in Disneyland is a parody of the world of the imagination. The sumptuous age of stars and images is reduced to a few artificial tornado effects, pathetic fake buildings, and childish tricks which the crowd pretends to be taken in by to avoid feeling too disappointed. Ghost towns, ghost people. (BAUDRILLARD, 2010, 58)

The writers in *Haunted* are devoid of hopes and referentials and, just like the average visitor of Disneyland or a movie-goer, they seek a fantastic alternative to the reality they live in – a reality that is not even entitled to its name anymore.

3.3 “I SHOUTED OUT WHO KILLED THE KENNEDYS”: SEDUCTION, VIRULENCE AND THE PHANTASIES

The previous section discussed how important images and their manipulation are for Baudrillard. They mediate relations and are present in virtually every instance of human life. The postmodern world is marked by a general concern about appearances (another factor that reinforces Umberto Eco’s statement that every epoch is postmodern – p. 65), and our times

are particularly prolific in terms of options for the manipulation of one's image: make-up, surgery, prostheses, clothes and accessories, body art, attitude. Each postmodern individual has his/her own ideal standard for each one of those attributes, and the notion of "ideal" comes from hyperrealized images, or, as Baudrillard calls them, the 'realer than real' images.

If image plays such an important role in his theory, it is only natural for him to focus on cinema as well. No other medium has displayed such a capacity of simulating images and perpetuating hyperreality: "cinema plagiarizes itself, recopies itself, remakes its classics, retroactively its original myths, remakes the silent films more perfectly than the original, etc." (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 47)

Cinema is based on the manipulation of images, or, in Baudrillard's words, the "strategy of appearances" (1990, 7): on screen, one can be anything with the aid of special effects, the appropriate clothes and make-up or the right use of light. The problem is that our referentials are lost. The origin of our standards of "good", "beautiful" and "heroic" (and also of "evil", "ugly" and "villainous") have become lost and cannot be traced back: "[t]here is no more need to choose between the beautiful and the ugly (thanks to Warhol's can of soup), therefore we are incapable of choosing and we are condemned to indifference." (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 18)

Our ideals consist of simulated images, which have been built upon other simulated images – represented by Palahniuk's mantra in *Haunted* "the camera behind the camera behind the camera" and by Baudrillard's concept of *culture degree-Xerox* discussed in section 3.1. (pp. 97)

So much simulation leads to total artificiality and a loss of referentials that some might find difficult to deal with. This issue is particularly complicated for some media figures who

acquire the status of icons, more often than not via the exhausted simulation of their images. For both Baudrillard and Palahniuk, Marilyn Monroe is a suitable example of this fact.⁴²

...the era of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, and the Kennedys, of those who really died simply because they had a mythic dimension that implies death (...) this era is long gone. It is now the era of murder by simulation, of the generalized aesthetic of simulation, of the murder-alibi – the allegorical resurrection of death, which is only there to sanction the institution of power, without which it no longer has any substance or an autonomous reality. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 24)

The expression “murder by simulation” is perfect to define what happens during the writers’ retreat in *Haunted*. In spite of not having done anything to deserve the mythic dimension Baudrillard mentions, the writers want to be entitled to the advantages that being a media myth brings, even if that involves being hurt or, for most of them, dying. The greatest advantage brought by the mythic aura is the prerogative of telling a unique story without questionings or the risk of being overlooked, which would ultimately give them power – the power you can get by manipulating your image according to your purposes and by making others believe your hyperreality is your reality, indeed. In other words, the power you get by seducing.

The three examples Baudrillard points out cover the most important aspects of death and its seductive function in the media. One finds a mythic aura around the personae of James Dean, the Kennedy family and Marilyn Monroe, and their physical deaths enhanced that. In

⁴² For the recurrence of Marilyn Monroe in Chuck Palahniuk’s work, see page 45, and for an analysis of her image as a transvestite, see section 4.2.

James Dean's short list of films, there is the recurrence of the simulated image of the rebel – therefore, it is only fitting that the individual James Dean has to die in a car crash at the age of 24. Another example of this is to be found in the uncanny coincidence marking the death of several music rebels at the age of 27: Janis Joplin (dead in October 1970), Jimi Hendrix (November 1970), Jim Morrison (1971), Kurt Cobain (1994) and the new addition to the group, Amy Winehouse (2011).

Likewise, there are plenty of websites that present the so-called 'Kennedy curse', the many tragedies that have happened to the family, including murders by shooting, fatal airplane disasters and a failed lobotomy. The curse is epitomized by the assassination of John F. Kennedy when he was the president of the United States in 1963, and it has even been mentioned by the Rolling Stones in their famous song *Sympathy for the Devil*, in which Lucifer makes references to many of his deeds on Earth.

Finally, there is Marilyn Monroe. In some respects, her mythic aura is equivalent to James Dean's: she did not simulate the image of a rebel in her movies, but she certainly did so in relation to her public persona through the abuse of alcohol and drugs and her notorious involvement with John F. Kennedy, who was married to Jacqueline Kennedy (who happened to personify another effective example of simulation: the 'classier than classy').

Marilyn simulated to exhaustion the image of an adorable and utterly sexy girl. However, part of her mythic aura relied on her overwhelming frailty and her consequent inability to deal with hardships. Her death has been officially considered the consequence of a suicide attempt through overdose of barbiturates – which, once again, is perfect: everybody is satisfied with that – politicians, the police and the audience. There would be no surprise to see Marilyn Monroe dead in such a way, after the endless simulation of her image as a fragile, dependent and unstable person.

All the media examples brought here are related to simulation and hyperreality. More than that, they help to understand the strategy of appearances Baudrillard refers to when he presents his concept of seduction. However, before presenting the concept of seduction the way it contributed towards my reading of *Haunted*, a few observations are necessary.

When Baudrillard discusses seduction, he focuses on sex, sexuality, and the multiple relationships and clashes between masculine and feminine. His ideas, as always, tend to be fragmented, polemic and, occasionally, radical. A reader who is not acquainted with Baudrillard's work and who comes into contact with his writings about seduction will probably have three impressions: at first, that he is a sexist of the worst kind. The second one, that he is one of the greatest feminists in history. And finally, that he is an anti-feminist.

My work most certainly does not intend to display a sexist or feminist view of literature or the world. That would be a serious contradiction, given that as far as sexual differentiation in the postmodern world is concerned, "sexist" or "feminist" have ceased to be the only options in store. I dislike Baudrillard's over-psychoanalytical tone in some of passages, as well as some of his ideas about gender relations, which have been deliberately and conveniently omitted. Therefore, his theory about seduction is supposed to be seen as an analysis of human relations, both among humans and with their environment, solidifying the bond between the concept of seduction and the concepts discussed in the previous section.

The second important observation regards the way I present Baudrillard's ideas for seduction and related concepts. Quotations and primary ideas come from original texts, and, given that quotations are loose pieces of a text that does not appear in its entirety, the false impression of sexual bias might arise. My reading of *Haunted* consists of an adaptation of the ideas presented that do not necessarily involve the original sexual frame; therefore, when Baudrillard discusses *masculine* and *feminine*, I discuss respectively *social majorities* and

social outcasts. The former are represented by general audiences and, in many respects, to the average reading public of the novel, whereas the latter is represented by Palahniuk's group of characters. This binary opposition should be seen as another analytical exercise, just like my other attempts to adapt Baudrillard's ideas to my purposes.⁴³

Some of Baudrillard's initial fragments about seduction seem perfect to define *Haunted*: he points out to the present-day promotion of "sex, evil and perversion" (1990, 1); he also mentions the proliferation of images, echoed in Palahniuk's characters' concern with themselves in the media and their obsession with bruises and scars to display to the audiences; for Baudrillard, the time now is one of indetermination: "No more want, no more prohibitions, and no more limits: it is the loss of every referential principle." (1990, 1) As the writers move into the abandoned theater, they create this new and peculiar society with their own values and references. For the reader, who is supposedly a member of larger societies and who has to abide by pre-established moral and social codes, the consequences are the general feeling of strangeness and the realization that the writers have lost their referentials. In fact, *Haunted* is formed by a series of Palahniuk's attempts to shock, and his effectiveness depends on how the reader deals with the loss of his/her own referentials.

When Baudrillard deals with desire, he affirms that when it "is entirely on the side of demand, when it is operationalized without restrictions, it loses its imaginary and, therefore, its reality; it appears everywhere, but in generalized simulation." (1990, 5) Here I propose one more adaptation: instead of *desire*, *violence*. Such an adaptation enriches the reading of most of Chuck Palahniuk's fiction. Violence is everywhere and with no restrictions in *Rant*, *Fight Club*, *Pygmy*, and, more blatantly, in *Haunted*. To this must be added the fact that the violence perpetrated in *Haunted* has, in its roots, a strong character of simulation and fakeness. It is

⁴³ Example of "metaseduction": as I point out what seduction means for Baudrillard and apply his ideas to my reading of Palahniuk's novel, I try to seduce you into believing that my reading is feasible.

real violence, that effectively victimizes people both by means of death or mutilation, and, at the same time, it is simulated and meaningless violence in a frenzy: “Director Denial has already hacked off fingers. So has Sister Vigilante – plus some toes, using the same paring knife that Lady Baglady borrowed from Chef Assassin to slice off her ear.” (H, 149-150)

As far as the indetermination of sex is concerned, two characters epitomize the lack of limits: Mrs. Clark, who builds herself to the image of an archetypal pornographic actress with big and artificial lips and breasts, heavy makeup and overdone suntan only to become a pathetic lonely woman, and Miranda, the transsexual in *Speaking Bitterness*. The sort of perfection Miranda aims at is the same as Mrs. Clark’s – the body of a sex goddess. Miranda’s misfortune lies in her attempt of interaction and leveling with other women, which leads to her humiliation and deconstruction as a female. For men, however, it apparently works out for both Palahniuk and Baudrillard. While the former states that Miranda became “the kind of woman only a man would become” (H, 259), the latter states that the parody of femininity is imagined, staged and fantasized by men (1990, 14). Not coincidentally, two of the most meaningful analyses presented in section 4.2 of this work – the one about transvestites – are related to Mrs. Clark and Miranda.

The writers in the novel embody the premise that the universe must be interpreted in the terms of seduction, namely, “play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances” (1990, 7). As they play with facts that happen within their isolation – deaths, villainy, mutilation – they challenge the truth; more than that, they also challenge common sense, as they struggle for a questionable status: the one who feels the greatest pain, the one who has undergone the most horrible suffering or who has the biggest scars. The strategy of appearances is obvious here, in spite of their twisted aesthetics. Instead of manipulating their looks towards a

healthier or sexier stage, they go towards destruction and handicap. Ultimately, the writers' effort to look as bad and hurt as possible aims at seducing audiences in the future.

This comes full cycle with many of Baudrillard's postulates: firstly, that "seduction is more intelligent, and seemingly spontaneously so." (1990, 10) Naturally, self-inflicted pain and starvation are not intelligent decisions in themselves, and even the writers in *Haunted* know that: "Of course, we each wanted to leave enough food to last until we were almost rescued. Those last couple days, when we were really fasting, hungry and suffering – we could stretch that to a couple weeks in the retelling." (H, 102) However, with a goal in sight, anything goes. Appearances are reversible, as Baudrillard repeats throughout his writings about seduction, and many of the self-inflicted handicaps could be solved or softened with make-up or prostheses, if the writers desired to be reintegrated to "normal" society.

Secondly, Baudrillard states that "*seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe.*" (1990, 8) If the surviving writers in *Haunted* ever managed to display their scars on TV shows and documentaries (which is something we will never know), they would probably elicit some sort of response on the part of the audience, such as pity, sympathy or disgust. Regardless, they would obtain attention, which is their ultimate objective. That would be a victory based on images, testimonials and interviews, and, naturally, seduction. The writers' obsession with the media shows that their simulations and delusions, in spite of unrealistic, are in tune with the real world. They know that the access to media they want so badly is an important tool to provide them with power. Therefore, it is possible to say that the writers' hyperrealized desire – leaving confinement and becoming famous – would be the result of the combination between seduction and power, or the union of the symbolic and the real universes.

Thirdly, Baudrillard states that the strategy of appearances will probably be opposed to the force of being and reality. (1990, 10) In this sense, the awareness displayed by the characters in *Haunted* is symptomatic: when Mr. Whittier supposedly dies, they say “We were all soaking it up. Absorbing the event. Digesting the experience into a story. A screenplay. Something we could sell.” (H, 106) They believe that Mr. Whittier’s death might be helpful, because it would enable them to have a second villain, thus increasing the drama. This role is naturally assigned to Mrs. Clark, who is a sort of second-in-command to Whittier. The writers, aware of the situation, decide that “one villain will die, and his she-villain will torment the rest of us in her rage.” (H, 107)

Mr. Whittier and Mrs. Clark have their hidden agendas – he organizes the retreat, with some objective that is never clear (to indulge himself to a unique kind of reality entertainment? To merely have fun? To analyze the human mind or the literary creation process of several writers?), whereas she wants to discover what had happened to her daughter Cassandra. Because of their sui generis situations in relation to the rest of the writers, both Mr. Whittier and Mrs. Clark place themselves in power positions within their new organization, only to be labeled villains later on and to be socially excluded. This fact comes full cycle with Baudrillard’s reaffirmation of the disgust for the pretension and transcendence of power. (2002, 73)

The last of Baudrillard’s postulates about seduction that agrees with the search for hurt and mutilation in *Haunted* is that “makeup is nothing else (...) a solution by excess” (1990, 15). The violence in the writers’ retreat is plenty, excessive and free of boundaries. The missing fingers, the lost blood, their ruining their food and facilities on purpose, all of these aspects work as a sort of make-up, used to cover up their issues and to make their story more attractive.

In order to understand Baudrillard's definitions of masculine and feminine, it is necessary to try to overview the situation from the masculine perspective, supposedly dominant and representative of the majority. For Baudrillard, *masculine* is a force that believes to have had a historical prevalence up to the present. Conversely, *feminine* is an apparently dominated force⁴⁴; notwithstanding, Baudrillard only defines masculine and feminine like this in order to twist his own definitions and claim that the feminine element is in reality more powerful than the masculine one⁴⁵. The power of feminine lies in its "being nothing".⁴⁶ (1990, 15)

Baudrillard's polemic justification relies on his notion of hyperreality, and once again, tackling the issue under the masculine viewpoint is crucial. By being nothing, the woman can be anything the masculine power wants it to be. In other words, it is as if women were blank canvases upon which the man is able to project whatever he needs. And that, according to Baudrillard, is what the feminine power is based on: the masculine belief that the established order remains, and that male dominance still exists.

Genders aside, I would like to point out to the reader that a translation is necessary towards understanding my reading proposal of *Haunted*. *Masculine* equals *social majority*, whereas *feminine* stands for *social outcasts*. Having that in mind I propose the following adaptation of the theory: social majority involves cultural and social codes understood and respected by many people; such codes are related to religious, moral, political, psychological and economical values that guide human relations⁴⁷. If one follows the rules established in

⁴⁴ This is the moment when impression number one about Baudrillard – "he is a sexist" – comes forth.

⁴⁵ This is the moment when impression number two – "he is a feminist" – arises.

⁴⁶ And naturally, this is the moment for impression number three – "he is an anti-feminist."

⁴⁷ Baudrillard corroborates this idea even more by stating that "masculinity would be closer to the Law" (1990, 24)

those codes, one should not have problems with peers – hence the domination and the majority.

Social outcasts, on the other hand, are a minority, like the feminine would be in opposition to the masculine. Outcasts are so mostly because they cannot or will not respect social codes. Most writers in *Haunted* represent different sorts of minorities: Lady Baglady is wealthy, Mr. Whittier and Miss Sneezy are sick, Chef Assassin and Sister Vigilante are serial killers, Baroness Frostbite and Saint Gut-Free are handicapped, Countess Foresight claims to have psychic powers and Reverend Godless earns his living as a transvestite. Interestingly, writers whose profile fit social majorities instead write stories in which they show how badly they react when they come into contact with minorities: Comrade Snarky supposedly is one of the women who humiliate Miranda the transsexual in *Speaking Bitterness*, whereas Agent Tattletale, the Duke of Vandals and the Earl of Slander take advantage of their professions to commit crimes.

Indeed, the writers in *Haunted* are social outcasts of the most varied kinds. They see in their retreat the (perhaps last) chance to succeed at their so far frustrated endeavor of producing a text. They all end up writing at least one short story, and they all aim at leaving the retreat and living a better life. Most of them do not manage to do so (out of nineteen, twelve of them have either implicit or explicit deaths), but they all think about the future, the life they will live in the real world, where social majorities dominate. Their comeback should be a brand new opportunity for acceptance and attention.

If a fresh start is what they want, being like blank canvases is convenient. They have already had a chance in the real world, and they did not succeed at social interaction and leading a “normal” life. The blank canvas has nothing on it. And for Baudrillard, it is

precisely on this nothingness that feminine (or, in my analogy to Baudrillard's thinking, social outcasts) have their power. They can be whatever social majorities want them to be.

Once they do not belong to those majorities, they ask themselves what normal people would like to see in the media – which is actually a display of intelligence on their part. The answer to their questioning is blood, scars, torture and other sad stories – yet another display of intelligence and awareness, because, in fact, general audiences tend to like these tragedies (“Today only distaste is determined – tastes are determinate no longer. Only rejections are violent.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 72) However, they become carried away with their ideas and actions, and what was supposed to be only a few missing toes and face scaring becomes frenzied mutilation.

The writers in Palahniuk's novel display how well the theory of seduction works. All the artificiality in their bruises aims at giving the impression that they are what big audiences want them to be: victims of a sensational trauma, hence sources of interesting stories. Seduction in the making, literally.

In consonance with the theory of seduction, Andrew Slade deals with mutilation, one of the most important and recurrent themes in Palahniuk's fiction, and the very means through which the powers of seduction described by Baudrillard are unfolded in *Haunted*. Slade asserts that the physical body is the territory on which significant processes happen for Palahniuk's characters, and that many of them achieve sublimity by destroying their bodies: “Finding the sublime in and through the practices of mutilation, Palahniuk's writing finds a moment of redemption and recuperation of authentic resistance.” (2009, 63)

When Baudrillard deals with pornography, he claims that it is not a phantasy of sex, but of the real instead. (1990, 29) Putting sex aside and transporting this idea into *Haunted*, this is exactly what the writers do through their self-inflicted contusions: they play with the

real, create their own truths, and absorb reality into the ‘realer than real’, the hyperreality. The connection between the notions of seduction and hyperreality becomes clearer: the former only happens by means of the latter, during a process of idealization of reality.

‘After the orgy’. This is the phrase Jean Baudrillard uses to define the state of things in the contemporary world (2002, 3). It is important to understand that, in spite of Baudrillard’s intense analysis of sexuality and its related aspects, he does not refer only to sex when he uses the term ‘orgy’. In his metaphorical premise, ‘orgy’ recalls excess, which is a key concept in all of the criticism Baudrillard developed throughout the last thirty years of his life. Those ideas guaranteed him titles such as the aforementioned “high priest of the new epoch” (BEST and KELLNER, 1991, 111 and WOODS, 1999, 25) and “fatal theoretician”, and, as specified previously (introduction, 19), the analysis of *Haunted* proposed in this dissertation is fully based on this last phase of his thinking. Therefore, mine is a reading that searches for the excesses in Palahniuk’s novel (which, let us be honest, is not difficult at all), and Baudrillard’s concepts gathered here to unfold the analysis depend, in one way or another, on excess.

According to Baudrillard, the orgy derives from the explosion of modernity upon us. The main consequence of such an explosion is liberation, in all its forms and at its maximum: “Political liberation, sexual liberation, liberation of the forces of production, liberation of the forces of destruction, women’s liberation, children’s liberation, liberation of unconscious drives, liberation of art.” (2002, 3)

Previous generations have fought for all sorts of social and psychological flexibility, so as to end stereotypes and prejudices, and their ultimate objectives have been achieved, even if not fully: women have earned the rights to vote and to be elected, to have all kinds of jobs, to be the heads of their families; contemporary couples can divorce, live in different

houses and have multiple sexual partners; gays now have the right in many countries to have their affective relationships officially recognized and adopt children; and nowadays, when a man displays either emotions or worries about appearance in public, that does not seem strange. Soup cans, urinals and blank canvases have been considered art, workers are entitled to go on strikes and conception is possible without sexual intercourse.

The paragraph above does not have the pretension to exhaust all categories of changes that took place in the past century; nor does it aim at saying that their realities are harmonious, and that the obtained liberations are ideal. As a matter of fact, it is full of debatable ideas that may sound inaccurate or shallow to readers who feel represented by any of categories mentioned or neglected. However, it should suffice to show that at least the sense of liberation has been obtained. Specific sorts of liberation, incomplete liberation, hypocritical liberation. Nonetheless, liberation.

The sense of liberation achieved brings the void Baudrillard refers to. There are improvements to be fought for, undoubtedly, but the fights for these improvements are not as intense or as meaningful as the original fights, aiming at a conquer that seemed completely unseen. As Baudrillard states, “all we can do now is simulate the orgy, simulate liberation. We may pretend to carry on in the same direction, accelerating, but in reality we are accelerating in a void, because all the goals of liberation are already behind us.” (2002, 3)

In this post-orgy world, simulation and hyperreality become key concepts, because all possible situations have taken or could have already taken place. The ones that have not actually happened can be hyperrealized, as the writers in *Haunted* show: in general, they have not had any sort of social relevance (most of them actually are not even relevant to their closest relations), and their reputations are either non-existent or negative. Their background involves crimes and acts had as shameful, thus leaving no prospect of success, recognition, or

at least of a life had as 'normal'. All in all, the retreat they take part of becomes the perfect environment for the full development of their hyperrealities – the individual, idealized realities they only manage to live because they freed themselves from the reality shared with the rest of the world.

The self-reinforcement of the “Mythology of Us” and the “Museum of Us” (for Baudrillard, “The museum, instead of being circumscribed as a geometric site, is everywhere now, like a dimension of life.”(1994, 8)) and the display of constant concern with telling their stories on TV after the confinement signalize what their hyperrealities are all about: being heard, enjoying fame and having access to the power media can grant them: “The book. The movie. The television miniseries.” (H, 103) is what they envision, in addition to “The television and radio crews, the newspaper and magazine reporters sat in the parking lot...” (H, 312); and finally, they conclude that the ideal (hyperrealized) position to be is “the camera behind the camera behind the camera giving the last and final truth. We all want to be the one standing farthest back. The one who gets to say what’s good or bad. Right or wrong” (H, 51), corroborating Andrejevic’s idea discussed section 3.1 that being “the camera behind the camera behind the camera” equals being a content producer and gives some kind of power (p. 108).

If hyperreality equals idealization, it leads to what Baudrillard calls the “realer than real” (2002, 18), that is, a scenario so altered and psychologically perfected that it cannot be replaced with simple reality anymore. Mrs. Clark provides a clear example of this aspect in her first short story, *Post-Production*: she takes part in a homemade pornographic movie with her husband Nelson, and when they see themselves on screen, they become frustrated with what they see, and they understand that their hyperreality has taken over the ‘simple’ reality: “Just for thousands of years you keep going to bars and clubs and you think you’re having a

great time. You imagine you're the center of attention. You have a husband you think is handsome. You think you're both such entirely hot shit." (H, 141)

The previous quotation was taken from the beginning of the story, and it helps to set the tone of the narration. Every time the phrase 'you think' is repeated there is a reference to the Clarks' gone hyperreality, one that they used to think people would consider worth watching⁴⁸: "Other married couples weren't just wasting their sex, unwatched, unappreciated by strangers." (H, 141) The restlessness and awkwardness perceived in the narrative tone are based on the realization that all the previous opinions Tess Clark had about herself and her husband, all the aspects that made her and her husband 'hot shit', are gone or have never existed.⁴⁹

The Clarks – and all of us, for that matter – are representatives of what Baudrillard calls "The refugees from the orgy – the orgy of sex, political violence, the Vietnam War, the Woodstock Crusade, and the ethnic and anti-capitalist struggles too, together with the passion for money, the passion for success, hard technologies (...), the whole orgy of modernity." (2010, 47-8)

The post-orgy world is characterized by the absence of referentials, the clash between simulation and reality, and the feeling of emptiness derived from the impression that all boundaries have been crossed. Violence, artificiality and undetermination are the main evidence of such a scenario: "Mass production hysteria has more to do with the compulsion of getting rid of something than with the drive of creating anything." (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 71) Indeed, for Baudrillard the destructive instinct of individuals regulates their social

⁴⁸ In addition, the double deixis in the use of the pronoun 'you' reminds us that tough realizations, such as Mrs. Clark's, are bound to happen to anyone, including the reader. For the use of the pronoun 'you' in the work of Chuck Palahniuk, see pages 55.

⁴⁹ The aspects related to the Clarks' appearance in *Post-Production* are discussed in section 4.2.

interactions and responses. Chuck Palahniuk seems to agree with the idea, given that destruction plays a crucial role in all of his works, as presented in section 2.2.

Both of them seem to focus their views of the world on people's unwillingness to accept what transcends their understanding or their taste. In addition, Baudrillard points to the fact that "The constellations of taste and of desire, like that of the will, have been blown apart – by what mechanism, we do not know. By contrast, the constellations of unwillingness, of repulsion and disgust, are more solid than ever." (2002, 72) Therefore, people know what they do not like and what they want to refuse, though they cannot specify what they like. This leads to the establishment of a kind of collective neurosis:

Symbolic space, the mental space of judgment, has no protection whatsoever. Not only am I unable to decide whether something is beautiful or not, original or not, but the biological organism itself is at a loss to know what is good for it and what is not. In such circumstances everything becomes a bad object, and the only primitive defence is abreaction or rejection. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 74)

The need for defense implies the detection of a problem. Based on that, Baudrillard develops a series of medical analogies between a sick body and a sick society, being *virulence* the first concept within the analogy to be presented.

The social sickness has many origins, but one of them seems to be more relevant for Baudrillard: the media. Undoubtedly, his theory is strongly connected to the importance of media in our times, due to its range, influence and the power it has in terms of spreading ideas, thus (re)defining our grounds of the real.

Another aspect that enhances the impact of the media in Baudrillard's thinking is the fact that information nowadays is very easily accessed, particularly through the Internet, an instrument that allows simultaneity and constant updating. Those should be positive aspects of communication – after all, they have been conquered through our study, effort and inventive capacity.

However, Baudrillard focuses on its negative aspects; for him, the post-orgy world is characterized by an increasing amount of information and media that turns out to be overwhelming. As a result, not only information flows fast, but also rumors and false stories. “No more violence or surveillance: only “information”, secret virulence, chain reaction, slow implosion, and simulacra of spaces.” (1994, 30) In addition, more means and more speed contribute towards the emptiness of information – one does not necessarily have to have something to say, as long as one says it: “Communication is a matter not of speaking, but of making people speak. Information involves not knowledge but making people know. (...) the point in advertising and propaganda is not to believe but to make people believe.” (2002, 46)

One contemporary and obvious example of virulence is the kind of video available on the Internet called “viral”: they have appealing images and sounds and tend to be devoid of any practical use or relevance; their objective is to merely reach as many viewers as possible. “All these forms are viral – fascinating, indiscriminate – and their virulence is reinforced by their images, for the modern media have a viral force of their own, and their virulence is contagious. Ours is a culture in which bodies and minds are irradiated by signals and images.” (2002, 36-7) In the case of the virals, contagion and the irradiation of signals and images is based on the fact that the circulation of those videos depends on e-mail exchange and posts on social networks.

At the same time, virulence is a symptom of and contributes towards the impossibility of apprehending and determining principles (2002, 10), enabling the confusion of categories: “Everything is sexual. Everything is political. Everything is aesthetic.” (2002, 9) More than that, everything is information.

In addition to the metaphor of the virus, he mentions an allergy (2002, 71) against which there must be medicines and vaccines. The social body is “allergic” to negativity, pessimism and “bad things”, and an attempt of “cure” is to be found in the “excess of positivity, (...) an ineluctable drop in the level of negativity.” (2002, 44) Therein lies a great irony: we are all obsessed with positivity, but our behavior is characterized by violence (the prevalence of the instinct of destruction over the instinct of creation). Once again, *Haunted* exemplifies Baudrillard’s theory very well: while the violence is obvious both in the short stories and in the writers’ interaction during confinement, the collective obsession with positivity is obliquely expressed through the reinforcement of the audience’s safe and happy reality in comparison to the horrible events of the retreat.

The desperate attempt of sterilizing the world of negativity is what Baudrillard calls *prophylaxis* (2002, 60), and by defining it he points out that “in a hyperprotected space the body loses all its defences.” (2002, 62) Positivity in excess leads to repression, and repression leads to infinite simulation. To this chain of events Baudrillard gives the name *operational whitewash*:

we are doomed in consequence to a whitewashing of all activity – whitewashed social relations, whitewashed bodies, whitewashed memory – in short, to a complete aseptic whiteness. Violence is whitewashed, history is whitewashed, all as part of a vast enterprise of cosmetic surgery at whose completion nothing will be left but a society for which, and individuals for whom, all violence, all negativity, are strictly forbidden. (2002, 44-5)

The erasure of negativity, although seemingly a good thing, originates an unbalance that interferes with individualities and differences. Forms, faces, personalities: everything must be submitted to corrections and compulsive remodeling, which is symbolized by the notion of the surgical face (2002, 45); in *Haunted*, not only faces are surgical, but also bodies. Due to their “twisted aesthetics”, the aim is not to look good and feel gorgeous – on the contrary, deformity and missing parts is what they seek, always with their eyes on the media.

In order to corroborate his ideas about the negative consequences of prophylaxis, Baudrillard resorts to a parallel between the social sickness (collective neurosis against negativity) and diseases that epitomize postmodern times:

“Total prophylaxis is lethal. (...): it [medicine] treats cancer or AIDS as if they were conventional illnesses, when in fact they are illnesses generated by the very success of prophylaxis and medicine, illnesses bred of the disappearance of illnesses, of the elimination of pathogenic forms.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 64)

Social systems that undergo total positivization must also deal with desymbolization (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 65), which means that the definitions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’, or ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ become blurred and, at times, impossible to make. *Haunted* proves that by questioning those definitions and others that are also part of Baudrillard’s discussion, such as art (is a scatological story about body decay and torture considered art?), death (can I die and survive through my work? Can I have a death worthy of a mythical figure without working for it?) and information (do I really have something meaningful to say?)

The last concept presented in this section does not relate to the sickness of the body as the previous one. Instead, it focuses on the psyche, which is as sick as the body. For Baudrillard, the post-orgy world is haunted by three phantasies that pervade the most varied areas of human relations: cancer, transvestitism and terrorism.

The phantasies embody broader themes discussed by Baudrillard in other texts written and published before and after *The Transparency of Evil*, the text in which the phantasies receive names, features and their “status” as phantasies. They are the direct consequence of the characteristics of the post-orgy world presented so far: indifferentiation, emptiness of information, violence, neurosis, loss of referentials. Due to them, there is a confusion of categories, and everything is interpreted in terms of phantasies. (2002, 9)

A direct consequence of this interpretation is that everything is sexual, political and aesthetic. Because of that, there is no more specificity, and generalization is everywhere: if on the one hand everything is sexual, political and aesthetic, on the other hand nothing is sexual, political and aesthetic anymore. The word ‘politics’ loses its meaning; sex loses its determinants, and art itself disappears (there’s no more beautiful or ugly). (2002, 9)

Baudrillard defines the phantasies as follows:

Our true phantasies lie elsewhere – specifically, they focus on the three above mentioned forms, each of which arises from the skewing of a basic operating principle and the confusion that results from this. These forms, terrorism, transvestitism, and cancer, all reflect excesses – on the political, sexual and genetic levels respectively; they also reflect deficiencies in – and the consequent collapse of – the codes of the political, sexual and genetic realms. (2002, 36)

The concept of phantasies is the basis for the reading of *Haunted* presented in the next chapter. That being the case, it is important to highlight the terms in the previous passage that relate to the essence of the phantasies: *excesses*, *confusion*, *deficiencies* and *collapse*. The analysis proposed in the next chapter looks for the presence of those aspects in the stories that form *Haunted*, identifying the existence of the three phantasies taking into consideration multiple possibilities.

The orgy is over. Now it is time to exorcize (or entertain?) our phantasies.

4 THE END OF THE ORGY, OR THE PHANTASIES

“We are witnessing the rise – the simultaneous rise – of terrorism as a transpolitical form, of AIDS and cancer as forms of pathology, of transsexuality and transvestitism as forms that are sexual and, in a general way, aesthetic. These forms, and these forms alone, are what fascinate us today”. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 36)

This chapter proposes a reading of *Haunted* focused on Baudrillard’s premise described in the previous chapter – the idea that the world is haunted by three phantasies that influence virtually every area of human life. In spite of the ideas related to the phantasies being constantly mentioned somehow throughout a large phase of Baudrillard’s writings – namely, between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the years 2000 – most of the postulates presented here come from *The Transparency of Evil*, first published in 1990.

The simplicity of the division presented in this analysis – three sections devoted to each phantasy – contrasts with the complexity perceived in the structure proposed by Palahniuk in his novel of stories: while most of his works present a reduced number of main characters, in *Haunted* they are nineteen: “*Haunted*, then, presents Palahniuk’s least individually developed cast of characters.” (SONDERGARD, 2009, 15)

In addition, *Haunted* is the only work by Palahniuk (non-fiction excluded) in which there is not just one storyline, but twenty-four instead: twenty-three short stories plus the narrative about the writers’ retreat. Given the fragmentation pervading all structural aspects of the novel, a chart with the names of the characters and the titles of their short stories is provided in appendix II. Nonetheless, the structural division proposed here – three phantasies,

three sections – does not mean that one story or character is secluded within the realm of one single phantasy. What it does mean is that, due to the extreme features of each phantasy, as well as of the stories and the writers/characters, some of them are more closely connected to one of the three phantasies.

4.1 CANCER

“We have always loved war. We are born knowing that war is why we’re here. And we love disease. Cancer. We love earthquakes. In this amusement-park fun house we call the planet earth, Mr. Whittier says we adore forest fires. Oil spills. Serial killers.”

We love terrorists. Hijackers. Dictators. Pedophiles
 “We love when airplanes crash. We adore pollution. Acid rain. Global warming. Famine.” (H, 101)

Baudrillard denominates one of the phantasies *cancer* based on a series of analogies involving the silent, massive and dangerous ways it affects postmodern society, comparing this reality to the way cancer affects an organism. Its effects are noticed in our modes of conceiving and perceiving communication, information, art and interpersonal relationships. This phantasy manifests itself in the stories and characters in *Haunted* in four main ways, namely: emptiness in communication and information (in association to the notion of virulence); the banalization of aesthetics and art; the ‘artificial sterilization’ of the environments and the people; and the massive presence of body diseases and the decay they bring.

The destruction of bodies associated to cancer as a disease is somehow echoed the novel through the massive presence of other diseases and conditions that also have destructive consequences. Four writers have illnesses or deformities prior to the retreat: Saint Gut-Free (missing part of his intestines), Mr. Whittier (progeria), Miss Sneezzy (a rare and highly contagious virus) and Baroness Frostbite (missing part of her mouth because of frostbite). However, the unfolding of the retreat and the environment in which it takes place invite to vicious behaviors and attitudes that also lead to body decay.

According to Mrs. Clark, the average person burns sixty-five calories per hour while asleep. You burn seventy-seven calories each hour awake. Just walking slow, you burn two-hundred. Just to stay alive, you need to eat 1,650 calories each day.

Your body can only store about twelve hundred calories of carbohydrates – most of them in your liver. Just being alive, you burn through all your stored calories in less than one day. After that, you burn fat. Then muscle.

This is when your blood fills with ketones. Your serum-acetone concentrations soar, and your breath starts to smell. Your sweat stinks of airplane glue.

Your liver and spleen and kidneys shrink and atrophy. Your small intestine swells from disuse and fills with mucus. Ulcers open up holes in the wall of your colon.

As you starve, your liver converts muscle to glucose to keep your brain alive. As you starve, your hunger pains disappear. After that, you're just tired. More and more, you're confused. You stop noticing the world around you. You quit keeping yourself clean.

Once you burn through 70 to 94 percent of your body fat, and 20 percent of your muscle, you die.

For most people, this takes sixty-one days. (H, 344)

The previous passage is paramount for many reasons. Firstly, it presents one of Palahniuk's classic prose resources – the use of medical language and technical vocabulary, in consonance with the cancerous consequences of the retreat on the writers' bodies. Another interesting detail is the fact that Palahniuk's words are expressed through Mrs. Clark's voice, which is fitting, given that at this point she has already assumed the role of leader/older member/ villainess/wise woman. Secondly, the author's cleverness in the use of language also comes across here; he is absolutely pedagogical, rational and effective, as the description evokes different sensations by describing different organic body responses. Thirdly, the passage comes at the final part of the story, increasing the relation of cause and consequence between body decay and the harsh conditions in the retreat and giving to the reader a time contextualization that does not exist throughout the narrative (sixty-one days); finally, the last sentence turns out to be vintage Palahniuk style: in an ironic, straight-forward and meaningful way, he manages to say that death is a concrete, silent possibility.

For Cassandra Clark, Tess Clark's daughter and a participant of Mr. Whittier's first retreat, death has become a reality, rather than a possibility. It is interesting to note that while most writers produce one story, Mrs. Clark produces four, which might be read as four chapters of the story of Cassandra's life: *Post-Production* shows Cassandra's conception during the shooting of a homemade pornographic movie; *The Nightmare Box* presents her turning point as she comes across the mysterious Nightmare Box in an art gallery; *Poster Child* depicts her downfall, and the decadence of her body and mind; and *Cassandra* deals with Tess's attempts of coming to terms with the fact that, being unable to either help her daughter or see her decay, she kills the girl. In that sense, Cassandra's life story has the same effect as the narrative of the retreat: to show the annihilation of the health and sanity of individuals affected by cancer-like conditions.

Despite the context, the environment always seems to be the main reason why “cancerous” cells reproduce in *Haunted*. The retreat and the theater are stimuli for the vicious actions on the part of the writers. For instance, the previous retreat and the unexplained nightmare box experience lead to Cassandra’s demise; many of the writers present either in their backgrounds or in their short stories another sort of confinement that invites to sickness: Miss Sneezzy and Mr. Whittier (hospitals), the Missing Link (Indian reservation), Reverend Godless (rodeos), Saint Gut-Free (the swimming pool during his masturbatory accident), Lady Baglady (the street during her escapades as a homeless) and Countess Foresight (an antiques store full of old products with sad stories associated to them).

Miss Sneezzy’s story *Evil Spirits* seems to be the one that illustrates more blatantly the relation between cancer and the environment. She owes her penname to the rare virus she carries, the Type 1 Keegan virus, and, as it happens to all the other writers/characters in the novel, their literary production revolves around the facts that somehow haunt them. In her narrative, Miss Sneezzy shows what life is like on Columbia Island, an institution kept by the government whose residents “carry around bugs that would kill the world. Viruses. Bacteria. Parasites.” (H, 364)

The leitmotif in *Evil Spirits* is Miss Sneezzy’s permanent status as an isolated underdog, either surrounded by death before her committal or by loneliness afterwards. On Columbia Island, she is the only patient who carries the Keegan virus, and given its high contagiousness, she is kept in permanent physical isolation in a completely customized environment, with no rights whatsoever to be in touch with other human beings or leaving her room.

Miss Sneezzy presents some aspects of her daily life in isolation in her room, such as weekly blood and urine tests, sterilized sheets, and her relationship with Shirlee, the night

guard who only communicates with her through an intercom. In her own words, Shirlee is “as close to a best friend as it gets here.” (H, 364)

Palahniuk never explains how Miss Sneezy manages to escape Columbia Island in order to join the other writers in the theater; however, therein lies an irony: it turns out that she escapes in order to avoid one kind of confinement only to end up in another one. Being trapped still is a significant part of her existence, turning the writers retreat into an amplified version of her previous confinement. In that sense, both Columbia Island and the abandoned theater share a fundamental feature, one that Baudrillard names the *sterilization of the environment*. The coincidence between this sterilization and Miss Sneezy’s fictionalized background is so strong that one of Baudrillard’s explanatory metaphors for it is tremendously akin to *Evil Spirits*:

Consider the ‘Boy in the Bubble’, surrounded, in his NASA-donated tent, by an atmospheric distillate of medical knowledge, protected from any conceivable infection by an artificial immune system, ‘cuddled’ by his mother through the glass, laughing and growing up in an extraterrestrial ambience under the vigilant eye of science. Here we have the experimental version of the wolf-child, the ‘wild-child’ raised by wolves. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 60)

A vacuum-sealed existence, such as the one Miss Sneezy was used to before joining the retreat, is what ends up happening to her and her fellow inmates during their stay in the theater. More than not being able to leave, they do not want to do so, which leads to the conclusion that the vacuum-sealed existence and an artificially sterilized environment is what they want and need. Sabotaging their food, heat, gas, appliances and locks is nothing but the first step for the ‘artificial sterilization’ of their environment.

Once again, in order to understand how the theory applies to Palahniuk's novel the writers' "twisted aesthetics", recurrently mentioned in the previous chapters, must be taken into consideration. In *Haunted*, sterilization implies the elimination of all factors that hinder the writers' capacities, both of creating and socializing. As their stories show, socialization in regular environments seems impossible. Thus, the only possibility for all of them is to be in a place with people who share their inadequacies and traumas. This sterilized environment is guessed at in Mr. Whittier's advertisement for the retreat, as he offers the opportunity to "Live with like-minded people in a setting that supports total immersion in your work." (H, 83-4)

The sabotage of basic facilities contributes towards the writers' lack of initiative and defense in their retreat environment, and their refusal to leave the theater at the end of the story indicates that the world they had left behind is too scary or too difficult to handle now. Along with the sabotaging, there are other actions they perform in order to customize their environment, such as wearing costumes, mutilating themselves, assigning roles of villains and basing their routine on the artificial sunlight provided by Mr. Whittier.

American psychoanalyst Philip Zimbardo develops an interesting theory that might be applied to understand the behavioral domino effect identified in *Haunted*. *The Lucifer Effect* is Zimbardo's explanation and analysis of the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE), which he carried out in August 1971. During the SPE, he gathered a group formed by some of his undergraduates and civilians, locked them up in a house and monitored them. They were divided into two groups, prisoners and officers. The objective was to verify the inmates' behavior towards each other. He had to cancel the experiment after a few days due to the officers' violence and bad treatment towards the prisoners. Zimbardo claims to be a student of "the psychology of evil – of violence, anonymity, aggression, vandalism, torture, and terrorism" (ZIMBARDO, 2007, xi).

It is important to note that Zimbardo's observations rely on a Manichaeian duality between good and evil and a consequent reinforcement of the illegal, immoral and evil aspect of the actions involved in the experiment – which is fitting, as he has felt responsible for the traumas some of his “guinea pigs” underwent. Therefore, Zimbardo's contributions enrich the analysis insofar as they have resemblance to some of Baudrillard's views. Despite the morality pervading Baudrillard's theory and the recurrence of the notions of good and evil in Zimbardo's, this analysis does not intend to see the writers in *Haunted* as mere evil-doers. As they are both perpetrators and targets of the actions in the story, the labels “villain” and “victim” are blurred and impossible to establish. In reality, the very fact that the writers desperately seek villains is Palahniuk's clever way to show that none of them is indeed essentially evil.

“One of the dominant conclusions of the Stanford Prison Experiment is that the pervasive yet subtle power of a host of situational variables can dominate an individual's will to resist.” (ZIMBARDO, 2007, xii) Those situational variables are the Place, the Person, and the Situation. In *Haunted*, the three of them seem to work together towards the final results of the retreat – the same factors previously mentioned in association to the psychology of evil.

Zimbardo and Baudrillard agree that the environment has a negative effect on people's behavior. For Baudrillard, this is the basis for the presence of cancer (the phantasy) in contemporary times. For Zimbardo, a “contaminated” environment (in the Baudrillardian sense of the word) explains the “banality of evil” (2007, xiii) relying on the notion of *cupiditas*:

Cupiditas, in English, is cupidity, which means avarice, greed, the strong desire for wealth or power over another. What *cupiditas* means is the desire to turn into oneself or take into oneself everything that is “other” than self. For instance, lust and rape are forms of *cupiditas*, because they entail using another person as a thing to gratify one’s own desire: murder for profit is also *cupiditas*. It is the opposite of the concept of *caritas*. (ZIMBARDO, 2007, 4)

The idea of victimization the writers in *Haunted* try to pass on is an example of *cupiditas* as Zimbardo describes it. Through mutilation and manipulation of feelings and stories, the writers attempt to become what they are not – the “other”. The presence of otherness in Zimbardo’s theory is interesting, for it reinforces the idea that the writers are monsters. As the etymology of the word mentioned in the introduction (p. 15) points out, the notion of monster implies malformation or difference, hence, otherness.

Zimbardo mentions murder for profit as an example of *cupiditas*. Some of the short stories in the novel deal with that, such as *Foot Work* (masseuses who murder their clients on demand), *Swan Song* (murder disguised as suicide for the sake of a good media story), *Ambition* (the murder of artists, once again on demand) and *Product Placement* (murder integrated to blackmail). Rape, another element mentioned by Zimbardo as an example of *cupiditas* is present in *Ritual* and *Exodus*.

One of Zimbardo’s thesis is that we are bound to have unexpected evil behavior when confronted with unfamiliar situations: “[y]ou start a new job, go on your first computer-matched date, join a fraternity, get arrested, enlist in the military, join a cult, or volunteer for an experiment.” (ZIMBARDO, 2007, 6 – emphasis added) These unfamiliar situations might trigger what he calls the *dispositional approach*, in another echo to Baudrillard’s ideas regarding cancer: “[s]ometimes the sick person is the end product of environmental

pathogens, which unless counteracted will affect others, regardless of attempts to improve the health of the individual.” (ZIMBARDO, 2007, 8)

In *Haunted*, there is no will to counteract evil dispositions. In fact, the dispositions displayed by the writers are the main reasons for the “sterile” environment they need for the retreat. All their actions and notions (mutilation, manipulation, sabotage of facilities, mutual understanding, the recurrently mentioned “twisted aesthetics” perceived in the novel) become part of a process that makes the place safe and sterile for them. In this new dimension they create – which is nothing but their hyperreality – they are judged and punished, just like in the world they left behind; nevertheless, they also perform the role of judges. On that note, it is important to highlight that when Baudrillard mentions this contemporary obsession of people with sterilization, he draws a metaphor based on the necessity of total cleanliness (asepsis) in health institutions and the necessity we have of preventing some events from taking place in our daily routine, such as violence, crime, murder and lies. Baudrillard gives the name of *prophylaxis* to this obsession with positivity, and, in diverse ways, prophylaxis is the basis for some of the short stories.

For instance, when Chef Assassin writes his blackmail letter to a knife company in the story *Product Placement*, he does so assuming that the brand does not want to be associated to a serial killer who has a weird preference for their products when it comes to committing murder: “Still, no matter how careful I am, it’s just a matter of time before the police will catch me. With this in mind, my only fear is that Kutting-Blok knives will become linked in the public mind with a series of deeds that people might misunderstand.” (H, 248) The hypothetical fear the owners of Kutting-Blok would display – a fear Chef Assassin counts on – is based on some factors typical of the postmodern society: collective hysteria, viral spread of information, the power of media and people’s fascination with tragedies.

Baudrillard states that our obsession with cleanliness and disinfection (or, in his words, the “purification of bodies”) has a major counter-effect, namely, the possibility of development of other harmful conditions that might be even more dangerous than the ones that purification is supposed to prevent. He mentions AIDS and cancer as examples of such fact. For Baudrillard, it is logical that the two diseases should have become “the prototypes of our modern pathology, as of all lethal viral onslaughts. Saddling the body with replacement parts and abandoning it to genetic whims inevitably dislocates its systems of defence.” (2002, 63)

Fighting in excess against negativity leads to the configuration of a hyperreality, where spaces are hyperprotected. In such places, the body loses all its defense devices. This metaphor might be transported into a reading of *Haunted* by seeing the theater as the hyperprotected space – no judges, no hindrances to literary creation, and no rules to follow – and the writers as the bodies which have lost their defense. If on the one hand the writers in society may be seen as cancerous cells (or “rotten apples in the basket”) without which people and the world would be much better, on the other hand they might be seen as unprotected cells within confinement.

The standards that had been imposed to them up to that point no longer exist, and if the absence of such standards is what triggers mutilation, self-pity and manipulation, we might see those very standards as the writers’ previous defense – the defense devices that prevented them from mutilating themselves before, for instance. Zimbardo uses the bad apples metaphor as well when he affirms that “[a]berrant, illegal, or immoral behavior by individuals in service professions, such as policemen, corrections officers, and soldiers, is typically labeled the misdeeds of “a few bad apples”” (ZIMBARDO, 2007, 10)

Chuck Palahniuk's social criticism comes across as his stories lead us to conclude that the retreat echoes behavioral patterns and social dynamics perceived in the "normal" world. As a matter of fact, some short stories present such vicious settings that the reader cannot help but to think that real people might be as rotten apples as the marginal writers in the novel. This idea is particularly applicable to two short stories.

Cora Reynolds, otherwise known as Director Denial, is the author of *Exodus*. She has nobody but a cat and her job is to interview children who have been victims of abuse during investigations. She tries to make them describe the traumatic experiences they had been through by using dolls in the reenactment of the events; in addition, she is also responsible for ordering the office's varied supplies.

Two elements become important in the analysis of this short story: her loneliness and her involvement with objects. While she seems to be a stereotypical spinster, a responsible and bureaucratic public servant with no interesting features whatsoever, she displays mixed feelings – concern, bitterness, restlessness – towards the children she comes across: "Really, the problem was, Cora never sees a little kid, a freckle-faced, pigtailed little girl, unless somebody's fucked her. (...) No, most kids come in here quiet. Stretch-marked. Already middle-aged. Not smiling." (H, 160) Based on these comments, it is arguable the Cora's loneliness might be a consequence of her hopelessness and sadness. However, it becomes important to highlight that in spite of having lost her faith in humanity, she still has feelings.

The second important aspect in Cora's personality is her constant involvement with objects. The only living being around her is her cat, and the rest of her interaction in the world is with things. This idea is delineated in the beginning of *Exodus*, as she explains the story of Breather Betty, the doll used in the practicing of mouth-to-mouth breathing and resuscitation. She explains that Betty's face was built based on the mortuary mask of a French girl:

This face on the floor, it's the face of a suicidal pulled from the water over a century ago. Those same blue lips. The same staring dull eyes. All Breather Betty dolls are molded from the face of this same young woman who threw herself into the Seine River.

If the girl died because of love or loneliness, we'll never find out. (...)

For the rest of history, all over the world, people will be trying to save this same dead woman.

This woman who just wanted to die.

The girl who turned herself into an object. (H, 155-6)

Cora affirms that “[t]hat is just what human beings do – turn objects into people, people into objects.” (H, 158) She proves that by describing how she takes pity of Breather Betty as she discovers that her male co-workers had been using her for oral sex: “Yeah, the lab team said, the ooze was sperm. Some of it maybe six months old. (...) Besides, running it for DNA, the genetic signifiers showed that this was the work of twelve, maybe fifteen different men.” (H, 158)

She buys two silicone dolls on the Internet – a little boy and a little girl – that are supposed to be used by the children during the interview. However, she makes a mistake, and instead of buying *anatomically detailed* dolls, she buys *anatomically correct* ones. In her own words,

Your typical anatomically detailed doll is made of cloth, sewn like a stuffed animal. It has strands of yarn for hair. The big difference between it and Raggedy Ann is the details: A floppy stuffed penis and balls. Or a lacy cloth vagina. A drawstring pulled tight in back to make a puckered anus. Two buttons sewn to the chest for nipples. These dolls are something the intake kids can use to play-act. To demonstrate what Mommy or Daddy or Mommy's new boyfriend did. (H, 160-1)

The new dolls call everybody's attention at the police station due to their being very real – too real, as Cora notices:

That afternoon, even as Cora pulled the new clothes onto the boy and girl, detectives came by her desk, asking to check them out. For intake interviews. For investigations. Asking to reserve them for some hush-hush off-site evaluation. For overnight, to use them early the next morning. For the weekend. The girl, preferably, but if she wasn't available, then the boy. By the end of that first day, both the dolls were booked solid for the next month. (H, 165)

Whenever the dolls were returned, they smelled of perfume, alcohol and cigarettes; in addition, they had marks caused by biting and spanking. As she realizes that her co-workers use the silicone children for nasty purposes, she does not know how to deal with the fact. The virulent behavior becomes clear, as Cora points out that the dolls were “booked solid for the next month”.

The notion of Baudrillard's prophylaxis as the trigger for an even worse scenario is present here. What increases the appeal in *Exodus* is its dealing with pedophilia, an evil that contemporary societies have tried hard to eliminate. Cora purchases the dolls in order to help children overcome their experiences with pedophilia; nonetheless, they become instruments through which a sort of symbolic pedophilia takes place – a worse kind, for it is perpetrated by the very ones who are supposed to assure that such thing does not take place.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The presence of the police in *Exodus* is also discussed in the section about terrorism.

It becomes clear that Cora does not fit the social circles she lives in, which makes her an outcast – hence, perfect for Mr. Whittier’s retreat. The fact that she gives her birth name to her cat (throughout the retreat, she goes solely by Director Denial, whereas ‘Cora Reynolds’ is only used in reference to the cat) indicates her strong social displacement. As she gives her own name to the cat and adopts the pen name Director Denial, she symbolically gives up her old identity and assumes a new one. It is interesting to notice that her pen name and the title of her only story include the words ‘denial’ and ‘exodus’, both of which related to escape, refusal and displacement.

She avenges the dolls’ suffering by sticking glue into the dolls’ orifices. That evidently brings problems to the agents who use the dolls with sexual purposes, but that does not prevent them from continuing doing so: “[i]t’s then Cora goes to lunch and buys a razor blade. Two razor blades. Three razor blades. Five” (H, 167), which are placed in the dolls’ orifices. The next day, she is able to see that the detective who had taken the girl has his tongue cut in half, and that the detective who had taken the boy is limping.

Cora’s final attempt of revenge consists on inserting in the dolls a biohazard sample she had obtained from the laboratory. At this point, we are reminded of Baudrillard’s cancer in a clearer way, as Cora’s objective is to spread diseases among the detectives, consequently affecting their wives: “[a]ny wife lets this go, and next week he’ll bring home herpes to her and the kids. Gonorrhea. Chlamydia. AIDS.” (H, 168)

Cora is eventually blamed for bringing problems into the office, and is invited to take a few days off, given that, according to her superior, she had been “overreacting” (H, 169) As the director tries to justify her team’s actions to Cora, she makes a point to reinforce yet again the virulent aspect of cancer as a phantasy: “[i]t’s the kids, the director says, who tear up the dolls. It always has been. Each victim will find a victim. It’s a cycle.” (H, 169)

The message comes across in an ironic style typical of Palahniuk, which is recurrent in *Haunted*: we live in a system that labels certain attitudes as immoral, inappropriate, or even criminal. However, if a significant number of people have such attitudes, a sort of social immunity arises (in the particular case of *Exodus*, there is also the support provided by people's affiliation to the police). For certain social groups or tribes, debatable attitudes are permitted or at least forgiven based on the convenience of being part of the majority. That is what happens to many social groups had as "normal" presented in some of the short stories in *Haunted*: the many people who pretend to be sick when they are not in order to collect pension in *Crippled*, the sexually violent military men in *Ritual*, the jet-setters in search for dirty, dangerous fun in *Slumming*, the women who humiliate the transsexual Miranda in *Speaking Bitterness*, and, naturally, the men and women of justice in *Exodus*.

In the end, Director Denial breaks into the office and points a gun at an officer in order to "kidnap" the dolls and, along with Cora the cat and Breather Betty, she forms a sort of "sterilized" family. The conclusion is that for Director Denial prophylaxis (protection or disinfection) implies the absence of other human beings. Dolls and animals are permitted, given that they are not capable of cruelty. The ending of the story is appropriate: given that she runs away with the dolls and cat, and by having threatened an officer and stolen public property (the dolls), she becomes a criminal and a fugitive altogether.

What happens in *Haunted* turns out to be a sort of twisted prophylaxis: by living in a small community, these writers determine rules and exceptions, rights and wrongs, or 'sickness' and 'health', which ultimately influences their peculiar sterilizing process. In the 'sterilized' community formed by these frustrated writers, taboos, crime, lies and mutilation become the rule, which is followed by all members and justified. In that sense, the dynamics of social relations presented in *Haunted* – both within and without the confinement – reflect

behavioral patterns seen in contemporary societies. As Baudrillard states, “we are already living in the bubble ourselves (...) bereft of everything yet overprotected, doomed to artificial immunity, continual transfusions and, at the slightest contact with the world outside, instant death.” (2002, 61)

The second short story that epitomizes the sterilization of the environment is *Obsolete*. The reader is presented to a planet earth where people are “emigrating”, that is, committing suicide. Taking one’s own life has become the pattern for the contemporary society presented in this short story, and death has acquired a sort of glamour, granted by the importance media has given to “emigration”. *Newsweek* says on its cover that “It’s Hip to Be Dead!”, whereas *Time* magazine says that “Death Is The New Life” (H, 388), constituting an inversion of values, a device Palahniuk uses heavily in another short story, Lady Baglady’s *Slumming* (p. 75). It becomes clear that emigration is indeed a trend to be followed, as “[o]n the television news, big-name celebrities were applauded the moment they emigrated.” (H, 395) Other publications, perhaps had as more serious, approach the issue in a different way, such as *The New York Times*, whose cover reads “Death Is Dead”, and *USA Today*, with the headline “The Death of Death” (H, 391)

The story is told under the perspective of a family formed by mother, father, son, daughter and dog. The parents are a couple of bodybuilders, whose bodies are made up of defined muscles, with only two percent body fat. Larry, the brother, is a goth rocker, and Eve, the daughter, is a teenage schoolgirl. The family decides to emigrate together, and in order to do so they all enter the car and use a Going Away Kit (available at Wal-Mart or Rite Aid) that leads to death by suffocation. Tracee, the mother, reads from a pamphlet distributed by the government how the kit works: “As less hemoglobin is available to carry oxygen, your cells begin to suffocate and die.” (H, 388) and “Beginning with headache and nausea,” Tracee

reads from her government pamphlet, “symptoms include a faster and faster pulse as your heart tries to get oxygen to your dying brain.” (H, 390) Once again, Palahniuk’s pedagogical tone and medical vocabulary contribute towards the intended effect – shock through inversion of values and the consequent normatization of death.

Eve is the only one who does not seem to be comfortable with the situation. She does not verbalize her doubts, even though she questions the scenario she is faced with: “There, the sun is still shining. Birds build nests, too dumb to know this planet is out of fashion. Bees crawl around inside the open roses, not knowing their whole reality is obsolete.” (H, 397) As she notices that the other family members have already lost consciousness – and right before losing consciousness herself – Eve takes the dog, leaves the car and eventually finds her boyfriend, who is not fond of the idea of emigrating as well. At the end of the story, the reader discovers that Eve’s boyfriend is named (not coincidentally) Adam, and that she is pregnant. Adam, a teenager like Eve, observes that “[i]f we get the whole human race started again, our folks will be *so pissed...*” (H, 399)

Obsolete is symbolically important for *Haunted* in many different ways: it is written by Mr. Whittier, the idealizer of the retreat; it closes the novel, which means that at least within the universe of stories the “boss” has the final say. Finally, the motifs and end-of-world mood perceived in the story epitomize the thinking Chuck Palahniuk invites his reader into throughout the novel. How attached are we to life? Are attachment to life and faith in humanity indeed obsolete ideas? Is the human body obsolete as well, as Mr. Whittier suggests? (H, 393) Is the world really over? What are our priorities as members of this postmodern society?

One of the main reasons why Chuck Palahniuk’s novel has been characterized by critics as having “vast lengths of shock and appall” (PASTOREK, 2005), or containing “the

stuff of nightmares”⁵¹ is that it shows that when taken to its extreme, the idea of extirpating all evil in the world through asepsis leads to the opposite of what is expected. In a hyperprotected space the body loses all its defenses; as a consequence, “in these transparent, homeostatic or homeofluid systems there is no longer any such thing as a strategy of Good against Evil, there is only the pitting of Evil against Evil.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 68)

Therefore, more than being a collection of tasteless images – and indeed, some of them are – intended to cause gratuitous disgust, *Haunted* serves as a depiction of possible human behaviors and reactions, involving daily objects and apparently mundane people. Chuck Palahniuk makes a point of stressing the humanity of his weird characters, as he states that “[i]f you haven’t already noticed, all my books are about a lonely person looking for some way to connect with other people” (SF, xv), or also in the afterword of the 2005 edition of *Haunted*, as he admits that his goal “was just to write some new form of horror story, something based on the ordinary world.” (H, 410)

Miss Sneezzy is a major representative of that. Her short story shows her craving human contact and mundane experiences, such as in the passage in which she remarks that “I’m twenty-two years old. Old enough to drink beer, and I’ve only ever kissed a dead boy.” (H, 369) All of these experiences are forbidden to her by the literally hyperprotected space she has to live in; at the end of the novel, she is the only one who accepts Mr. Whittier’s proposal of leaving, which is symptomatic of her desire of leading what most people would consider a normal life. However, her ending is as pathetic and fruitless as her attempts of interaction, once she is stabbed to death at the door and taken back inside by Saint Gut-Free and Mother Nature.

⁵¹ See annex O for reviews of *Haunted*.

Palahniuk's work as a whole proves that romantic images and sweet love stories are not his forte – in fact, the final scene has a cheesy air, with the weird couple formed by Miss Sneezzy and Mr. Whittier walking arm in arm towards the sunlight; however, the ending of *Haunted* provides its reader with images of the prospective formation of a couple, echoing the ending of *Obsolete*, in which it is guessed that Adam, Eve and the dog will be together and form a family of their own: “Mr. Whittier leads Miss Sneezzy to the door. To the world, outside. The two of them, hand in hand. (...) He's hauled the alley door open a little, open enough so a ray of real sunlight angles in from the alley.” (H, 400)

The final scene also highlights the importance of the setting for the story, as Miss Sneezzy is pulled back inside confinement – in the same fashion as seen in the final scenes of some horror movies and novels, such as Stephen King's *Carrie*, *[REC]* and its American remake, *Quarantine*. These, along with *Haunted*, show characters being either pulled or forced into the places they are trying to leave. However, the place is so powerful that it is inescapable – just like a cancer often proves to be.

Arguably, the abandoned theater where the main story takes place is crucial for the establishment of cancer as a phantasy and all its facets. Strange thematic rooms and confinement lead to all sorts of extreme reactions, all of which caused by a factor Baudrillard denominates *saturation*. And, as he points out, “deficiency is never a complete disaster, but saturation is fatal, for it produces a sort of tetanized inertia.” (2002, 32) As the writers/characters affirm, “We all look to be asleep or unconscious or dreaming awake, muttering about how none of this is our fault. We're the prey. Everything here has been done to us.” (H, 400)

However, Miss Sneezzy is not the only writer in the novel with a kind of disease. Mr. Whittier, the organizer of the writers' retreat, suffers from a rare disease called Hutchinson-

Gilford syndrome, also known as progeria. As the narrator of *Dog Years*, Mr. Whittier explains what progeria consists of using the aforementioned massive medical vocabulary recurrent in Chuck Palahniuk's prose: "One out of eight million kids develops Hutchinson-Gilford progeria syndrome. A genetic defect in the protein lamin A will make their cells fall apart. Aging them seven times the normal rate." (H, 113)⁵² If Mr. Whittier's body is equivalent to a 126-years-old's and mathematics is taken seriously, it means he should be, in fact, 18 years old. However, Mr. Whittier is "thirteen – fourteen next month." (H, 382)

Even though progeria does not manifest itself through a virus, its effects on Mr. Whittier are related to viral aspects. Firstly, he needs a sterilized environment, and like Miss Sneezy, he spends most of his life committed to a sanatorium – his very own bubble. He develops the habit of tricking volunteer nurses into having sex with him under the false pretense of his coming death. The women, who are predominantly in their forties, married and with children, give in, thinking that there is nothing wrong about giving a little comfort to an elderly man who is about to die. As a matter of fact, the supposed goodness in their acceptance leads him to refer to them as "angels". However, Mr. Whittier is not really a "mister", regardless of what his looks indicate. It comes as a shock for all of them the revelation that Whittier is not of age, which technically makes him a "victim of statutory rape." (H, 116) They give him money in exchange for his silence, providing him with means to finance his writer retreats.

Despite the significant number of apparently negative aspects that have been – and are yet to be – pointed out in Mr. Whittier's retreat (plus the writers' efforts to make him come across as the villain of the story), he is not to be seen as an evil character. If Whittier is to take a larger amount of the responsibility for gathering the writers and providing them with the

⁵² Images of progeria patients are in annex X.

appropriate structure for their frenzy and lies (the cancerous environment), he is to be seen as a sort of protector. For Baudrillard, cancer (and AIDS, given the innumerable parallels Baudrillard traces between the two) is something that saves us from an even greater evil: “What is AIDS a resistance to, what even worse eventuality is it saving us from? (Could it be a sexual epidemic, a sort of total promiscuity?)” (2002, 66)

Once again, Baudrillard’s idea proves to be polemic and applicable to *Haunted* at the same time. Let us take Saint Gut-Free and his famous barf-causing short story *Guts*. Without a doubt, the writer/main character of the story is an essentially sexual being, which is explained by the massive presence of masturbation and possibilities related to it. Nonetheless, Saint Gut-Free never pursues sex with other partners, which theoretically makes him much less bound to be contaminated with the HIV virus or to contract any other sexually transmitted diseases.

Baudrillard refers to the aspect of contamination and reproduction that characterize cancer, expressed in *Guts* in the reproduction of some social and family codes by which Saint Gut-Free feels compelled to live: not experiencing sex and masturbation without feeling guilty, repressing feelings and experiences that may lead him to pleasure, and fulfilling his parents’ standards and dreams: a sports scholarship at university, graduation, and finally, a stable and respectful profession.

Regardless of his final choice, it is likely that Saint Gut-Free would be destined to face the reproductive aspect that Baudrillard points out in cancer: had he lived according to his parents’ standards, he would probably have children of his own, and eventually demand from them to follow the same social and behavioral rules of sexual and psychological contrition. By not doing that, Saint Gut-Free continues living a life of compulsion and excesses: his extreme masturbatory experience in the swimming pool makes him lose part of his intestines,

and as a ‘gut-free’ person, he is a compulsive eater, which adds to the general disgust of those around him, since he continually eats and defecates, in a vicious gross cycle.

The protection Saint Gut-Free obtains is paralleled to other instances of protection for other writers: by not leaving her sterilized environment, Miss Sneezzy is protected from a worse kind of pain (contaminating and killing her beloved ones, as it had happened prior to her confinement); by killing civilians in the street with bowling balls, Sister Vigilante reminds the people in *Civil Twilight* to be more careful, thus preventing a bigger evil: “Sister Vigilante points out to the bright side of the situation: when a mysterious serial killer is on the loose, people tend to be more careful. They don’t want to be a victim, and they don’t want to be accused of being the killer.” (H, 233) She goes even further by pointing out that in the Victorian England that feared the attacks of Jack the Ripper, “[b]urglaries dropped by 85 percent. Assault by 70 percent.” (H, 233); by murdering Cassandra, Mrs. Clark spares her daughter from the darkest stages of body and mind decay.

If most of the short stories might be seen as expressions of protection according to Baudrillard’s standards for cancer, then Mr. Whittier is the ultimate protector, for he gathers the writers and saves them from their pathetic lives and the constant feelings of inadequacy and incapability. As the behavioral dynamics in the retreat indicate, the writers seem to believe that the best way of overcoming such feelings is being on the media – thus being loved (H, 404). The manipulation, exaggeration and obsession with the media show the writers’ reliance on another remarkable characteristic of cancer – the emptiness in communication and information.

Baudrillard affirms that “[n]o matter how marginal, or banal, or even obscene it may be, everything is subject to aestheticization, culturalization, museumification.” (2002, 16) In *Haunted* this notion is well-established by the recurrence of the phrases “the Mythology of

Us” (H, 83, 255, 292, 329, 404) and “the Museum of Us” (H, 175, 176, 329, 404). Section 2.2 (p. 43) mentions these two phrases in reference to the attempts of Palahniuk’s characters to commune through art. Nonetheless, there are two other approaches to them: considering that the writers in the retreat have completely lost their referentials of truth and reality, it is possible to affirm that the phrases simply serve to feed their egos.

On the other hand, the possibility of the writers’ self-awareness (at least to some extent), must not be discarded. If that hypothesis is to be taken into consideration, it is arguable that the repetition of the phrases reflects their knowledge of how pathetic and uninteresting their lives are. Such knowledge, however, does not prevent them from trying to profit and be famous, for it is not the only knowledge they have: they also understand that postmodern media is capable of transforming anything – and anybody – in a marketable product.⁵³ In addition, media nowadays is no longer a distant apparatus, given that the audience’s thirst for reality has put us in the positions of both content receivers and content producers. (p. 108)

Easy access to the media has enhanced the viral aspect of communication, and, as a consequence, content producers (that is, all of us) do not question anymore the relevance of spreading certain kinds of news: “[i]nformation circulates, moves around, makes its circuits (which are sometimes perfectly useless – but that is the whole point: the question of usefulness cannot be raised)” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 29) In fact, Baudrillard goes even further by stating that “[t]here is something particularly nauseating about this prodigious uselessness, about a proliferating yet hypertrophied world which cannot give birth to anything.” (2002, 32) I agree with Baudrillard, and I suggest as the ultimate example of such a

⁵³ As Director Denial authoritatively asserts, “This is just what human beings do – turn objects into people, people into objects.” (H, 158)

fact the majority of posts I see on Facebook: people informing that they are in the shower, watching television, travelling in x days or who they had had dinner with the night before: “in order for content to be conveyed as well and as quickly as possible, that content should come as close as possible to transparency and insignificance.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 49)

The fact is that news in the postmodern world is frequently devoid of any relevance, which is a consequence of our concomitant double status of content receivers and producers. Baudrillard goes even deeper into the issue as he states that “if good communication implies the annihilation of its own content, good data-handling implies a digital transparency of knowledge. Good advertising implies the nullity – or at least the neutralization – of the product being advertised.” (2002, 50)

That is exactly what *Haunted* proposes: the authors have a lot to say (hence the writing of their short stories), but their permanent regard about the future after they leave confinement focuses on *what* they will say to the newspapers and television. They do not have the stories they wish to tell, therefore they do whatever they can to come up with them, or at least with (fake) evidence of them.

The confined writers inflict themselves and the others pain, humiliation and mutilation; they kill and lie, all the while rehearsing their excuses and versions of the stories. Once they do not have real facts to present, how to tell the stories becomes the most important aspect of their future story-telling: ready-made texts, planted wounds, made-up villains, manipulation of words and actions said and performed by dead people. Thus, the promotion of information and its immediate and effective spread become the main objective for the writers/characters in *Haunted*.

While Baudrillard and I display our revolt against the postmodern situation of communication, some of the writers and short stories in *Haunted* exploit it to their advantage.

Without a doubt, the Earl of Slander's story *Swan Song* epitomizes all the ideas mentioned about the media so far. The Earl, who is a reporter, has a well-defined theory about the kind of story that raises people's interest: "people don't want a happy ending." (H, 94)

The story starts by introducing Danny Wilcox, former child star: "He lives in a tract house, in some suburban development. Mows his own lawn. This is him, bald and middle-aged, a little fat and ignored." (H, 92) The description makes it clear that Danny Wilcox is nowadays an average man, with average activities and a normal, perhaps mediocre, life.

The Earl's intentions become clearer as he presents several examples of artists who had a tragic ending due to downsides in their careers:

People want to read about Rusty Hamer, the little boy on *Make Room For Daddy* who shot himself. Or Trent Lehman, the cute kid from *Nanny and the Professor* who hanged himself on a playground fence. Little Anissa Jones, who played Buffy on *Family Affair*, clutching a doll named Mrs. Beasley, swallowing the biggest overdose of barbiturates in the history of Los Angeles County. (...)

Or when Jay Smith, the "Little Rascal" known as Pinky, was found stabbed to death in the desert outside Las Vegas.

It's the kind of joy we felt when Dana Plato, the little girl on *Diff'rent Strokes*, got arrested, posed naked in *Playboy*, and took too many sleeping pills. (...)

Most people, they want to read about Lani O'Grady, the pretty daughter on *Eight is Enough*, found dead in a trailer house with her belly full of Vicodin and Prozac. (H, 94)

The Earl's theory has contemporary echoes in the deaths of Michael Jackson (overdose of Vicodin, just like in Lani O'Grady's case) and Brazilian actress Leila Lopes, who, after having a few roles in well-known soap operas, entered the pornographic market and killed herself by ingesting rat poison.

From this point on, the story describes how the Earl plots to kill Danny Wilcox, at the same time giving the impression that the death was a suicide originated in guilt. His care with detail and his efficiency remind us of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, in which the murderer boasts about how well the plan is executed. Wilcox now works as a veterinarian, and the Earl visits him using his dog as an excuse. They have informal conversations, in which the Earl pretends to remember Wilcox's screen days, and they start a friendship. When the Earl gives Wilcox some sleeping pills, he has already written Wilcox's obituary:

On the other hand, the story I already wrote is great. My version is all about Kenny's long slide from the spotlight to the autopsy table. How he lost his innocence to a long list of network executives in his campaign to become Danny. To keep the sponsors happy, he was farmed out a sexual plaything. He took drugs to stay thin. To delay the onset of puberty. To stay up all night, shooting scene after scene. No one, not even his friends and family, nobody knew the depths of his drug habit and perverted need for attention. Even becoming a D.V.M. was just to get access to good drugs and sex with small animals. (H, 96-7)

One of the basic facets of emptiness as a feature of cancer regards information on the media, which is well-exemplified by *Swan Song*. The Earl of Slander's tendency of cupiditas towards Danny Wilcox mirrors what Baudrillard ironically points out through two questions: "If information referred not to events but to the promotion of information itself *qua* event? If communication were concerned not with messages but instead with the promotion of communication itself *qua* myth?" (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 50)

The other facet of emptiness focuses on art, and what Baudrillard denominates the *transaesthetics of banality*, or the general aestheticization of everyday life. The entire idea of

everything being aesthetic is fundamental for Baudrillard's theory regarding postmodernity. Anything is bound to become art, and precisely because of that, "[a]rt is gone. Art has disappeared as a symbolic pact, as something thus clearly distinct from that pure and simple production of aesthetic values, that proliferation of signs *ad infinitum*, that recycling of past and present forms, which we call 'culture'." (2002, 14)

Due to this feeling of nothingness, defining art becomes an extremely complex task. Examples of such impossibility are Duchamp's urinal and Warhol's Campbell soup, which caused a severe disruption in people's overall definition of artistic characteristics. This is a discussion that profits from a closer look into *Haunted*.

Art and artists have proven to be recurrent topics in Palahniuk's work, as they appear somehow in *Diary* (Misty Marie Wilmot), *Tell-All* (movie diva Kathie Kenton), *Snuff* (porno actress Cassie Wright), *Lullaby* (antiques expert Helen Hoover Boyle) and *Invisible Monsters* (model Shannon McFarland). However, it is in *Haunted* that the author explores art in more levels and under different perspectives. The basic premise of the novel consists of the gathering of people who intend to produce literature. By aiming at remaining in people's imaginary permanently through their retreat stories, they appropriate what seems to be an artist's prerogative – surviving one's own death and be remembered for a long time, preferably forever, as Oscar Wilde points out in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, whose preface is mentioned in section 2.2 (p. 63).

Two short stories have a clear connection to art and by doing so they propose a series of relevant questionings. In *Ambition*, the Duke of Vandals kills painters and sculptors and copies their works, which are admired just as if they were the originals. The story shows that the "special" features (some call it "a unique artistic view", others call it "creativity", most

just call it “talent”) art was believed to have decades ago are no longer pre-requisites for the production of a work of art.

The second short story focusing on artistic issues is *The Nightmare Box*, written by Mrs. Clark and corresponding to the second chapter of Cassandra’s life story. Two aspects in the story make it an exception within the collection: it is the first story that is not introduced by a poem (*Poster Child* and *Cassandra* do not have poems before them as well; that brings the three stories together with *Post-Production*, reinforcing the idea that the four of them are, in fact, one longer story), and it has a supernatural tone not perceived in the other stories, given that Cassandra’s experience with the nightmare box is never explained.

The story begins by showing Cassandra in an advanced stage of physical and psychological decadence. She cuts off her eyelashes, burns innumerable cigarettes to their filters, sits naked on the living room couch, with “[a]ll her arms and legs bunched tight around her in the cold air” (H, 210) in front of the blank television screen (which, ironically, is the image that for Baudrillard epitomizes the contemporary man: sitting in front of a blank television screen).

Cassandra manages to say that the experience that led her to such a state “happened in that gallery. Across from the antiques store.” (H, 211) Interestingly, *The Nightmare Box* and *Something’s Got to Give*, the only stories with a more supernatural character, mention somehow an antiques store.

Cassandra, as it is gathered in the reading of *the Nightmare Box*, is not a regular teenager. While most girls of her age (fifteen) would be concerned with parties and their debuts, Cassandra attributes a higher importance to artistic fulfillment and fruition. Mrs. Clark is particular about the dress her daughter was wearing – “it was black and stitched with black sequins and beads. It was a crust of rough black glitter with her breasts pink and meaty inside.

A hard black shell.” (H, 212), and she observes that “[s]tanding and smiling in the center of the art gallery, she was the only woman you’d remember. Cassandra Clark, only fifteen years old.” (H, 213)

The gallery owner had “a thin mustache, plucked and trimmed perfect as two eyebrows.(...) a little devil’s beard that made his chin look pointed. He wore a banker’s blue suit and a single earring too big, too fake-bright to be anything but a real diamond” (H, 213) He reveals that the box belongs to a person named Rand, and right before looking into the box, Cassandra sees a nameplate that reads “Roland Whittier” (H, 214) Two aspects are important here: the gallery owner’s appearance, which recalls the archetypal image of the devil, and the names “Rand” and “Roland”, which are similar to “Brandon”, Mr. Whittier’s supposed real name.

The Nightmare Box turns out to be Palahniuk’s most intense flirtation with the supernatural, and some of the aspects in the story invite to a parallel to *Dracula*: there is an archetypal Satan (Dracula and the gallery owner), a dangerous situation (inviting Dracula into one’s house or to look into the box), and gloomy consequences to those who face the situation, in addition to the lack of explanation to the connection between Mr. Whittier and Roland/Rand, which is definitely aimed at. Finally, there is the possibility of seeing Cassandra Clark performing the same role Lucy Westenra performs in *Dracula*: both girls seem to have special qualities that others do not, which might explain why they are chosen by their archetypal Satans to undergo certain experiences. In both characters, there is the mixture of youth and sexiness (Lucy’s multiple marriage proposals and Cassandra’s “short-short” dress), and the purification of their bodies by the hand of somebody who loves them – Lucy’s fiancé Arthur devampirizes her, whereas Mrs. Clark kills her daughter in order to stop her pain.

Cassandra's special characteristic becomes clear when we learn that many people had looked into the box before her, but nothing happened to them. "They held on and looked inside, but all they saw was their own eye reflected in the darkness behind the little glass lens. All they heard was a little sound. A clock, ticking" (H, 214) The moment Cassandra look into the box, the ticking stops, and "[w]hat happens, only Cassandra knows." (H, 219)

Looking into the nightmare box is a lonely process, just like having a nightmare during sleep: "[w]hat you suffer, you suffer it alone. What happens inside the Nightmare Box, it only happens to you. There's no one you can share it with. There's no room for someone else." (H, 220)

Two short passages of the story come full cycle with Baudrillard's postulates: Mrs. Clark affirms that the box "infects" you (H, 220), reinforcing the connection of the story to his views on cancer, and at the end, Rand affirms that "[w]hat you see inside the box (...) is a glimpse of real reality" (H, 222) – hyperreality.

Speculating about what the box reveals is nothing but trying to understand what Palahniuk wants us to see in his short story – perhaps a world characterized by the loss of boundaries, fake realities and a feeling of helplessness and lack of energy, typical of a post-orgy state.

4.2 TRANSVESTITISM

Nobody's surprised at how "Miranda's" labia look. The skin too frilly. The wet-flower look a stylist works hard to get in *Playboy* or *Hustler*. (...) The pubic hair trimmed and waxed down to a thin stripe. Perfumed. Not the way a pussy is supposed to look. The longer we look, the more we agree it's not real. (H, 265)

Transvestitism is the phantasy related to the excesses and deficiencies in our sexual codes. Among the three phantasies, it is definitely the most blatant and obvious in *Haunted*. This comes full cycle with the body changes – more often than not via mutilation – perceived throughout the work of Chuck Palahniuk.⁵⁴ That happens because the fascination exerted by these forms is, according to Baudrillard, “viral”, and their virulence is “reinforced by their images, for the modern media have a viral force of their own, and their virulence is contagious.” (2002, 36-7)

One important aspect of transvestitism is that, contrary to possible primary expectations, it is not something related exclusively to sex, cross-dressing, or homosexuality. For Baudrillard, the main issue concerning the sexual aspect of contemporary societies is that everything is sexual – a premise that repeats itself for the other phantasies, once everything is aesthetic (cancer) and everything is political (terrorism). This generalization of categories (or their absence) leads to complete indefiniteness, and, under the perspective of transvestitism, this is how it is translated: in the past, there were things that were supposed to be sexual, and as a consequence, things that were not supposed to be sexual. If now everything is sexual, this division no longer exists, and sex loses its determinants.

This determinacy of what is sexual is supposed to be based on certain characteristics, associated to what people call “sex appeal”. The pursuit for such features is best exemplified by actions such as going to the gym in order to have a “fit” body (such as Tracee and her husband, the bodybuilders in *Obsolete* mentioned in the previous section), hair dying, cosmetic surgeries, or doing whatever to conceal the effects of age on one’s body. The use of the word “fit” between quotation marks is meant to call the attention for the implications of how the word and its fundamental dictionary meaning (to be the right size for someone or

⁵⁴ As mentioned in section 2.2, which discusses common features and patterns in the work of Chuck Palahniuk.

something) are twisted according to social and cultural pre-established notions. The use of the term “fitness” in the advertisement of gyms is a good example of that. What underlies such use is the idea that if one body does not have certain muscles well-developed in some strategic areas, certain curves, color, shape or size, it is not sexually attractive, it is not “fit” in that sense.

Traditional, orthodox sexual practices imply that males are attracted to females, and vice-versa. In that sense, homosexuality could be seen as a primary step towards unorthodox sexual practices, being transvestitism a possible unfolding for such practice. Naturally, one might think that at this point a thorough research on how transvestitism has become a social practice and its implications in different contexts would enrich this analysis. I agree with that, but there are two reasons for not doing so: the first one is that such research would take me to materials and concepts whose sociological and anthropological importance are far too relevant to be summarized in a few pages; most of those materials and concepts would probably be related to sexuality, which leads me to the second reason why not to do that: sexual issues are, indeed, a relevant aspect of the transvestite for my analysis and for Baudrillard’s as well; nonetheless, it is not a crucial one. Such is the complication about discussing sex nowadays that Baudrillard himself claims that “nothing is less certain than sex, behind the liberation of its discourse. And nothing today is less certain than desire, behind the proliferation of its images.” (1990, 5)

Based on that, Baudrillard develops the idea of transvestitism as a phantasy: the exaggerated pursuit for sexual fitness and the overwhelming number of possibly sexual characteristics all together in one body turn out to have the effect contrary to what it was supposed to cause. He provides three examples of pop icons that embody the transvestite in different ways: the first one is La Cicciolina, the famous Italian porn star from the 1970s and

1980s, whom he calls a “marvelous incarnation of sex – of sex in pornographic innocence” (2002: 21);⁵⁵ Baudrillard also poses the following question about her:

But is not La Cicciolina too a transsexual? Her long platinum hair, her customized breasts, her realer-than-real curves worthy of an inflatable doll, her lyophilic eroticism borrowed from a comic-strip or science-fiction world, and above all the hyperbole of her (never perverse or libertine) sexual discourse – all conspire to offer a ready-made and total sinfulness. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 21)

The second example of transvestitism Baudrillard finds in the pop world is Madonna. Seen by some feminists such as Camille Paglia as the epitome of the twentieth-century woman, Baudrillard calls her a “virgin fruit of the aerobic sphere, product of a glacial aesthetic, devoid of all charm and sensuality – a numbed android who by virtue of this very fact was perfect raw material for a synthetic idol.” (2002, 21) He criticizes Madonna for her supposed artificiality, and calls the attention to her fitness through the use of the word ‘aerobic’.⁵⁶ However, he does not fail to acknowledge Madonna’s power as a pop figure, as he associates her to nitroglycerine – even if an artificial one. (2002, 21)

Finally, the third figure mentioned by Baudrillard as a transvestite is Michael Jackson. If La Cicciolina’s and Madonna’s transvestitism is more obvious and sexual, Michael Jackson’s is more complex. Apart from the possibility of having had diseases, Michael

⁵⁵ Baudrillard also mentions La Cicciolina as an epitome of the indetermination of things as he remembers she was elected for the Italian Parliament in 1987, mixing the sexual and political spheres.

⁵⁶ Now that she is fifty-three years old, Madonna seems to have embraced exercise and, as Baudrillard puts, “aerobics” more than when *The Transparency of Evil* was written, in 1990. Some recent photos of the singer show her with over-developed biceps, a skinny body and protruded veins in the arms, probably a result of over-exercise. See annex Y.

Jackson had his face lifted, his hair straightened, his skin lightened – reconstructed with the greatest attention to detail, all towards becoming a pure and innocent child; Baudrillard actually goes further when he states that “he is child-prosthesis, an embryo of all those dreamt-of mutilation that will deliver us from race and from sex.” (2002, 22)

“All of them are mutants, transvestites, genetically baroque beings whose erotic look conceals their generic lack of specificity. They are all ‘gender-benders’” (2002, 21). This is how Baudrillard refers to La Cicciolina, Madonna and Michael Jackson in the end, calling the attention for two aspects that are fundamental for the analysis presented here regarding *Haunted*: the ‘child-prosthesis’ and the ‘gender-benders’.

Tracing a parallel between the transvestites Baudrillard presents as examples, it is possible to identify how they differ from each other: La Cicciolina is the cheap sex goddess, the kind that is ideally seen on the cover on men’s magazines; contemporary examples of such kind of transvestite include Pamela Anderson (during her *Baywatch* days), porn stars Jenna Jameson and Sylvia Saint⁵⁷, or any of the “fruit women” that have infested Brazilian media in the past few years. Madonna in the 80s is a transvestite that focuses on its physical capacity, stamina and explosion onstage or in front of the camera. Contemporary examples include Madonna in the twenty-first century and other artists with attractive or muscular bodies and famous for their explosive performances, such as Beyoncé, Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft or Mrs. Smith, or Britney Spears at the turn of the century. And Michael Jackson, the authentic representative of the “child-prosthesis” category, finds equivalents in Cindy Robinson, the American woman who underwent multiple cosmetic surgeries to look like a Barbie doll, and,

⁵⁷ The main character in *Snuff* is Cassie Wright, a pornographic actress built by Palahniuk to the image of women like La Cicciolina, Pamela Anderson, Jenna Jameson and Sylvia Saint.

in Brazil, in Ângela Bismarchi, who is only seen in media during Carnival or when she undergoes another cosmetic surgery towards eternal youth.⁵⁸

One case worth mentioning when it comes to the different nuances of transvestitism is Lady GaGa's: she has taken many possibilities to their extreme, be it by her extravagant clothes made of non-wearable materials such as meat and cigarettes, be it by wearing prostheses that dehumanize her, or by resorting to the most orthodox of all forms of transvestitism – dressing as a man.⁵⁹

As Baudrillard states, and the people mentioned above corroborate, “what we seek is less beauty or attractiveness than the right look.” (2002, 23) And that applies in many different levels to the transvestites Chuck Palahniuk presents in *Haunted*. One of the stories presents ‘authentic’ transvestites, that is, people who cross-dress.

Told by Reverend Godless, *Punch Drunk* is a story about two US Air Force members, Flint and Webber, who plan to crash an airplane somewhere in the Middle East. In order to obtain the necessary money, they dress as famous female singers such as Barbra Streisand, Celine Dion and Bette Midler in the most varied events, such as motorcycle runs, rodeos, boat shows and country fairs.

For prices that range from U\$10 to U\$50, customers buy the right to spank them for a certain period of time. A third friend, former US Marine member Jenson, is casually

⁵⁸ I wonder what Baudrillard would say if he learned that one of Ângela Bismarchi's surgeries consisted of a hymen reconstitution meant to provide her second husband with the feeling of having sex with a virgin on their wedding night. At the time of the surgery, she was 37 years old – and looked over 40, without a doubt.

⁵⁹ Images of Lady GaGa in annex Z.

mentioned (not as part of the terrorist attack), and the reader eventually discovers that this Jensen is Reverend Godless himself. (H, 183)⁶⁰

Apparently, Flint and Webber manage to gather the money they need solely through their work: “That was the night they finally topped out the fifty grand for the mission” (H, 190) – which makes sense, once the reader gets to see from the very first lines of the story that the two friends had been “working” hard:

Webber looks around, his face pushed out of shape, one cheekbone lower than the other. One of his eyes is just a milk-white ball pinched in the red-black swelling under his brow. His lips, Webber’s lips are split so deep in the middle he’s got four lips instead of two. Inside all those lips, you can’t see a single tooth left. (H, 182)

The violence pervading Palahniuk’s work is well-exemplified in *Punch Drunk*, considering that Flint and Webber earn money through an occupation involving violence, and the money they make will finance a sort of terrorist act. At the same time, the story is full of ironies, particularly when the narrator gives details of their ‘repertoire’: “You put on a curly red wig and false eyelashes, lip-synch to Bette Midler at the Collaris Country Fair and Rodeo (...), and you can make some real money.” (H, 183), or “Lip-synch to Barbra Streisand

⁶⁰ Two references to two other works by Palahniuk are relevant here: in *Survivor*, the author presents Tender Branson, a member of a religious sect who hijacks an airplane and is supposed to crash it. In addition, in his book of memoirs called *Stranger Than Fiction*, he presents events he attended in small countryside towns such as rodeos, sex festivals and demolition derbies (competitions of combines, machines used to harvest wheat), which most certainly inspired the events Reverend Godless describes. For instance, in the same memoir book Palahniuk describes the Rock Creed Lodge Testicle Festival in Missoula, Montana – the same town where Flint and Webber finally reach the US\$ 50,000 they need. (2005, 191)

singing that “Evergreen” song, and you’d better have a friend waiting to drive you to the emergency room. Take a couple Vicodins beforehand. Before you glue on those long pink Barbra Streisand fingernails” (H, 183); a typical example of Palahniuk’s kind of humor can be found in the following passage: “The song, it’s the wailing song from the end of that *Titanic* movie. That Canadian chick. (...) Some guys, they’d hit him until their hand got tired, then get back in line to use their other. That wailing *Titanic* song, it almost fucking killed Flint.” (H, 183-184)

Transvestitism plays an important role in Flint and Webber’s business. Firstly, they discover that hitting women or female-looking people is more profitable than hitting men: “Flint had this girl who was up to it. But after, like, one shot to the face, she was saying, “No way...”” (H, 184); then, they realize that by putting together the chance of beating men with the wearing of women’s clothes, they reach a very good market: real women.

Of all the folks, the women are the worst. Some of them ain’t happy ‘less they see teeth fly out the other side of your mouth.

Women, the drunker they get, the more they love, love, love to slug a drag queen. Knowing it’s a man. Especially if he’s dressed and looking better than they are. (H, 186)

The mixture of feminine and masculine elements – the very dichotomy that causes uneasiness in cross-dressing – is presented from the very beginning: the reader knows that none of the men are homosexual or effeminate (Flint has a girlfriend, Sheila, and Webber sometimes flirts when the women he comes across); their background in the military forces and their friendship with other fellow Air Force male members are reinforced throughout the

story; even the poem that introduces the short story presents Reverend Godless as a sort of transvestite with clearly visible masculine elements. It also works as an interesting way to bring together the Reverend Godless (third-person narrator) with his characters.

Reverend Godless onstage, his eyebrows are plucked and shaped
 into twin-penciled arches, with, underneath each,
 a rainbow of sparkle eye shadow in shades from red to green.
 And on one bare bicep muscle, bulging,
 Below the spaghetti strap of a red-sequined evening gown,
 Tattooed there is a skull face with, under the chin, there words:
 Death Before Dishonor. (H, 181)

If the poem that introduces *Punch Drunk* contains this subtle irony of the tattoo that reads ‘Death Before Dishonor’, the ending of the story is not only ironic but also invites to some thinking. When asked by one of their ‘clients’ why they cross-dressed to be beaten up, Webber replies that “Everybody wants to make the world a better place.” (H, 191) That may be Palahniuk’s way to imply that that kind of service is a necessity in contemporary societies, a means through which people come to terms with their repressed feelings (in a fashion similar to the creation of the secret organization in *Fight Club*).

On the other hand, the story has some political hints left along the dialogues, for instance when Flint mentions Mecca, the Al-Haram, the Mormon Tabernacle and the Beverly Hills Hotel, where the Dalai Lama is supposed to be. (H, 191) Any of those places could be a

target in their terrorist enterprise, and Webber's response at the end of the short story may be an indication that this kind of destruction of anti-American symbols is what Flint and Webber (radical military men?) consider to be "making the world a better place".

Another short story – *Speaking Bitterness*, written by Comrade Snarky – presents a very interesting character for the analysis of transvestitism. Miranda is a transsexual that crafted herself to be a typical sex goddess – the kind of transvestite Baudrillard would pair to La Cicciolina. In Miranda one sees Chuck Palahniuk's literary creation very well, for she is made up in the same fashion as other characters in other works by the author, such as the porn queen Cassie Wright in *Snuff* or super model Shannon McFarland and her transsexual sibling Brandy Alexander, born Shane McFarland, in *Invisible Monsters*. Even one of the writers/characters in *Haunted*, Mrs. Clark, shares these characteristics as well.

The story describes Miranda's attempt to participate of a meeting held in a club only for women – a "women-only safe space" (H, 258). The impression conveyed to the reader from the very beginning is that the characters and the author of the story are the archetypal radical feminists, the kind that does not like men for several reasons. The bitterness in their conversation, highlighted by the title, basically focuses on experiences with men. At the very beginning of the story, the narrative voice states that "To men, a woman is either a virgin or a slut. A mother or a whore." (H, 258)

Comrade Snarky, the author, wears camouflage pants, leather elbow patches and steel-toed boots and a beret, in an obvious attempt to place herself as a sort of soldier, a woman with a rebellious, aggressive personality. (H, 3, 256) Even the introductory poem, called *Anticipation*, presents some aspects that, under a Freudian perspective, have probably contributed to Snarky's way of thinking: her parents' divorce and the constant fear her mother instilled in her that her father would rape her someday. That never took place, but it had some

impact on her, as Comrade Snarky herself acknowledges in the poem that precedes her story: ““Instead of all that,” Comrade Snarky says, “my father took me to the zoo.” / He took her to the ballet. He took her to soccer practice. / He kissed her good night. (...) “But, for the rest of my life, I was always ready [to defend herself from a rapist]” (H, 257).

If on the one hand the women in *Punch Drunk* prefer beating drag queens who look better than themselves, the ones in *Speaking Bitterness* are uncomfortable with Miranda, partly due to her overwhelmingly sexual looks. Indeed, Miranda’s efforts to look female end up forming an overdramatic image, the archetypal image of a tasteless hooker: she has a lizard-skin pocketbook, which she holds in her hands with long, pink fingernails; she is wearing a rainbow-colored scarf tied around the neck and a complementary fur coat on a cropped silk blouse covering big breasts. The narrative voice (an undefined “we”, just like in the story dimension that shows the writers’ interaction in the abandoned theater)⁶¹ comments on Miranda’s accessories as follows: “His lips and shoes and handbag, his fingernails and watchband, they’re all as pretty-pink as a redhead’s asshole.” (H, 259)

The narrative “we” goes on, by pointing out Miranda’s exaggerated make-up: long eyelashes, eyeliner, lipstick onto lipstick, blusher on top of the blusher, mascara on top of mascara. Their conclusion is that “[h]e’s a total sex-doll fantasy, the kind of woman only a man would become.” (H, 259), which is an echo to Baudrillard’s postulate that the main power of a women lies on everything man projects on her (section 3.3, p. 135).

⁶¹ The narrative “we” in *Haunted* is discussed in section 2.3, page 71. *Speaking Bitterness* is one of the few short stories that echoes this undefined narrative voice seen in the story dimension that shows the writers’ interaction in confinement. That happens because in both cases indefiniteness is not only recommended but also necessary. There are two groups of characters – respectively, the confined writers in *Haunted* and the group of women in *Speaking Bitterness* – that share fundamental psychological features, therefore specification becomes unnecessary.

All the efforts Miranda has made to become a woman are completely ignored by the women in the group. A major piece of evidence is the recurrence of the pronouns “he” and “his” throughout the story whenever they refer to Miranda, such as when Miranda shows her driver’s license: “The state may recognize his new gender, we tell him, but we choose not to.” (H, 258) Even after they become aware that Miranda has gone through a sex change surgery, they keep on calling her “he”.

The use of their natural womanhood as a wall separating them from the transsexual woman becomes more and more aggressive as they see every little female detail in Miranda: she carries in her purse a canister of hot-pepper spray and silver rape whistle (H, 262), showing that regardless of being born as a man, she understands what it is like to be a woman in dangerous times. More than that, as one who was born a man, Miranda gives to those women proof that she is aware of both perspectives, male and female: she has the shape and genitals of a woman and a feminine personality, but has crafted herself into the kind of woman men want for sexual satisfaction – therefore putting her male perspective to work.

When Miranda is called a “sex-doll fantasy” by the group of women, it is only the first step in their “decoding” process of Miranda’s physical femininity. The conclusion of their analysis comes with harsh words:

Here’s every male fantasy brought to life in a kind of Frankenstein monster of stereotypes⁶²: The perfect big round breasts. The hard muscle of long thighs. The mouth, a perfect pout, greasy with lipstick. The pink leather skirt too short and tight for anything but sex. He speaks with the breathy voice of a little girl or a movie starlet. A huge gush of air for what little sound comes out. It’s the kind of whispery voice *Cosmopolitan* magazine teaches girls to use, to make listening men lean closer. (H, 260)

⁶² Baudrillard also makes use of the Frankenstein analogy when he discusses the visual appeal of the “child-prosthesis” (2002, 21).

The excerpt highlights the mouth, “greasy with lipstick”. Previous passages mention the blush being put on top of more blush, mascara being put on top of mascara. In some levels, this is another way for Chuck Palahniuk to present his recurrent blurred images. In *Haunted*, Palahniuk’s distortion mantra is “the camera behind the camera behind the camera”, always leading to the manipulation of images, to the blatant reality that Baudrillard refers to as hyperreality, where things are “more real than real” and in which the cover people sometimes try to put forth does not agree with what is underneath. Aware that her femininity is not natural and regardless of how obvious or visual it may be, Miranda constantly refreshes her make-up – to the point of overdoing it – in another attempt of advertising her womanhood.

Eventually the narrative voice reveals that the embargo to men has a solid psychological and social basis. Therefore, Miranda will never have the chance of being in the meetings. She is to blame, simply because she was born a man. As they explain, they try to escape from “husbands who won’t pick up dirty socks. Husbands who slap us around, then cheat on us. Fathers disappointed that we’re not boys. Stepfathers who diddle us. Brothers who bully us. Bosses. Priests. Traffic cops. Doctors.” (H, 260-1)

The gathering unfolds until the women force Miranda to undress and they abuse her, as a sort of symbolic vendetta against all men that had harmed them in the past. “The women in the group, we look at each other. To have a man here taking orders. Some of us were molested. Some of us, raped. All of us, ogled, groped, undressed by male eyes. It’s our turn, and we don’t know where to begin.” (H, 265)

The abuse leads to the deconstruction of Miranda as a woman, and also as a transvestite in the way Baudrillard suggests. All the elements that form her physical femininity are destroyed or altered somehow, leading to a pitiful result:

Whatever he is, “Miranda” is crying. Caught up in his little drama, all his eye makeup and blusher mixed with his foundation and coming down his cheeks to each corner of his mouth. He’s almost naked with his stretched pantyhose webbed between his ankles, his feet still in gold-elegant high-heeled sandals. His blouse is gone and his pink lace bra is open and hanging off his shoulders. His firm, round breasts shiver with each sob. He’s on the conference table this way. His fur coat on the floor, kicked off into a corner, his blond hair falling down. His own little horror story. (H, 265)

The recurrent use of medical vocabulary in Palahniuk’s work can also be seen here, when the women finally reach the one feature that once separated Miranda from the rest of them, the one aspect that once prevented Miranda to consider herself a ‘real’ woman: her vagina. When describing Miranda’s genitals, Palahniuk incorporates his characteristic use of technical vocabulary to reverse Miranda’s feminization process:

We point out how the clitoris must be the penis whittled down. Somebody describes how the artificial vaginal vault is just the penis, gutted and stuffed inside, a section of mucus-producing lower intestine spliced in for depth. Where the cervix should be, they use the skin salvaged from the empty scrotum. (H, 266)

This deconstruction process perceived in *Speaking Bitterness* allows a parallel with other works of literature by authors that Chuck Palahniuk has been affiliated to for some reason, particularly authors that have some kind of association to contemporary branches of Gothic literature. Two good examples come from well-known works by two authors connected to the Southern American Gothic, which had its peak between the decades of 1930 and 1950. In Flannery O’Connor’s *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1953), the main character Hulga is deprived of her artificial leg (the only way through which she can walk) and her

glasses (the only way through which she can see), meaning that she loses the two aids she has to interact with other people as normally as possible; it is a similar process to the one seen in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), in which Blanche DuBois, eager to look younger than she actually is, conceals her face through the use of dim lights, Chinese lanterns, and make-up, until her open-ended private encounter with Stanley Kowalski deconstructs the hyperreality Blanche had tried to live in.

Miranda's rape – the culmination of her deconstruction and humiliation – turns out to be also a rite of passage. The ending of the story insinuates that after being abused, Miranda is finally able to understand what it is like to be a woman like the members of the group. In reality, the final words of the story are exactly the same that open it, "From the minute she sat down, we tried to explain. We don't allow men. This is a women-only safe space. The purpose of our group..." (H, 268), which reinforces even more the cyclic idea of the rite of passage – especially considering that when the words reappear to close the story, they are preceded by the women's realization that they had done something wrong: "How did we *get this way?*" (H, 268)

In spite of the anatomic details, the battle of the sexes and the sexual abuse presented in *Speaking Bitterness*, the story also epitomizes the non-sexual aspect of Baudrillard's notion of transvestitism; indeed, Miranda is a "sex doll", the women in the group have suffered sexual violence and later on, they perpetrate sexual violence against Miranda. However, not even all those aspects related to sexual codes make the characters deeply involved with sex and its procedures. As Baudrillard observes, "Sexed beings, we certainly are (...) but sexual?"

That's the question. Socialized beings, we are (and sometimes, by force), but social? It's still to be seen. Realized beings, yes – but real? Nothing is less certain.”⁶³ (2004, 54)

Therefore, sex and its determinants are twisted in the story to show positions of power and separation of groups, but above all, to show that Miranda – the sex doll, the Frankenstein creature, the monster, the made-up sex robot – is not sexual, merely “sexed”. She, like the women in the group, is aware of the sexual codes and sexual determinants. By turning herself into a woman made to the image of cheap sex goddesses – a sort of La Cicciolina – Miranda displays what Baudrillard calls an “excess of reality, this hyperreality of things.” (2004, 29) She demonstrates her talent in representing, in producing an image with a well-set objective. That is the main difference between her and the other women, who state that “[b]eing a woman is special. It's sacred. This isn't just some club you can join.” (H, 262)

The twist of sexual determinants comes through once more, when, right before the abuse takes place, the feminine “we” that narrates the story expresses itself in a stereotypical masculine fashion, probably the way abusive men would express themselves:

It's obvious. This poor, sad, misguided fuck, he's using us. The way a masochist goads a sadist. The way the criminal wants to be caught. Miranda is begging for it. This is why he's shown up here. It's why he's dressed this way. He knows this shorty-short skirt, these big casaba boobs, they drive a real woman wild. In this case, “no” does mean “yes”. It means “Yes, please.” It means “slap me.” (H, 264)

⁶³ “Sexuados, certamente o somos (...) mas sexuais? Eis a questão. Socializados, somos (e às vezes, à força), mas seres sociais? Resta ver. Realizados, sim – mas reais? Nada é menos certo.” Translation mine.

All things considered, Miranda embodies the premise Baudrillard poses when he comments on the child-prosthesis: everyone performs an appearing act, and for such everyone needs the right look: “So it is not: I exist, I am here! But rather: I am visible, I am an image – look! Look!” (2002, 23) And it is towards the right look for one particular situation that Tess Clark, the most prolific of the nineteen writers confined in the abandoned theater, undergoes some body changes herself. Mrs. Clark produces four short stories, all of them related somehow to her daughter Cassandra and the different stages of her life and death, as mentioned in the previous section. What concerns the analysis of Baudrillard’s transvestitism at this point is the first short story, called *Post-Production*, which shows Cassandra’s conception.

The poem that introduces the story shows Mrs. Clark as a variety of the “Miranda type”: “Her eyelids tattooed the orange that looked so chic two decades ago, / her lips silicone to the size and shape of suction cups, / then tattooed a forgotten shade of frosty peach.” (H, 138); in addition, “breasts rising big as soufflés / or loaves of bread.” (H, 139)

Just like in *Punch Drunk*, in *Post Production* the money is supposed to finance something (the baby the couple wants to have), and just like in *Speaking Bitterness*, the artificiality of Tess’ and Nelson’s bodies are major components of Palahniuk’s narrative.

However, *Post-Production* focuses more than the other two short stories on hyperreality and how sometimes people are forced out of it, when reality hits them in a tough way. Here, a very interesting conflict between the objectives of reality television and Baudrillard’s hyperreality takes place: when one agrees to be in a reality show or something of the sort, one believes that will see the best about oneself: the best looks, the best moments, the best tirades. If that indeed happens, the documentation makes one’s hyperreality realer – if such is possible, considering that for Baudrillard hyperreality is already the ‘realer than real’;

for Tess Clark, however, what happens is the contrary, which is clear when the narrator says that “it doesn’t make any sense to get out of bed and erase the videotape. That would be like breaking a mirror for showing you the truth. Like killing the bearer of bad news.” (H, 141)

The Clarks’ artificiality is exposed in a deconstruction technique very similar to the one found in *Speaking Bitterness*:

The trouble with eternal youth is, you do tend to procrastinate. So, the Clarks taught themselves how to make a video. This included Nelson shaving the hair around the base of his dick, to make it look bigger. Tess got breast implants as big as her spine would support. (...) Her lips she got threaded inside with tubes of puffed-foam fillers, giving her a blow-job pout for the rest of her life. Both the Clarks, they signed up for tanning sessions, twenty minutes, twice a day. (H, 142)⁶⁴

When Baudrillard explains the four phases of the image, he presents them in a way that enables an analysis of *Post-Production* backwards: “it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.” (1994, 6)

The first stage – the reflection of a profound reality – corresponds to the image Tess sees at the end of the whole process: a middle-aged woman with excessively artificial looks who is left abandoned by her husband and expecting a child; the second stage – the masking of a profound reality – consists on her effort to remain young, resorting to all kinds of

⁶⁴ The intertext between *Post-Production* and Chuck Palahniuk’s novel *Snuff* is unavoidable. In both cases, there is a pornographic movie being shot, and the author resorts to the deconstruction technique to point out how artificial the players’ appearance is. *Snuff* provides its reader with scenes of nipple shaving, use of artificial bronzer glues and wrinkle make-up as well. In addition, in both stories the movie being shot has an objective: in *Post-Production*, financing a baby; in *Snuff*, Cassie Wright wants to die after having beating a record by having sex with six-hundred different men.

procedures; the masking of the absence of a profound reality is represented by the unconscious realization of the void in her life and her husband's as well (which could account for their decision of having a baby in order to maybe fill the void); and the simulacrum, or the complete absence of reality, is where their deceased hyperreality takes place: during the more than seven days Tess and Nelson spend shooting their home adult video – and, obviously, before the post-production stage, when the two of them still consider themselves good-looking and worth watching on a sex video.

The choice for the title of the story – *Post-Production* – proves to be intelligent: it is precisely during this final step of filmmaking that the Clarks' hyperreality falls apart, when they are confronted with some tough facts: the exhausting process of having forty-eight hours of pre-conceived, unauthentic sex turning into a two-hour-long movie; the editing itself, the use of machines and the reading and understanding of codes, tapes and camera positioning; and, ultimately, the realization that what the camera shows is very different from what they have in mind at first. As the narrative voice ironically observes, "The difference between how you look and how you see yourself is enough to kill most people. And maybe the reason vampires don't die is because they can never see themselves in photographs or mirrors." (H, 143)

For the Clarks, the most difficult part of the editing process is to understand that "you have to create a false reality. You have to imply a relationship by putting events next to each other. This path of images, it has to lead the viewer from one sex act to the next. You have to fake a continuity. The illusion has to make sense." (H, 142)

The video made by the Clarks, with its amateur features, is nothing but the record of a regular couple's intimate moment with artificial movements. The sex recorded on camera is not simply "wasted sex", as they refer to the intercourses had by couples who do not tape

themselves, but it is supposed to have a feeling of a daily life scene – just like a reality show would do. Curiously, the Clarks watch pornographic videos themselves in order to remain excited as they make their movie, and, according to their perception, “the people in each movie seemed to be looking off camera at a movie of their own.” (H, 143) That places them in an interesting position in this ‘chain of voyeurism’: by displaying this awareness of watching and being watched, they document their aesthetic ideal of a pornographic sexual relation, turning themselves into transvestites, or sex dolls, in an adaptation of the idea that we are both content receivers and content producers.

That same aesthetic ideal has been molded by other pornographic movies (the “watching” part of the process), which leads them to resort to artificial looks and cliché sex moves in the hopes of having their movie viewed by others, in an effort Mark Andrejevic calls “the work of being watched”, as presented in section 3.3. On that note, Baudrillard says that to take sexual pleasure has no purpose, once the contemporary world requires us to give sexual pleasure, be it to ourselves or, in the Clarks’ case, to others. (2002, 47)

If today is indeed the realm of the screen (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 54), it is precisely on the screen that Tess and Nelson Clark realize how pathetic they are, in comparison to what they once thought they were. Their self-perception on the video includes phrases such as “two hairless animals”, “proportioned all wrong”, “with short legs and long necks and thick torsos with no definite waist”, “loose skin”, an erection that “looked twisted and dirt-dark, something from a bin in the back of a Chinese grocery”, or Tess’s lips and chest, which were too big and still with scars from her recent surgeries. (H, 144-5)

It is very easy to perceive transvestites when sexual issues are involved. However, that does not happen all the time. Two stories in *Haunted*, for instance, display women with one similarity (they look good on screen) and one big difference: one of them – Marilyn Monroe –

is a sex and beauty icon, whereas the other – fictional character Miss America – struggles for a few minutes of television exposure.

Something's Got to Give, told in a first-person narration by mysterious Countess Foresight, deals with her psychic ability to 'read' objects through touch. 'Reading' here means having access to past stories related to the objects through vision, most of them old possessions of dead people.

In order to justify herself and perhaps to give more credibility to her discoveries, she calls it a science, named 'psychometry'. (H, 319) One day, at an antiques store⁶⁵, the owner presents to her a jar containing a fetus, supposedly a baby Marilyn Monroe lost while filming *Some Like It Hot*. While there is no concrete evidence that Monroe was indeed pregnant at the time, it is interesting to highlight Palahniuk's choice of including in his collection of stories one of the greatest sex symbols in the history of pop culture –interesting but not surprising, given that Marilyn Monroe is a recurrent figure in Palahniuk's stories, as discussed before (p. 45)

What La Cicciolina did in terms of symbolizing the sexual transvestite in the 1970s and 1980s is, in many ways, what Marilyn Monroe did in the 1950s. For instance, if Miranda's description in *Speaking Bitterness* is taken into consideration once more, many common elements are perceived: platinum blond hair, soft and whispery voice and unquestionable femininity.

Also interesting is the fact that the antiques dealer affirms that she lost the baby because “[director] Billy Wilder made her run down the train-station platform, take after take,

⁶⁵ For the relevance of antiques stores in *Haunted*, see section 4.1.

wearing high heels” (H, 322), in a reference to a movie scene that eternalized Marilyn Monroe as a beauty goddess.

The anthological scene referred to by Countess Foresight in her short story contributed towards Marilyn Monroe’s unquestionable power as a pop and sex icon, and this same power absorbed the actress’ entire life in ways she was never able to control, making her appearance more preponderant than her individuality. This agrees with Baudrillard’s statement that good photography (Marilyn’s specialty) does not represent anything except for non-representability, or the exoticism of the object on camera. Baudrillard goes even further, as he uses Marilyn herself as an example of seductive women, who are always the most self-estranged. (2002, 152)

As she touches the jar, Countess Foresight has a vision that shows the old antiques dealer, much younger than now, actually killing Marilyn Monroe in her bed in 1962. The vision is so revealing and sensational that in her description, the Countess calls it “more compelling than the best television series. More honest than the longest documentary. A primary history source. A real player.” (H, 326) The references to documentaries and television shows is symptomatic of the Countess’ view on these media products, and their relation to the truth (either a supposed commitment to show it or a deliberate intention to manipulate it); ultimately, this belief is something she shares with her fellow confined writers, as perceived in the writers’ obsession with the stories to be told on television when they leave.

If Marilyn Monroe might be considered an ‘inspiring’ transvestite, one that sets beauty standards and somehow dictates rules to follow, Miss America is just the average reality show ‘star’⁶⁶: a young girl willing to have some kind of career on television. Good looks, as her

⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, Brazilian reality television has produced a few Misses America. One of them, however, seems to be the perfect copy of Palahniuk’s character: Joseane Oliveira, Miss Brazil 2002, who was a cast member of the third edition of the Brazilian version of *Big Brother* in 2003, and stayed on the show only for two weeks,

penname indicates, are not an issue. However, she is always “looking for what’s NOT to like” every time she looks in a mirror. (H, 46)

The pursuit of fame and good looks has caused such damage to Miss America’s perception of reality that even her ‘distortion mantra’ is different from other variations seen in Palahniuk’s work: whereas they usually come with the repetition of one word, such as “a copy of a copy of a copy” (FC, 11), or “the camera behind the camera behind the camera” (H, 51) or “an echo of an echo of an echo” (H, 379), Miss America’s detached hyperreality is represented by “a shadow of a reflection of an image of an illusion.” (H, 52)

The story Miss America writes is called *Green Room*, in a reference to the room where people wait before they shoot a television program. The whole story takes place in the green room, and it describes her anxiety before her live entrance on a typical daytime American TV show to advertise for an exercise device. She never has the chance of actually going on air, once it is a live show and segments of the program must be edited or cut. It does not come as a shock to the reader when the show producer tells her “Thank you for coming down, but we’re sorry. We overbooked and ran long...” (H, 54)

In terms of physical appearance, Miss America is not as flashy as Miranda, Mrs. Clark or Flint and Webber dressed as women. Nevertheless, she seems to be the one transvestite in all stories that tries to use her looks in a more coherent, less shocking manner, in spite of her blurred notions of herself and her body. Her apparent physical normality makes her an even more relevant character in Palahniuk’s ensemble, because she is probably a better representative of the average reader of the novel than the other transvestites in the stories.

until the public voted her out. In 2010 she returned as a member of the tenth edition of the show, only to be evicted after seven days. Apparently, this particular Miss Brazil is not destined to be famous, like Palahniuk’s Miss America. Between her appearances on *Big Brother*, Joseane Oliveira worked as an announcer and dancer in low-quality late TV shows in small channels.

The very archetypal image of Miss United States is supposed to represent what is best about the American Dream, and yet, there are downsides to this dream as well. The exaggeration and lack of perspective of the beauty-pageant-contestant kind of girl had already been presented and mocked in movies such as *Miss Congeniality* and, in a more critical and specific way, in *Little Miss Sunshine* (beauty pageants for children). What Palahniuk does with his Miss America is to simply point out how pathetic life can be for people who fail to recognize their limitations by hiding in their hyperreality.

What the transvestites presented so far show us is that everyone is the manager of their own image (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 23). The short stories and the writers who create them are significant evidence of that fact, given that they manage to alter their appearance according to their needs through the abundant mutilation that takes place in the abandoned theater.

In a twisted way, that makes all of them transvestites. Considering Baudrillard's idea that images nowadays are based on their functionality and their efficiency in appearing acts, it is possible to adapt Baudrillard's thinking for the purpose of mutilation in the story. "What is sought today is not so much health, which is an organic equilibrium, as an ephemeral, hygienic and promotional radiance from the body – much more a performance than an ideal state." (2002, 23)

If the idea of health as the ideal state is replaced with the notion of handicap as something ideal, it comes full cycle with the mutilation present in *Haunted* and in Chuck Palahniuk's work as a whole, as presented in section 2.2 (p. 52). Mutilation is functional, fake and should have a well-defined purpose in the writers' future performances on screen. It is expected that the bruises and scars will be seen as evidence of stories – or, in Baudrillard's term, to "promote" these stories. Even if the idea in the previous quotation is to be taken

literally it will be echoed in some parts of Palahniuk's short stories, such as in *The Nightmare Box*, when the narrator describes people's teeth in an art gallery: "Their teeth white, as if they never used teeth for anything except to smile." (2005, 212) In other words, functionality tops any other possible priority.

That leads back to the idea of the 'child-prosthesis', epitomized by the made-over Michael Jackson. If the transsexual state of affairs that characterizes the contemporary world is marked by a confusion of categories leading to virtual sexual indifference (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 12), it is possible to claim that, by analogy, the writers in *Haunted* become 'people-prosthesis'. They inflict the others and themselves mutilation in order to level with each other. In the hyperreality they live in, the ideal is to have bruises and scars to show in the future. Their physical changes do not necessarily involve sexual characteristics, or features that make them more or less sexually appealing. However, they do dream of mutilations that set them free from categorizations and pre-established social orders that, for many reasons, do not suit them anymore or have never suited them.

Two are the perspectives to be taken into consideration here: the story narrated by that undefined narrative 'we', that shows the writers' lives in confinement; and a speculative notion of what would happen when (or if) somebody indeed rescued them alive from confinement.

Within the theater, the objective the writers impose on themselves is to be as physically destroyed as possible. The 'mutilation frenzy' takes place, and as far as body destruction is concerned none of them differs from the others, once they all achieve such an objective. Indeed, they are all either dead or handicapped by the end of the story. In the micro-universe Chuck Palahniuk creates, mutilation is the rule, and corresponds to cosmetic

surgery, prostheses and make up, all of them devices people use in the outside world to look better; in both cases, they are one step closer towards transvestitism.

Outside the theater, or after the novel is over, we are left to speculation. The ending indicates that they refuse to leave the theater when Mr. Whittier finally unlocks them, and the reader does not get to see if or how possible survivors would display their scars and handicaps on the media. However, it is only logical to imagine that the interplay of differences Baudrillard mentions – that is, how people ‘play’ with their differences in a social level – should play a much bigger role for the remaining writers.

In the outside world, where the standard still is non-mutilation and complete bodies, the missing toes and fingers would cause an effect in either way: if they managed to sustain the claim to truthfulness in their fake stories, the scars would indeed come out as mementos of a harsh experience, and the writers would certainly get some publicity that could even help them sell some books; on the other hand, if truth came out and the falsity of the traumas were revealed, they would still be on the papers and TV news as insane people, or, which is even more likely, as the kind of people who would do anything for Andy Warhol’s fifteen minutes of fame – in which case they would fall in the same category as virtually any regular former participant of a reality show.

If the transvestites are ‘gender-benders’, with ‘gender’ here is seen as one category among many, by analogy it is possible to affirm that the writers in *Haunted* are ‘form-benders’ or ‘shape-benders’. The transvestite’s gender is difficult – perhaps impossible – to define. After the mutilation experiences, the writers’ human forms – the feature that ultimately defines them as humans – becomes blurred as well (just like Lady GaGa and her prostheses). It is interesting to point out that some of the writers already displayed some kind of deformities prior to their confinement: Mrs. Clark (multiple body changes towards a

Cicciolina kind of body); Miss America (blurred notions of her own appearance, a classic symptom of eating disorders such as bulimia or anorexia nervosa); Baroness Frostbite, whose gums are pulled back, with “the brown root of each tooth exposed” (H, 333); Saint Gut-Free has a missing part of his intestine and is overwhelmingly skinny; and finally, Mr. Whittier, who suffers from progeria, a “genetic defect in the protein lamin A will make their cells fall apart. Aging them seven times the normal rate. (...) Mr. Whittier, with his crowded teeth and big ears, making his body 126 years old.” (H, 113)

It is relevant to notice that the one responsible for the retreat is himself a sort of ‘form-bender’, a transvestite from the very beginning. As the writers give themselves scars, they modify their shapes, developing a sort of bond with the already modified Mr. Whittier, who therefore proves to be a seductive character: “in seduction the distance between the Same and the Other, is abolished.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1990, 67)

Another sort of transvestite, one that deals with a complete inversion of social or moral values, is also perceived in the novel: the ‘category-benders’. People who fall in a certain social category and for some reason make an effort to refuse or deny such fact. *Slumming* is the short story that epitomizes that kind of transvestitism. Possibly one of the clearest expressions of Palahniuk’s self-proclaimed intention to depict the opposite of the American Dream, *Slumming* is narrated by the former socialite Lady Baglady, a wealthy woman who describes how she and her husband dress as homeless people and go out in the street, and the advantages they have by doing so.

A total inversion of social and material values pertaining to the American Dream underpins Lady Baglady’s (or Mrs. Evelyn “Muffy” Keyes) unique type of transvestitism.

The reader is warned that something is wrong from the very beginning, when it is revealed that Mrs. Keyes' "new rule is: No radio. No television. No newspaper"⁶⁷ (H, 67).

The presence of the expression 'new rule' in the opening is significant, because it sets the tone for the rest of the story and the narrative: Lady Baglady becomes a weird transvestite based on an enormous group of new rules, most of them verbalized by her socialite friend Elizabeth Ethbridge Fulton Whelps, better known in their social circles as 'Inky'.

More than toying with Inky's long name and her nickname, both typical for socialites, Palahniuk also presents her as a sort of trend-setter, the kind that dictates tendencies that will certainly be followed by her less creative friends. Some of the rules presented by Inky are: being absent is the new being present; poverty is the new wealth; social divers are the new social climbers; nobodies are the new celebrities; public is the new private; insanity is the new sanity; dressing down is the new dressing up; looking bad is the new looking good; and poverty is the new nobility. All those rules lead to one simple conclusion, as Lady Baglady eventually admits: "'Having nothing to lose," Inky said, "is the new wealth." (H, 79)

The main motivation for Lady Baglady, her husband, Inky and all their other upper-class friends who go slumming is their desire of not having any kind of social responsibilities, which gives them the chance of acting in ways they are not supposed to – or, as the narrator puts it, it is "their vacation from being Packer and Muffy Keyes, the textile CEO and the tobacco-products heiress. Their little weekend retreat into the social safety net."⁶⁸ (H, 75)

⁶⁷ This is another interesting twist in *Slumming*: as discussed in section 3.3, the presence of media is a fundamental part of the writers' hyperreality. Therefore, Lady Baglady's short story twists orthodox notions consolidated within bigger social circles, but it also twists a crucial notion for the universe of writers portrayed in *Haunted*.

⁶⁸ Slumming is in many respects similar to the idea of Bunburying, presented in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). In the play, the character Jack Worthing, who lives in the countryside, adopts the name Ernest when he goes to London, so that he can enjoy the nightlife in the city without social worries.

A sort of underground organization – reminding of the one presented by Palahniuk in *Fight Club*, slumming apparently brings a lot of wealthy people together:

The Global Airlines wino happens to be Webster “Scout” Banners. Him, Inky, and Muffy, they meet up with Skinny and Frizzi. Then Packer and Boater come join them. Then Shoe and Bones. They’re all drunk and playing charades, and at one point Packer shouts out, “Is there anyone under this bridge *not* worth at least forty million dollars?” (H, 75)

Slumming also includes sex making in the street, standing in line for free food and begging for money with written signs such as Inky’s, which reads “Single mom. Ten kids. Breast cancer.” (H, 76) All these actions obviously take place on the street, where anyone can see them, and that constitutes another twist in the story: the fake beggars claim that being on the street dressed as homeless people is the best way to hide, because people tend to ignore their presence – or their smell: “Stink for privacy, the new way to protect personal space. Intimidation by odor.” (H, 75)

However, the characters in *Slumming* are not the only ones trying to hide or to obtain some sort of advantage by pretending to be what they are not. *Crippled*, by Agent Tattletale, shows people try to fraud insurance by pretending to be unfit to work in order to obtain their retirement sooner. Agent Tattletale, who is also the narrator, must find those ‘transvestites’ and denounce them. What makes him fit for this mission is the fact that he used to be a retirement fraudster himself, as he admits when he investigates a woman called Sarah

Concomitantly, his friend Algernon Moncrieff has a non-existent invalid friend called Bunbury, which is convenient when he wants to escape social appointments.

Broome: ““Her life used to be mine,” I say. “I can see the way she thinks things are.”” (H, 277)

In his theorization about transvestitism, Baudrillard presents it as the fate of the sexual body – because it plays with the commutability of the signs of sex, and also as the path that leads from sexual difference to sexual indifference. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the fraudsters in *Crippled* and the rich people in *Slumming* are transvestites by tracing simple analogies: in both stories the characters manipulate their bodies, playing with the commutability of social, pre-conceived signs – what makes one either handicapped or extremely poor. Due to that fact, where differences are supposed to exist (homelessness versus wealth, ability versus disability), they do not. The characters blur categories, try to live in an artificial social indifference – with no specificities or differentiation, and ultimately convert themselves into social transvestites.

The short story that closes the ensemble in *Haunted – Obsolete*, by Mr. Whittier – epitomizes the loss of specificity that characterizes this kind of social transvestitism. By accepting without apparent questioning the idea of committing suicide – or ‘emigrating’, as the process is called in the story – the humanity presented in the story reflects that “excremental society whose development is uncontrollable, occurring without regard for self-definition, where the accumulation of effects goes hand in hand with the disappearance of causes.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 31)

Transvestitism is taken to its most extreme consequences in *Obsolete*. The setting implies that the end of the world is near – or, at least, of the people who live in it. The body (which, for Baudrillard, is the ultimate prosthesis through which people express their transvestitism) has become obsolete. (H, 393) In the apocalyptic world presented in the short story, all people have been convinced somehow that ‘emigrating’ is the only course of action

to take, which means that any trace of individuality has been erased. The indifference that characterizes the transsexual state of affairs has become so intense – for all people have become ‘suicidal transvestites’ – that there is no more space for transvestitism in all its other possibilities: sexual (such as Mrs. Clark and her husband), transsexual (such as Miranda), social (such as Lady Baglady and her friends and the people who pretend to be disabled to collect pension) or physical, such as the couple of bodybuilders in *Obsolete*.

Not by coincidence, the focus of the story lies on a family formed by a couple of professional bodybuilders with “bodies of ripped, defined muscle with only two percent body fat.” (H, 393) Considering bodybuilding as a means through which physical transvestitism occurs in normal conditions (not in a fully suicidal society), the couple’s passive attitude towards emigration indicates their lack of power or will to question anything, or their denial or inadequacy regarding this new configuration of the world: as people who have worried all their lives about fitness (in the athletic sense of the word), the couple eventually realizes that the work of a lifetime has become useless – which is an issue for them, considering that their lives were based on “hundreds of people applauding, watching them up onstage, pose and flex.” (H, 393) However, they continue to perform their physical activities, even if pointlessly. Tracee, the mother, keeps on “pedal[ing] her stationary bicycle, alone in the gym’s big empty aerobics room, pedaling to disco music while she yelled encouragement to a spinning class not there anymore” (H, 393), whereas the father weighs lifts, limited to light weights and machines, because there was no one observing him.

The sexual nature Baudrillard associates to the phantasy of transvestitism constitutes a useful tool to analyze Chuck Palahniuk’s novel of stories. Even when the sexual element is not present, analogies have proven effective in the expansion of the central idea, for *Haunted* presents a variety of transvestites: sexual, transsexual, social, physical or artificial; some of

them are hypothetical, or just too unrealistic; however, some are perfectly feasible and all of them – realistic or not – reflect our anxieties and fears, which leads to the certainty that no matter how much we believe that transvestitism is not part of our lives, the truth is that it is.

4.3. TERRORISM

Pollution, overpopulation, disease, war, political corruption, sexual perversion, murder, and drug addiction... (...) A constant reminder. A culture of complaint. Of bitch, bitch, bitch... (H, 392)

If cancer is the phantasy related to the idea that everything is aesthetic and transvestite is the one related to the notion that everything is sexual, terrorism is based on the premise that “everything is political”. Once more, the concepts of simulation and hyperreality play important roles, just as in the two other phantasies.

Baudrillard affirms that we are living at the age of the ‘transpolitical’, and that “[t]errorism in all its forms is the transpolitical mirror of evil. For the real problem, the only problem, is: where did Evil go? And the answer is: everywhere – because the anamorphosis of modern forms of Evil knows no bounds.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 81)

The irony in Baudrillard’s theory is in the fact that we ourselves have spread evil everywhere precisely by trying to avoid it at all costs. In many ways, the analogy he traces for the presence of evil due to our efforts to erase it is similar to the one he traces when he points out that AIDS is a virus created due to mankind’s obsession with prophylaxis and extreme

cleanliness: “in a society where it is no longer possible to speak Evil, Evil has metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms that obsess us.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 81) Terry Eagleton agrees with Baudrillard about the status of evil as something contemporary societies have tried to banish by arguing that “[i]f the word ‘evil’ is not to be found in the dictionary of political correctness, it is because it is thought to imply a particular theory of wrongdoing, one which regards it as springing from metaphysical rather than historical causes.” (2005, 115) This premise is paramount for the understanding of the confined writers’ behavior in *Haunted*, as well as for the ideas underpinning some of the short stories in the novel.

The writers’ objectives of fame and fortune are mainly based on the power of TV shows, movies and newspaper articles. The devices they rely on to construct their narratives and to increase their personal dramas show how aware they are of the impact information causes on the masses that access it, especially if it involves tragedy and demise. The fake traumatic experiences, the scars and disembowelment, and the constant election of a villain in their group show that the writers’ strategy is to twist the premise of not speaking evil – in fact, they intend to throw evil at people’s faces as much as possible. That could be easily associated to their “twisted aesthetics”, a recurrent idea in previous sections of this work; however, by trying to explore their dramas to the fullest, the writers display an uncanny method in their seemingly chaotic thinking, which might, after all, not be as twisted as it apparently is.

The events are, indeed, fake. Nevertheless, this is a fact we learn simply because, as readers of the novel, we have access to backstage information. Despite the lack of truth and extreme violence, they are feasible stories, a fact which can be proven on any given day simply by opening the newspaper at the crime section. The feasibility of such tragic situations, allied to a (sometimes morbid) curiosity intrinsic to the human being, corroborate

Baudrillard's premise of people's fascination with terrorism; after all, "[t]he social is aligned with all that has become residual: social issues are to do with ill-health, discrimination, exclusion, problematic behaviours" (HEGARTY, 2007, 93)

The social issues exemplified by Hegarty are all noticeable in *Haunted*: representing ill-health there are the writers mentioned in the section about cancer (Saint Gut-Free and his missing intestines, Baroness Frostbite and her facial mutilation, Miss Sneezzy and her rare virus, and Mr. Whittier and his progeria); discrimination is seen in writers who represent different archetypal underdogs, such as the Missing Link, who is originally from an Indian reservation, Lady Baglady and her rich friends who attempt to undergo the harsh situations of the homeless, and Comrade Snarky, whose story has a transsexual as its main character (p. 187). Finally, exclusion and problematic behaviors walk hand-in-hand in Palahniuk's writing. As the first chapter points out, the author has a taste for characters with severe social dysfunctions and a consequent difficulty to fit in. In *Haunted*, this applies to all the writers involved in the retreat.

Jesse Kavadlo affirms that Palahniuk "understands the distinctly human needs of both isolation and connection, and the ways in which our paradoxical ambivalence toward other human beings frequently goes awry" (2009, 108) The retreat proves to be a suitable example of that; it is a gathering of people in need of human connection (as a matter of fact, their failures basically consist on frustrated attempts of socialization) who end up forming a new society and, somehow, succeeding at connecting; at the same time, they have the chance of revisiting their history and producing short stories – hence the need for isolation.

The social structures that characterize the postmodern world are constructed based on models of hyperreality, which, sometimes, come in the form of statistics, computer models, data processing, polls (all of which sources that retain the main feature of hyperreality – the

loss of an initial reference of reality). The link between this idea and *Haunted* is in the fact that such data is supposed to represent the average individual – the TV viewer, consumer, voter. If we take into consideration Baudrillard’s premise that regular social structures are based on general information whose origin is unknown, it is arguable that the social structures perceived in the writers’ interaction in the retreat all aim at reaching the average individual – the one who will watch TV, buy or vote, for instance.

By mutilating, enhancing danger and drama and lying, the writers try to create a plot that, according to their viewpoint, will be appealing to the average individual – the one who will be interested in watching interviews and documentaries about the case, as well as buying memorabilia and sympathizing with them. In addition, by working so hard on details of their fake stories, the writers try to give the audience what they think the audience wants. What the writers in *Haunted* work with is the features of an idealized postmodern mass, which is eager for information and has pre-conceived ideas of what terrorist acts are like; therefore, the writers do what they can to deliver a story that will not frustrate viewers (and consumers): “This is how all the holdups, airplane hijackings, etc., are now in some sense simulation holdups in that they are already inscribed in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their presentation and their possible consequences.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 21)

The social structures are also characterized by the occupation of spaces on the part of the masses, which are defined by Baudrillard as by-products of consumerism. This is another postulate that finds echo in *Haunted*, given that the writers intend to achieve the masses, who, according to Baudrillard, are characterized by ‘hyperconformity’ (2008, 47) – passivity, high tolerance to events and catastrophes, obeisance, and the feeling of comfort brought by the unconscious certainty that decisions must be made, but that there are people to make them.

Indeed, for Baudrillard there is no terrorism without masses and mass media. The example he provides proves to be close to what the writers in *Haunted* have in mind: as he mentions acts of violence in Brussels in 1985, he points out that “[t]he most striking thing (...) is not their violence *per se* but the way in which the violence was given worldwide currency by television, and in the process turned into a travesty of itself.” (2002, 75)

By focusing on the spreading of news and the constant fear we have that something terrible might happen, Baudrillard removes the spotlight from the physical violence and directs it towards the terror. In spite of integrating the two ideas as well, Palahniuk shifts the focus by turning violence into a priority for him and his characters (probably a strategy to continue to reach the particular audience that seems to have embraced his work so passionately), and making psychological terror a less obvious – but still important – element.

Product Placement is a good example of how this works in the novel. In his letter, Chef Assassin instills terror into the owner of Kutting Blok through a series of innuendoes related to a possible killing spree involuntarily “sponsored” by the Kutting Blok top-quality knives. He has the targets in sight – critics who had written bad reviews about his cooking – and the tools to perform the service. Not one blood drop is shed in the story, but terror and fear pervade it, as the atmosphere of the letter hints that murders might take place any time. In addition, there is Chef Assassin’s clever use of the power of media and its contaminative capacity, given that “[t]he contagiousness of terrorism, its fascination, is every bit as enigmatic as the contagiousness of these other phenomena.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 38)

Another narrative that exemplifies the presence of terrorism in Palahniuk’s novel is *Civil Twilight*, in which Sister Vigilante depicts her going out and killing people in the street using bowling balls. By doing so, she establishes a series of interesting situations related to terrorism. Firstly, the simple fear that people start feeling to go out, given that the murders

become recurrent; secondly, the lack of pattern in the choice of victims or a concrete reason for them to happen. Sister Vigilante increases that feeling by allying herself to other *nonspecific-motive killers*, that is, serial killers whose reasons had been questioned as well: “Like Herbert Mullin, who killed ten people to prevent southern-California earthquakes. Or Norman Bernard, who shot hobos because he thought it would help the economy. What the Federal Bureau of Investigation would call *personal-cause killers*.” (H, 232) Sister Vigilante proves to be fully aware of the modern history of serial killing, not only by giving references but also by pointing out the utilitarian character of mass murder:

During the Atlanta Child Murders, while thirty kids were strangled, tied to trees, and stabbed, and shot, most of the city lived in security and safety they’d never known.

During the Cleveland Torso Murders. The Boston Strangler. The Los Angeles Slasher...

During these waves of murder, all crime dropped in each city. Except for the showoffy handful of victims, their arms hacked away and their heads found elsewhere, except for these spectacular sacrifices, each city enjoyed the safest period in its history.

During the New Orleans Ax Man Murders, the killer wrote the local newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*. On the night of March 19, the killer promised to kill no one in a house where he could hear jazz music. That night, New Orleans was roaring with music, and no one was killed. (H, 234)

Sister Vigilante takes terrorism to another level: she uses terror as an answer to terror, something that could be denominated counter-terrorism. By affirming that “[t]he police thought the killer was their enemy” (H, 232), she places herself on the side of justice, and highlights the benefits of her killing. The main idea in *Civil Twilight* mirrors the thinking

behind the writers' behavior in the retreat, once Sister Vigilante justifies her serial killing due to our need of a monster to believe in, or a "true and horrible enemy. A demon to define themselves against. Otherwise, it's just us versus us." (H, 233)

What Palahniuk presents in Sister Vigilante's narrative is a shift in values also perceived in other short stories, such as *Slumming* (jet-setters living the lives of beggars) and *Obsolete* (collective suicide as the new form of emigration). What these stories and the retreat have in common is the lack of reverence one must approach terrorism with pointed out by Terry Eagleton (2005, 15), who also claims that terror has its civilized uses and that it might be used effectively in social relations.

In his book *Holy Terror* (whose introduction is entitled *Invitation to an Orgy*), Eagleton highlights that terrorists tend to be underestimated by the masses, given that they are frequently seen as devoid of ideas, people who exert violence simply for the sake of it. As he defines the terrorist as somebody who uses terror with the intention of executing their political visions (2005, 1), Eagleton proves to have similar views to Baudrillard and Palahniuk. The writers in *Haunted* frequently rationalize their acts of violence – more often than not by finding a purpose in them – whereas Baudrillard affirms that "[w]e all collude in the anticipation of a fatal outcome, even if we are emotionally affected or shaken when it occurs" (2002, 76). More than giving a sense of reassurance when tragedy happens to others and not to us ("[c]loser to us, this is what terrorism is occupied with as well: making real, palpable violence surface in opposition to the invisible violence of security" (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 57)), terrorism has what Baudrillard denominates an *implosive* function: "and what implodes here is the political void (...), the silence of history (...) and the indifference and silence of everyone." (2002, 76)

Terrorism also has a configuration fitting in the postmodern society: just as we play concomitantly the roles of content receivers and content producers pointed out in the section about reality television and documentaries (p. 108), Baudrillard presents the idea of the *attempted role reversal* as he comments the 1985 episode of violence in a soccer stadium:

Spectators (English fans, in this case) turn themselves into actors; usurping the roles of protagonists (players), under the gaze of media, they invent their own spectacle (which – we may as well admit it – is somewhat more fascinating than the official one). Now is this not precisely what is expected of the modern spectator? Is he not supposed to abandon his spectatorish inertia and intervene in the spectacle himself? Surely this is the leitmotiv of the entire culture of participation? Curiously, it is in events of this kind that the modern hypersociality of the participatory variety is actualized – its own best efforts notwithstanding. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 76-7)

The previous quotation epitomizes the writers' action throughout the plot in *Haunted*. Apparently frustrated and passive in their natural environments – perhaps the kind of people that see life going by (spectators), they become protagonists in all possible manners. When they produce their stories, they tend to narrate past episodes of their lives, naturally focusing on themselves. Throughout their confinement, they “invent their own spectacle”, always aiming at a story more interesting than the official one. What, in their opinion, makes a story more interesting depends immensely on the crystallization of latent violence that characterizes contemporary societies: the audiences' anticipation of fatal outcomes – preferably visual ones, the taste for terror and the fascination and mass appeal originated from the terrorist model.

Mr. Whittier is an interesting figure when analyzing the presence of terrorism in *Haunted*. As a character in Palahniuk's novel, he performs several important roles: organizing

the retreat, being elected the villain among the group of writers, writing the short story that closes the collection (*Obsolete*), and being a leader in the abandoned theater, as he determines, for instance, when the artificial sun should come up (H, 118). Mr. Whittier represents the postmodern spectator very effectively: he produces content (he is a writer as well), he receives content (by pretending to die at a certain point, he has all freedom to observe the other writers interacting through hidden cameras, in the most Big-Brother-like fashion). More than interacting with the information produced, he offers the other writers the catalyst through which their talents might be fulfilled (he raises money for the retreat as he explains in *Dog Years* (p. 168), chooses the setting for the retreat and writes the suggestive invitation (H, 83-4)).

Baudrillard affirms that “a head of state – *no matter which one* – is nothing but the simulacrum of himself, and *only that gives him the power and the quality to govern*. (...) It is to his double, he being always already *dead*, to which allegiance is given.” (1994, 26) That comes full cycle with the way the writers deal with Mr. Whittier’s apparent death, as they manipulate and add drama to his death, in order to make it more fitting for their future stories:

No, we get to stage this scene. We’ll have him screaming with delirium. Mr. Whittier will be bleached pale and hiding behind his spread fingers, saying the devil is after him. He’ll be screaming for help.

(...)

In our version, we’ll kneel at Whittier’s bedside, to pray for him. Poor, innocent us, starving and trapped here but still praying for our devil’s eternal soul. Then a soft-focus dissolve and toss to commercial.

That’s a scene from a hit movie. A scene with an *Emmy nomination* written all over it. (H, 122)

Had not Whittier taken control of the retreat, he would not have become such an appropriate hypothetical villain. Adapting Baudrillard's words to the plot in *Haunted*, Whittier is a simulacrum of a ruler – he is as vulnerable and as much of an underdog as the others, but he does assume a sort of rule, and this is the very fact that places the target of “monster” so easily on his back.

Whittier is a ruler and a terrorist. His apparent old age, added to the fact he organized the retreat, grants him the prerogative of being a ruler in the retreat. The constant reinforcement on the part of the writers that he is “our villain, our master, our devil, whom we love and adore for torturing us” (H, 88) enhances his status as a simulacrum of a leader. It is natural for the leader to be chosen the villain, or for him to become a scapegoat, since “the king of chief is nothing without the promise of his sacrifice” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 25) Interestingly, at the end of the novel Mr. Whittier is locked outside the theater, which proves to be the worst of sacrifices the leader of this particular group could make. The writers' reluctance to leave confinement is symptomatic of the value hostages have for terrorism, as Baudrillard appropriately points out (2002, 38)

Nonetheless, Mr. Whittier is not the only terrorist in *Haunted*. In fact, each storyteller takes the role over, both in their present (the retreat) and their past (the stories they tell). Despite the immediate negative connections made to the term *terrorism*, Chuck Palahniuk is an expert in creating likeable terrorists. As Kavadlo points out, “Palahniuk asks readers to be with *and* against his narrators, just as they are with and against themselves” (KAVADLO, 2009, 108) Palahniuk's characters are in permanent conflict, which more often than not results in terrorist acts; however, Palahniukean terrorism has indelible traces of humanity, given that “[t]he terrorists are neither with us nor against us but are a part of us” (KAVADLO, 2009, 109). Some of Palahniuk's most important characters have their likability based on their

frequently reckless conduct. Examples of “human” terrorists in Palahniuk’s repertoire are Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, Brandy Alexander in *Invisible Monsters*, Buster ‘Rant’ Casey in *Rant* and Pygmy in the eponymous novel.

Taking all of Palahniuk’s characters into consideration, the label “terrorist” is perhaps best applicable to Tender Branson, the hijacker in *Survivor*. As he records his story into the black box of the airplane he has hijacked, Tender presents his anguish, traumas and failures in life. It is interesting to note that *Survivor* was published in 1999, just two years before the 9/11. This fact solidified Palahniuk’s reputation as a creator of terrorists, and, all things considered, accounts for the author’s sensibility, as he anticipates not only the acts of terror that became true at the dawn of the new millennium, but he also captures the essence of postmodern terrorism in all its facets.

Presenting characters with severe behavioral issues is an aspect that grants Palahniuk a great deal of negative criticism, given that such issues eventually lead to unorthodox reactions – murder, destruction, suicide, mutilation, vandalism, and many others well-exemplified in *Haunted*. However, the apparently strange characters in his stories have a fundamental social role: they are permanent social antagonists.

[A]bsolute freedom lives only in the act of negation (...) it needs obstacles and antagonists to come alive. There can be no transgression without boundaries to burst through, yet no boundaries in a world which absolute freedom dissolves to so much amorphous sludge. This need for antagonists is clear enough in contemporary politics: if the Soviets have ceased to play the role of Other on the Western stage, then the Muslims might always act as understudies. (...) enemies also constitute precious evidence of the existence of an objective world, thus lending your own projects some ontological credibility (EAGLETON, 2005, 84)

The constant elections of villains in the retreat account for the necessity the confined writers have of finding a figure that will work as an antagonist within the social structure they have. And by inventing extreme stories to be exploited on the media, they aim at placing themselves as antagonists within the larger social structure – not with the status of terrorists, but of victims of terrorism instead. Such a strategy comprises an onus – permanent handicap and physical pain – and an apparently stronger bonus – permanent sympathy and pity.

Terrorism “resists the certainties of an atrophied power system and attacks the system (...) [it] is not about the supposed goals of an organization, but a process that exceeds these goals while using them as its initial rationale.” (HEGARTY, 2007, 95) By attacking the system, cause and effect are absolutely lost in terrorism (2007, 97). In *Haunted*, those premises are applicable because of the human or mundane motivations behind terrorist acts. Seeing Mr. Whittier as a terrorist and his retreat as a terrorist act, we might consider his reasons for gathering a number of people and locking them up. Are they supposed to get together and undergo a cultural experience culminating with literary production? Or does Whittier understand that the world is full of people like him, with little or no space in social circles, and the retreat is meant to be an attempt of redemption or belonging for those taking part in it? If that is the case, Whittier should be seen as a humanitarian, rather than a terrorist.

On the other hand, there is the chance that Whittier is merely demented and self-centered (and, let us be honest, most teenagers – like Mr. Whittier – are indeed self-centered), in which case Baudrillard’s postulates make full sense: he gathered “guinea pigs”, locked them up, and tried to have his own way, using terrorism as a means to fulfill his desires.

Cause and consequence of terrorism end up blurred in *Haunted*, and the action most certainly exceeds the intention of terrorists. The best example of such a fact in the novel is the exaggerated mutilation and the excessively fake drama, which eventually leads the reader to

the impression that everything is “too much”. At a certain point, the writers’ compulsive behavior (search for a villain, scars, lies, dramatizing) seems to take place simply for the sake of it. Although they repeat throughout the narrative the media-related excuses for their behavior, it seems that both the repetition and the actions happen mechanically.

Underpinning the mechanization of actions in the novel is indeed an aspect related to media and the masses that Baudrillard claims to be a major feature of American society: “[t]he screen idols are immanent in the unfolding of life as a series of images. They are a system of luxury prefabrication, brilliant syntheses of the stereotypes of life and love. *They embody one passion only: the passion for images*, and the immanence of desire in the image.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2010, 59)

Without a doubt, the writers in the retreat intend to become screen idols, and the way Palahniuk presents them in his novel (pennames) shows that they already are stereotypes. Thus, it is only fitting that when it comes to creating a story to be told on the media, they have stereotypes and stereotypical images as references: the very bad villain who puts them through a lot of suffering, a few corpses along the way, and a happy couple in the end.

The title of the novel prevents us from forgetting that terrorism is necessarily implicit in the process of being haunted. As they deal with their ghosts, some of the writers verbalize their fears and anxieties in ways that make the connection between haunting and terrorism clear. As he comments the downsides of his sexual experiences in the swimming pool, Saint Gut-Free affirms in *Guts* that “[t]hat used to be my worst fear in the world: my teenage virgin sister, thinking she’s just getting fat, then giving birth to a two-headed retard baby. Both the heads looking just like me. Me, the father AND the uncle.” (H, 16), whereas Lady Baglady opens her narrative in *Slumming* stating that she does not watch television or read magazines or newspapers because she is afraid of the headlines (H, 67).

The terrorism seen in Palahniuk's work is related to his characters' *awareness of the world*: it is their perceptions and knowledge of how their society works and responds to events that lead them to act in excessive and overdramatic ways. There is even an element that might be called meta-terrorism: in their attempt of creating an ideally terrifying story, the writers feel anxious and frustrated when certain elements are missing, which might be ultimately interpreted as the fear of not having fearful enough embellishments.

The Saint calls himself the People's Committee for Getting Attention. All day, he's walking the length of every outside wall, banging on the locked metal fire-doors, screaming. But only banging with his open hand. And not yelling too loud. Just loud enough to say he tried. We tried. We made the best of the situation by being brave, strong characters.

We organized committees. We stayed calm.

(...)

Sister Vigilante calls herself the People's Committee for Finding a Decent Enemy.

(...)

Director Denial calls herself the People's Committee for Feeding the Cat.

(...)

Agent Tattletale knocks at Mrs. Clark's dressing-room door, saying, "Listen to me." Saying, "You can't be the victim, here. We've voted you the next villain."

Agent Tattletale calls himself the People's Committee for Getting us a New Devil. (H, 224-5)

For Baudrillard, terrorism is a natural consequence in a society whose behaviors are based on simulation. After all, simulation itself is terroristic, due to the fact that it is "always

of the real” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 47): it is based on the real, mostly on the information spread about the real by the media. Not coincidentally, Baudrillard claims that contemporary times are marked by the third order of the simulacra, which is a simulacrum of information (section 3.2, p. 120).

In some of his short stories, Palahniuk focuses on the relation between information and simulation, showing how powerful media can be and how effective it is in terms of spreading terror. *Obsolete*, discussed in the section about transvestitism (p. 207), epitomizes terrorism through its wasteland setting and the wave of suicide known as “emigration”, supported by major stores such as Wal-Mart and Rite-Aid, which sell the Going Away Kit, movie stars whose “emigration” receives media coverage, and important newspapers and magazines. *Obsolete* exploits a postmodern tendency pointed out by Baudrillard, who claims that “[t]he reign of incoherence, anomaly and catastrophe must be acknowledged, as must the vitality of all those extreme phenomena which toy with extermination while at the same time answering to certain mysterious rules.” (2002, 108) In fact, there is one sentence by Baudrillard which could have served as the main inspiration for the writing of Mr. Whittier’s end-of-world tale. These words acknowledge governmental use of terrorist techniques as a means of control: “For there is also a willful pursuit of (...) policies of provocation with regard to a country’s own citizens, attempts to fill entire sectors of the population with despair, to drive them to the brink of suicide: all of this is part and parcel of the policies of a number of modern states.” (2002, 77)

I would not go as far as to say that Palahniuk implies in his short story that a Western government would use this technique in real life; however, the criticism to consumer society is clear, as major symbols of mass media and commerce are mentioned, and the terrorism pervading the narrative is just as clear. For Baudrillard, policies of this kind are justified by

the appeal to crisis “of all modern states. They inevitably entail extreme measures of the sort mentioned, which are merely the diverted effects of a terrorism *to which the State is in no way opposed.*” (2002, 78) The political aspect of terrorism comes across in the story by the reference to a pamphlet divulging emigration issued by the government (H, 388), and the mention to a space program that had started the emigration wave, and its comparison to World War II: “[t]he same way that World War II gave us the ballpoint pen, the space program had proved the human soul was immortal.” (H, 389)

Another short story based on power of information is *Swan Song*, narrated by the Earl of Slander and discussed in the section about cancer (p. 173). By murdering former TV star Danny Wilcox and plating fake evidence of Danny’s pedophilia and zoophilia, the Earl of Slander, as a professional journalist, proves to be aware of what interests the masses. Violent actions are not enough anymore: now, they must be dissected, given that the audience will not be satisfied with less than full coverage and memorable details: “[t]he most striking thing about events (...) is not their violence per se but the way in which this violence was given worldwide currency by television, and in the process turned into a travesty of itself.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 75) Instead of focusing on the hypothetical full coverage the death of Danny Wilcox might get, *Swan Song* shows the processes news go through until, as Baudrillard claims, they become transvestites of themselves.

For prep, the whole week we talk, I surf the Internet. I download files from the former Soviet Union. Here’s a different kind of child star: Russian schoolboys without pubic hair, sucking off fat old men. Czech girls still waiting for their first period, getting butt-fucked by monkeys. I save all these files to one thin compact disc.

(...)

He’s asleep, still smiling, when I slip the gun into his mouth. (H, 96-7)

In that sense, *Swan Song* works as a micro-mirror of the writers retreat that backbones *Haunted*, whose narrative describes how the players of the story manipulate it to the point of transforming it in a transvestite of itself. Once again, it is important to point out the utilitarian aspect and usefulness of such enterprise. Stephen King asks in *Danse Macabre*: “Why do you want to make up horrible things when there is so much real horror in the world?” (1983, 13) The answer he gives seems to be the unconscious motivation for the Earl of Slander in his short story and for all the characters in *Haunted*: “[t]he answer seems to be that we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones.” (KING, 1983, 13)

Another facet of terrorism is exploited in *Exodus*⁶⁹ and *Ritual*, the short story written by the Matchmaker: the loneliness and helplessness of the realization that institutions whose main purpose is to protect in fact perpetrate crime. *Ritual* is based on a story had as an internal joke for the Matchmaker’s family, about one military officer who had the peculiar habit of forcing underprivileged defenseless girls to give him oral sex and cutting their heads off at the moment of orgasm. Until one day, while raping a gypsy, he cuts a piece of his own penis off while decapitating the girl. The Matchmaker’s uncle reaches a conclusion that comes full cycle with the applications of terrorism in *Haunted*: “Yes, terrible things happen, but sometimes those terrible things – they save you.” (H, 205)

Exodus shows Director Denial’s lonely battle against her co-workers in order to protect the dolls, which proves to be useless. The pedophile police officers are doubly protected: by each other, as they have an unofficial agreement of not exposing each other’s sexual preferences, and by the shield of respectability granted by the aura of law and justice. The inability of dealing with real-life and invented horror referred to by Stephen King, added to the realistic possibility of corruption within institutions, account for “the thesis that our

⁶⁹ A previous discussion about *Exodus* is found in section 4.1, p. 159.

culture creates the means for its own people to turn against it” (KAVADLO, 2009, 108), which is a core idea for the writers in the retreat and their views towards media and the ways to exploit it.

In a way, another kind of double protection is what Director Denial acquires when she joins the retreat: the inmates promise to keep each other’s manipulation of facts a secret, once it is a matter of common interest; concomitantly, the artificial aura of trauma and abuse behind the retreat provides them with an eternal reason for casual displays of excessive emotion, leading to popular sympathy.

The indifference with which they deal with casualties during the retreat reinforces Baudrillard’s emphasis on the relevance of arbitrariness rather than rational selection. This arbitrariness attacks the system’s undifferentiation, which leads to the conclusion that every individual is substitutable. Violence becomes so recurrent in the retreat’s hyperreality that at a certain point mutilation and death constitute ordinary elements of the writers’ daily life: “...Sister Vigilante says (...) Using a knife to pry up her fingernails, wedging the knife tip under and rocking the blade side to side to pop each nail up, then pull it off, she says, “The basis of any horror story is, the building has to work against us.” (H, 224)

Other examples are to be found in Mr. Whittier’s strategic yawning at Lady Baglady’s corpse (H, 89) and in the writers’ objective view about their peers’ demise: the narrative “we” observes that “[s]till, if he [Mr. Whittier] (...) bled to death – it would mean the royalties would only get split fifteen ways. Fourteen ways if Miss Sneezzy would hurry up and suffocate on the mold. Thirteen ways if Miss America is considerate enough to die in childbirth.” (H, 151) When Miss America indeed dies, the thought is repeated: “[o]ur story, the true-life epic of our brave survival in the face of cruel, cruel torture, well, the royalties get split only thirteen way. Now that Miss America bled to death.” (H, 345)

Dissertation, written by the Missing Link, brings an interesting approach to the issue of terrorism, one that is not exploited in other moments of the novel. The Missing Link comes from an Indian reservation, and he tells the story of a girl he calls Mandy Somebody, who is carrying on a research about the Bigfoot. Interestingly, Mandy's sentences are always interrogative, giving her an inquisitive, sometimes pretentious aura, which might be expected from a stereotypical academic student.

The aspect of terrorism present in *Dissertation* is its cosmopolitan character. Throughout her explanation, Mandy mentions names in several different languages of creatures who are supposed to be equivalent to the Bigfoot in different cultures: she mentions the Italian term *lupa maniera* (H, 297), the French equivalent *loup-garou* (H, 297), *varulf* (H, 297), *Yeti* (H, 299), the Canadian variety *Sasquatch* (H, 299), the Welsh term *gerulfos* (H, 300), or *Abominable Snowmen* (H, 299) in Tibet. Mandy wisely observes that this creature is a cross-cultural phenomenon that goes by different names, but represents the same (H, 299-300), which might be seen as Chuck Palahniuk's way of saying that an inexplicable fear is recurrent terrorizing characteristic in all societies.

The Duke of Vandals tells the story entitled *Ambition*, which deals with the illegal reproduction of works of art and the murder of artists. Art and terrorism have been associated by Baudrillard through the promise of easy profit: “[a]rt, which is everywhere susceptible to fraud, to copying, to simulation, and at the same time to the raving hyperbole of the art market, epitomizes a body irradiated by lucre.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 38) Terrorism also manifests itself in the short story when the Duke suggests that many artists, whose deaths have been officially explained by the most diverse causes, have actually been murdered by the organization he belongs to.

You might say he did his job too well, because the art critic send him off to kill a conceptual artist in Germany. A performance artist in San Francisco. A kinetic sculptor in Barcelona. Everyone thinks Andy Warhol died from gallbladder surgery. You think Jean-Michel Basquiat died of a heroin overdose. That Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe died from AIDS. (H, 132)

The Duke of Vandals enhances the terrorist tone in his remark by closing it with an acute observation: “[t]he truth is...you think what people want you to think” (H, 132), once again acknowledging the virulence in information as one of the most important means through which terrorism establishes itself. *Ambition* is pervaded by terrorism, and the device used by the Duke of Vandals to do so is questioning general certainties. The works of art displayed in museums and had as originals are not so, after all. The death of so many well-known artists, which seem to have been caused by so many factors, have all taken place for the same reason – murder for profit, or, as Philip Zimbardo names it, cupiditas. (p. 156)

Chuck Palahniuk proves to be aware of the importance of terrorism in postmodern societies. The truth is that fear and danger are concrete possibilities in big cities in the Western world. The paradox in the essence of terrorism lies in the fact that we try to protect ourselves as much as possible, but, as Saint Gut-Free cleverly observes, “[i]n the end, it’s never what you worry about that gets you” (H, 15)

It is virtually impossible to protect ourselves from every single danger. We have learned this, and one of the most frequent devices we use against this impossibility is anticipating disasters. Reenactments of real-life situations, super-exploitation of dramatic and traumatic events on the media and horror movies are some of the devices that allow violence to be a simulacrum of itself: “[t]oday’s violence, the violence produced by our

hypermodernity, is terror. A simulacrum of violence, emerging less from passion than from the screen: a violence in the nature of the image.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 75)

Approaching *Haunted* from the perspective of terrorism reinforces the idea that violence, psychological horror and fear are elements present in our lives. More than victims waiting for something terrible to happen, we are perpetrators and diffusers of terror, which depends on “intimidation, dissuasion, simulation, provocation or spectacular sollicitation.” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 79)

We do live, as Baudrillard and Eagleton affirm, a time in which speaking evil is forbidden. Social interactions are based on political correctness and fruitless attempts of neutralization of evil. An example of such a fact is a recent episode that took place in August 2011 in Brazil, when a judge banned the movie *A Serbian Film* from national movie theaters. The movie tells the story of a decadent male porn star who, willing to regain fame and reputation, signs a mysterious contract which says that he must do anything he is told. During the shooting of the film, the man is under the influence of drugs, and not fully aware of his actions. Scenes in the movie include murder, violence of all sorts, rape and innuendos of pedophilia.

My point is: banning the movie constitutes a serious kind of counter-terrorism. An individual with a certain authority and the means to prevent a film from being shown decides to exert her authority in a fashion that recalls the time of dictatorship – a phase of Brazilian history that is supposed to have ended. By banning the film, the judge gave it more visibility, once newspapers commented and questioned her decision. What is more, she affirmed that she did not watch the movie, which impoverishes her decision in drastic ways. I have not had the chance of watching *A Serbian Film* – I intend to, if it ever becomes available in legal ways – but I do not like not having been given the chance of deciding whether to watch it or not.

The judge's obvious lack of knowledge about horror movies contributed towards her uneducated final decision, given that the movie is probably not good, which is the case for most movies that try to exploit gore and extreme violence – I am the one to say it, for I have more often than not regretted wasting my time on low-quality movies of the kind.

The writers in *Haunted* never anticipate the possibility of being banned from the media. In fact, they are absolutely sure that media exposure will grant them compassion and human warmth forever. Their certainty of being liked comes from another certainty – that by telling their fake story on television, they will be doing a favor to mankind, as they are sure that they will be reinforcing in people the feeling that there is an uncanny otherness to which the masses do not belong. Their narrative on talk shows and documentaries – conveniently supported by an attractive package editors and sound mixers will be able to provide, thus consolidating the hyperreality and simulation that characterizes the postmodern spread of information – would have had an important function: being “a sure sign that “that” will never again occur.” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, 49)

5 WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO, NOW THAT THE ORGY IS OVER?

The “we” in the title of this conclusion is as complex and collective as the narrative voice in *Haunted*. If there is anything learned from the reading of the novel – or any other piece of writing by Palahniuk, for that matter – is that “we” is stronger than “I”. Social contact and human exchange is what his characters always want, and there is no way to obtain them if not through interaction with others. And yet, I must start with the “I” part.

As it seems to be the case with most things in my life, it all started with my curiosity for something radical, which would put me through a test and see what my limits were. That is how I started watching horror movies, and that is how I have fallen in love with them. That is how *Dracula* became my object of study six years ago, culminating in the writing of a thesis and an academic title. And that is how *Haunted* entered my life, in a permanent, painful and fun way. It is actually funny to think about the fact that I am writing the last words of a doctoral dissertation based on a book that I first read just to see if it would make me vomit...

Haunted is much more than a possible source of stomachache and shock. It is a work that deals with innumerable themes pertaining to human life, like redemption, belonging, restlessness, collectivity, fears, anxiety, failure. Its value for literary studies is unquestionable as well, since it elicits discussions about storytelling, literary creation, genre difference, and intertextuality. And, as the analysis as a whole proves, *Haunted* is a work of literature aware of the social and psychological contexts it is inserted in.

The choice of part of Jean Baudrillard’s theorizations to support my analysis has taken place due to the fact that Baudrillard displays the same sort of world awareness as Chuck Palahniuk – a kind of awareness with which I connect. These two gentlemen translate accurately many of my own impressions about the world and the people in it. However, it is

important to stress that, despite Palahniuk's extreme imagery and Baudrillard's tone, the worldviews presented here are not intended to cover the postmodern issue in its totality. The arbitrariness that is necessarily behind the writing of an academic work only proves the fact that "knowledge can only be partial, fragmented and incomplete." (WOODS, 1999, 21)

The troubles about Baudrillard are plenty: reading all of his production is virtually impossible, due to its quantity and means of publication (books, magazines, newspaper editorials, interviews). Once the issue of quantity is forgotten, there are Baudrillard's favorite topics, which are many and broad: Douglas Kellner, for instance, mentions "consumer society, media and technology, cyberspace and the information society, and biotechnology".⁷⁰ Because of such versatility, it is even difficult to find Baudrillard's books in stores, for they might be in the philosophy section, metaphysics, sociology or history, for instance.

Once I came to terms with the troubles about Baudrillard and his texts, I had to deal with *Haunted* and the effects of studying it. Main conclusion: the metaphor of broken glass in my eyes presented in the introduction did not suffice at all. Reading *Haunted* felt like many different things, and writing this work made me understand them. I felt outraged at times (as a more orthodox reader would), a little grossed out by a few passages (particularly by Baroness Frostbite's mouth and good old short story *Guts*), and I was able to notice that some of Chuck Palahniuk's attempts of outraging his readers were more naïve or entertaining than anything, such as in the adorable letter written by Chef Assassin to the manager at Kutting-Blok Knife Corporation in *Product Placement*.

I imagine Chuck Palahniuk gathering anecdotes and themes for *Haunted*, and I cannot help thinking that by bringing so many controversial topics to such a large collection of stories, his aim is to make sure that no reader of *Haunted* will be fully indifferent – and as the

⁷⁰ <http://gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/ baudrillardshort.pdf>. Access on February 9, 2011.

unique ensemble of writers in Mr. Whittier's retreat prove, there is nothing worse than indifference. Many are the elements in *Haunted* to which I respond as a reader, but the ones that called my attention the most were the pedophilia perpetrated by the police officers and detectives against silicone dolls in *Exodus*, the loneliness of Director Denial's battle to protect the same dolls, the sudden realization of the need of reprioritizing things Mrs. Clark undergoes (from changing her body to having endless sex to saving her daughter to killing her daughter – in order to save here again – to dealing with all of this), Saint Gut-Free hardships of being a teenage boy on whom expectations are placed, and the sight of fourteen-year-old Mr. Whittier looking over a hundred years old with his wrinkled tattooed body, which reminded me that my so far five tattoos will make me a “tattooed grandpa” in years to come. The decay of all the described corpses in the novel, and Palahniuk's excellent use of medical and technical vocabulary teach that after we die there is nothing left to our bodies except for decomposition, which is a valuable lesson.

Through his catalog of abject, dysfunctional and pathetic people, *Haunted* criticizes American society, and by doing so, it criticizes many Western cultures and societies (such as Brazil's) that have framed their identities based on the American model. In spite of its contemporary references and 21st century dynamism, the criticism could not be more old-fashioned: in a traditional (one might even call it “Victorian”) way, the underlying idea is that people who do the kinds of things the frustrated writers do in the novel will eventually have a fitting ending: death, humiliation, the permanent feelings of being outcasts and never belonging.

This is a work pervaded by many questions, which, in a sense, is Palahniuk's and Baudrillard's fault, given that their writings are always open to multiple interpretations, and some of their ideas are polemic. Some of the questions posed here are rhetorical, some are just

meant to tease, and I am afraid that I do not have a definite answer to most of them. Thus, my apologies come in the form of answer attempts to the most important ones.

Are the writers in Haunted monsters? That depends on how the term *monster* is approached. No, if you look for sheer evil in their actions. By forming a hermetic society with a limited number of members in the retreat, the writers in the novel concomitantly play the roles of victims and perpetrators. No character in *Haunted* has a fully evil nature. Yes, they are monsters, if we consider the etymology of the word presented in the introduction (p. 15), which focuses on the demonstrative aspect of monstrosity. The writers in *Haunted* show what happens when the system swallows you and you do not know how to deal with that (“[s]ystems, not just dispositions and situations, must be taken into account in order to understand complex behavior patterns.” (ZIMBARDO, 2007, 10)). The multiple handicaps and missing parts (fingers, ears, mouth, penis, buttock) at the end of the story constitute an interesting tribute to classic horror stories, in which monstrosity and otherness are marked by physical difference.

Then came a series of questions posed in section 4.1 (p. 165). They appear in a discussion about Mr. Whittier’s short story *Obsolete*, but they are applicable to the writers’ retreat as well. *How attached are we to life?* Very much, as the retreat proves. Being heard, seen on TV and loved are ways through which the writers aim at enjoying their life. No matter how contradictory this may sound, but the frustrated writers in Mr. Whittier’s retreat love life so much that they decide to give it a second chance, precisely by joining the retreat.

Are attachment to life and faith in humanity indeed obsolete ideas? Once again, the writers prove that this is not the case. Palahniuk himself admits that “all my books are about a lonely person looking for some way to connect with other people” (STF, xv). You do not write stories about people looking for people if you have no faith in humanity.

Is the human body obsolete as well, as Mr. Whittier suggests? The human body is not obsolete. It has changed and adapted according to the challenges the world and man have imposed to it. The human body is strong, but it does have its limits. In their frantic mutilation towards the ideal broken body, most of the writers in the retreat die, showing what happens when terror is not approached with the reverence it deserves (EAGLETON, 2005, 15).

What are our priorities as members of this postmodern society? Appearances, competition, success, efficiency, improvement. More than ever, these have become the advantages everyone has been looking for. And it is precisely in the pursuit of these priorities that the postmodern game Baudrillard describes so peculiarly takes place. He may have been called a “hyperbolic theorist of extremes” (HEGARTY, 2004, 91), but he did have an eye for the postmodern phenomena.

The Orgy is Over. Among all the postulates by Baudrillard, this is the one that reinforces the most his reputation as a pessimist. A post-orgy world recalls the destruction and absence in *The Wasteland* or the lack of will and power in *Waiting For Godot* – not coincidentally, two works highly influenced by contexts of war. The keyword for Eliot’s poem, Beckett’s play, Palahniuk’s prose and Baudrillard’s point of view is *exhaustion*. Possibilities are many and people use them up. Social and psychological roles now are much more confused, which makes life more complicated, to a certain extent.

What are we, content producers or content receivers? We are both. Our concerns now focus on receiving information (as much as possible, because information is power) and formatting the information we are going to spread. A natural consequence of this for Baudrillard is the enormous amount of useless information about useless topics circulating on the media.

What is true and what is fiction? Entertainment has borrowed the prerogative of truth into its name, and nowadays it seems that fiction must have a strong basis of truth underpinning it. *Reality television*. Television was supposed to be an instrument for the viewer to have access to a world of fictional entertainment. Now, there never is enough reality in TV shows. Sitcoms, talk shows, TV series... they all throw the reality of things at our faces, and we like it. In fact, we need it, because fiction that does not have the support of reality might be seen as alienation. The same happens to documentaries. Documentary has invaded fictional forms of film, and the claim to truthfulness is a strong device used by filmmakers and studios to call the audience's attention.

It is on this premise that the writers in *Haunted* base the building of their story. The term *excess*, so crucial for Baudrillard's notion of the end of the orgy, pervades the retreat. It is very easy to see excess in their violence, in their mutilation, in their faking. But the real excess, the one that indeed characterizes the action in Palahniuk's novel, is the excess of truth. They are so obsessed with it that they rely on lies, because there is never too much truth for them. Palahniuk remains loyal to his idea of "marginal" characters as representatives of reality: "the fringe is the future. Outside the mainstream, people are engaged in constant small experiments, testing new social models, new hierarchies, new personal identities." (in SCHUCHARDT, 2008, 9)

The phantasies. Cancer. Terrorism. Transvestitism. The first impact caused by the combination of these three words is grim; nonetheless, Baudrillard's theory – whose nomenclature is blatant on purpose to call the attention – shows that these three elements are natural parts of the postmodern world. Some kinds of transvestitism in *Haunted* sound too surreal to be true, such as the one aimed at through the mutilation frenzy; this is the part that accounts for the "fringe" Palahniuk refers to in his interview. However, other kinds of

transvestitism are so recurrent in contemporary life that they have been so crystallized that they have become the norm. Gyms, cosmetic surgery, insane diets, artificial suntan and the use of steroids some examples of the incessant pursuit for an idealized body that, more often than not, does not really exist without the help of a camera or photo doctoring devices.

Flash. Give me some _____. Shannon McFarland, the model in *Invisible Monsters*, fills her narration with a series of references to photographers' requests before shooting. The person taking the photo always asks the model to give him something: love, pity, sweetness, anger. Palahniuk is well-aware of the importance of the camera in our times. The writers in *Haunted* always want to be "the camera behind the camera behind the camera", thus having the final word about the truth. The image captured by the camera is what is supposed to outlive us, and be the ultimate version of the truth. This is perceived in Whittier's retreat, in the sense that the Earl of Slander and Agent Tattletale, owners of the tape recorder and video camera, respectively, replace yesterday's tragedies with today's: "[t]his moment foreshadowing the real horror of the next. This moment's already taping over the death of Mr. Whittier, which taped over the death of Lady Baglady, which taped over Miss America holding a knife to Mr. Whittier's throat." (H, 136)

Such is the virulence of information in our times, one of the main features of cancer as a phantasy. The importance of media for the confined writers is echoed in the real world, without a doubt. Irrelevant information about instant celebrities, viral videos whose only objective is multiple accesses, computer viruses that are transmitted disguised as messages containing photos or sex images of celebrities, urban legends, conspiracy theories. Indeed, it is so easy to produce and receive information these days.

The main feature that brings the phantasies together is a shift in the fascination exerted by forms. Based on Baudrillard's thinking, it is arguable that the writers in *Haunted* are

transvestites – for they manipulate their shapes until definition and differentiations are completely blurred – and cancerous, due to the virulence and emptiness in information that characterizes and influences their behavior.

Cancer might be seen as the phantasy that symbolizes *the means* through which they unfold their plan (viral and empty information, reliance on the media and general banalization – of art, of aesthetics and of violence itself), while the transvestite epitomizes the several *products* the writers and their characters try to become throughout their lives: prior to the retreat, they all tried to fit in different ways according to what they believed to be an ideal standard: gods of sex (the Clarks and Miranda), an artificial beauty queen (Miss America and, once again, Miranda), daddy's pride and joy (Saint Gut-Free, on whom lots of academic and athletic expectations had been put before losing his intestines), or a homeless beggar (Lady Baglady and her friends).

And terrorism. As the world witnesses the tenth anniversary of the 9/11, a lot has been said recently about terrorism and its negativity. Baudrillard sees terrorism as a means through which control is obtained and political will comes true. At the same time, discussions on terrorism allow us to think about intolerance, extreme actions and reactions, and the positive aspects of terrorism: reinforcing the feeling of security for those who are not victims of it and defining identities, in the sense that terrorism is a situation in which the *us versus them* is configured. The claim that *Haunted* is a story with terrorist characters is valid when we think of terrorism as a way of passing on a message, and also by remembering that it is a tale about individuals willing to sacrifice their lives and physical integrity for what they think is a higher purpose.

Fake realities. Hyperreality and the virulence of images are of the essence to make those fake realities take place. And do they. Palahniuk's novel proves that no matter how hard

we work, expectations are always too high. The ideal body is unattainable, the ideal family only exists in TV commercials, and, as the writers in *Haunted* imply, not even the ideal tragedy seems to exist.

Baudrillard forces us to ask ourselves some questions: how do we shape our idealizations? What is the source of our ideas about what is good, sexy and relevant? It is impossible to give satisfactory answers to these questions, and in the absence of a good answer, it is easier to ignore the questions altogether. The writers in *Haunted* do not bother to try to answer these questions, they simply take advantage of the rules of the game – a social game they feel they have been losing for a long time – and try to make the best out of the new situation they face. They are not the only ones to blame if “[t]he whole of advertising, the whole of political discourse, is a public insult to the intelligence, to reason” (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 73) Mr. Whittier and his gang might come across as lunatics. That, like the issue of monstrosity in the novel, depends on the eye of the beholder. In any case, Baudrillard has a fitting quote (when doesn’t he?) for that: “Nothing changes when society breaks the mirror of madness (abolishes the asylums, gives speech back to the insane, etc.) nor science seems to break the mirror of its objectivity” (1994, 9)

It is very easy for the reader to approach *Haunted* as an outsider and see the group of writers in the retreat as a bunch of crazy people. Chuck Palahniuk’s choice is to deprive them from giving interviews in Oprah Winfrey’s program or having their story turned into a movie. Be it as it may, their mission has been accomplished, even if it does not happen with the fame and love they had envisioned first. They reassure the audience, by giving people the certainty that things are still in control relative to the retreat. Palahniuk acknowledges that, affirming that “Thamus ruled that writing was a *pharmakon*. Like the word “drug” it could be used for good or bad, it could cure or poison.” (...) Written communication gives people what Thamus

called “the false conceit of knowledge”, a fake certainty that they understand something.”
(STF, 224)

Loss of boundaries. The first boundary lost in *Haunted* is the one of literary genres. It is called *A Novel of Stories*, and some critics have questioned the status of *Haunted* as a real novel. Is not the novel supposed to have one main plot and smaller episodes dependant on it? Can a work be considered a novel when it includes short stories and poems that work as epilogues?

Chuck Palahniuk’s fortunate subtitle invites to a discussion about the definition of novel as a literary genre. And, as it frequently is the case with Palahniuk, the discussions elicited by his work lead to questions that cannot be answered in one or two sentences. The problem here lies in the absence of an unquestionable definition for the term ‘novel’. Even Cuddon, whose conservative literary notions are used in the section about postmodernism (p. 65), admits that “[t]he actual term ‘novel’ has had a variety of meanings and implications at different stages.” (1998, 560)

‘Novel’ is a term of difficult definition, and that is so because it is a genre in constant development. If fragmentation is a major feature of the postmodern world, what is the problem about a novel in fragments? Perhaps Palahniuk’s (unconscious?) strategy of telling one story intertwined with smaller stories derives from his awareness that contemporary readers are not attracted to one long story.

The many tributes Chuck Palahniuk pays to classic Gothic literature reinforce the assertion that *Haunted* is a novel indeed, given that the rise of the former is directly connected to the development of the latter. More than a Gothic novel, *Haunted* is a collection of authentic horror stories.

According to Stephen King, horror, terror, fear and panic are “the emotions which drive wedges between us, split us off from the crowd, and make us alone.” (1983, 13) It is in the loneliness that *Haunted* provides that its main horrors arise; they come not only through obviously horrible scenes – which the reader must deal with alone – but also through the questions about life, society and feelings that it eventually poses to its reader. If the novel proves to be so aware of its postmodern surroundings, then it is only natural that it is considered a representative of the postmodern Gothic.

There is a mix of tendencies in the ensemble of stories in the novel, which happens due to the fact that contemporary Gothic does not support itself only on the supernatural. The mix brings the realistic element contemporary audiences need to get the “thrill” during the reading experience, and also the classic element responsible for the surprise, the unexpected, the shocking.

Another important boundary *Haunted* crosses is the one between reality and fiction. Palahniuk toys with this boundary-crossing in the choice of the professions of some of his writers: the Earl of Slander is a journalist – somebody who should be committed to the truth – whose story focuses on lies; Agent Tattletale is a government agent whose job consists on spotting liars; finally, Miss America is a pageant contestant with a wrecked view of herself which contrasts with the beauty and harmony she is supposed to represent. The blur between fiction and reality is what leads to the confusion and fragmentation typical of the postmodern world. As a consequence, other boundaries are lost, such as good and evil, good and poor taste, relevant and irrelevant.

It is true in a sense that nothing really disgusts us any more. In our eclectic culture, which embraces the debris of all others in a promiscuous confusion, nothing is unacceptable. But for this very reason disgust is nevertheless on the increase – the desire to spew out this promiscuity, this indifference to everything no matter how bad, this viscous adherence of opposites. To the extent that this happens, what is on the increase is disgust over the lack of disgust. (BAUDRILLARD, 2002, 73)

Saint Gut-Free. Mother Nature. Miss America. Lady Baglady. The Earl of Slander. Mr. Brandon Whittier. The Duke of Vandals. Mrs. Tess Clark. Director Denial. Reverend Godless. The Matchmaker. Sister Vigilante. Chef Assassin. Comrade Snarky. Agent Tattletale. The Missing Link. Countess Foresight. Baroness Frostbite. Miss Sneezy. Chuck Palahniuk. I know your names, and I will never forget them. I have not ignored you, I am not indifferent to you, and I have learned, almost as if I have been a member of your retreat myself, an undeniable truth.

That we are, have been, and always will be haunted.

All of us.

All.

REFERENCES

ANDREJEVIC, Mark. **Reality TV – The Work of Being Watched**. London : Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

APPIGNANESI, Richard; GARRATT, Chris. **Introducing Postmodernism – A Graphic Guide**. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2007.

AUFDENHEIDE, Patricia. **Documentary Film – A Very Short Introduction**. New York: Oxford, 2007.

BAUDRILLARD, Jean. **America**. (translated by Chris Turner) New York: Verso Books USA, 2010.

_____. **Fragments**. (translated by Emily Agar) New York: Verso Books USA, 2007.

_____. **Impossible Exchange** (translated by Chris Turner) New York: Verso Books USA, 2001.

_____. **Screened Out**. (translated by Chris Turner) New York: Verso Books USA, 2003.

_____. **Seduction**. (translated by Brian Singer) New York: St. Martin's, 1990.

_____. **Simulacra and Simulation**. (translated by Sheila Faria Gleiser) Detroit: Michigan University, 1994.

_____. **Telemorfose**. (translated into Portuguese by Muniz Sodré). Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2004.

_____. **The Conspiracy of Art.** Semiotext(e), 2005.

_____. **The Perfect Crime.** (translated by Chris Turner). New York: Verso Books USA, 2008.

_____. **The Transparency of Evil – Essays on Extreme Phenomena.** (translated by James Benedict). New York: Verso Books USA, 2002.

BENJAMIN, Walter. **The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility and other writings on media.** Belknap Harvard Press: Cambridge, 2008.

BEST, Steven; KELLNER, Douglas. **Postmodern Theory – Critical Interrogations.** New York: Guilford, 1991.

BLAZER, Alex E. *The Phony ‘Martyrdom of Saint Me’.* (pp. 143-156) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (ed.) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem.** New York: Routledge, 2009.

BOTTING, Fred. **Gothic.** London: Routledge, 2004.

_____. *In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture* (pp.3-15) in PUNTER, David. **A Companion to the Gothic.** London: Blackwell UK, 2001.

BRUHM, Steven. *The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It* (pp. 259-276) in HOGLE, Jerome E. **The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

BURKE, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful.* Available at <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/burkesublime.html>. Access on April 10, 2011.

CLERY, E.J. *The Genesis of Gothic Fiction* (pp. 21-41) in HOGLE, Jerome E. **The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

CUDDON, J.A. (editor) (revised by C.E. Preston) **The Penguin Dictionary of Literary terms and Literary Theory**. London: Penguin, 1998.

DEBORD, Guy. **A sociedade do espetáculo – comentários sobre a sociedade do espetáculo**. (translated by Estela dos Santos Abreu). Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 1997.

EAGLETON, Terry. **Holy Terror**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

HALL, Stuart. **A Identidade Cultural na Pós-Modernidade**. (translated by Tomaz Tadeu da Silva and Guacira Lopes Louro). Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2006.

HANTKE, Steffen. *Blood on the Bookstore Floor: Chuck Palahniuk and the Case of the Fainting Reader* (pp. 196-209) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (editors) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

HEBDIGE, Dick. *Staking Out The Posts* (pp. 181-207) in **Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things**. London: Routledge, 1988.

HEGARTY, Paul. **Jean Baudrillard – Live Theory**. Cornwall: Continuum, 2004. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

HOGLE, Jerome E. **The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

HOLMES, Su; JERMYN, Deborah. (org.) **Understanding Reality Television**. London: Routledge, 2004.

HORROCKS, Chris; JETVIC, Zoran. **Introducing Baudrillard**. New York: Totem Books, 1997.

KAVADLO, Jesse. *The Fiction of Self-Destruction – Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist* in SCHUCHARDT, Read Mercer (editor). **You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection**. Dallas: Benbella, 2008.

_____. *With Us or Against Us – Chuck Palahniuk's 9/11* (pp. 103-115) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (ed.) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

KELLNER, Douglas. **Entry on Jean Baudrillard**. Available at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>. Access on February 10, 2011.

KEREKES, David; SLATER, David. **Killing For Culture: Death Film From Shockumentaries to Snuff**. New York: Critical Editions, 2007.

KING, Stephen. **Danse Macabre**. New York: Berkley Books, 1983.

KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (editors). **Reading Chuck Palahniuk: American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

KUHN, Cynthia. *I Am Marla's Monstrous Wound: Fight Club and The Gothic*. (pp. 36-48) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (ed.) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

KRISTEVA, Julia. **Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection**. (Translated by Leon S. Roudiez) New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

LAWLESS, Andrew. **Those burnt tongue moments - Chuck Palahniuk in interview**. Available at http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page1/_chuck_palahniuk_haunted_interview.html. Access on January 21, 2011.

LIMA, Maurício; ZAKABI, Rosana. O horror fora da tela. **Revista Veja**, November 10, 1999. Available at http://veja.abril.com.br/101199/p_038.html. Access on October 24, 2002.

LYOTARD, Jean-François. **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979.

NG, Andrew. *Destruction and the Discourse of Deformity – Invisible Monsters and the Ethics of Atrocity* (pp. 24-35) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (ed.) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

OLIVEIRA, Henrique Leonardi de. **Fight Club: Clash of Ideas**. 2010. 51 p. End-of-course monograph (major in English). Porto Alegre: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), 2010.

PALAHNIUK, Chuck. **Choke: A Novel**. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

_____. **Diary: A Novel**. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

_____. **Fight Club**. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996.

_____. **Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon**. New York: Crown-Randon, 2003.

_____. **Haunted: A Novel of Stories**. New York: Doubleday, 2005.

_____. **Invisible Monsters**. New York: Norton, 1999a.

_____. **Lullaby: A Novel**. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

_____. **Pygmy**. New York: Anchor Books, 2009.

_____. **Rant: An Oral Biography of Buster Casey**. New York: Doubleday, 2007.

_____. **Snuff**. New York: Anchor Books, 2008.

_____. **Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories**. New York: Doubleday, 2004.

_____. **Survivor: A Novel**. London: Vintage Books UK, 1999.

_____. **Tell-All**. London: Jonathan Cape UK, 2010.

PARKER, Joshua. '*Where you're supposed to be*': *Apostrophe and Apocalypse in Chuck Palahniuk* (pp. 88-99) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (editors) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

PINKER, Steven. **The Blank Slate**. London: Penguin Books, 2002.

PUNTER, David. **A Companion to the Gothic**. London: Blackwell UK, 2001.

REIS, Andréia Dieter. **The Martyrdom of Saint Me: Choking Victor**. 2010. 75 p. End-of-course monograph (major in English). São Leopoldo: Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS), 2010.

ROSCOE, Jane; HIGHT, Craig (org.) **Faking It – Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality**. New York: Manchester University Press, 2001.

SCHUCHARDT, Read Mercer (editor). **You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection**. Dallas: Benbella, 2008.

SIMMONS, David; ALLEN, Nicola. *Reading Chuck Palahniuk's Survivor and Haunted as a Critique of 'The Culture Industry'* (pp. 116-128) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (editors) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

SLADE, Andrew. *On Mutilation: The Sublime Body of Chuck Palahniuk's Fiction* (pp. 62-72) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (ed.) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

SNIPP-WALMSLEY, Chris. *Postmodernism* (pp. 405-426) in WAUGH, Patricia (editor). **Literary Theory and Criticism – An Oxford Guide**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

SONDERGARD, Sidney L. *Chuck Palahniuk and the Semiotics of Personal Doom: The Novelist as a Escape Artist* (pp. 9-23) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (ed.) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

STIRLING, Kirsten. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jackass* (pp. 119-132) in SCHUCHARDT, Read Mercer (editor). **You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection**. Dallas: Benbella, 2008.

TRUFFIN, Sherry R. *'This is what passes for free will': Chuck Palahniuk's Postmodern Gothic* (pp. 73-87) in KUHN, Cynthia; RUBIN, Lance (editors) **Reading Chuck Palahniuk – American Monsters and Literary Mayhem**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

VALBY, Karen. **Chuck Palahniuk Does Not Attend Fight Club** in *Entertainment Weekly* 730 (2003): 62-64, 66-67.

WAUGH, Patricia. **Literary Theory and Criticism – An Oxford Guide**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in **The Complete Illustrated Stories, Plays and Poems of Oscar Wilde**. Chatham: Chancellor Press, 1991.

WOODS, Tim. **Beginning Postmodernism**. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999.

ZANINI, Claudio Vescia. **The Myth of the Vampire and Blood Imagery in Bram Stoker's *Dracula***. 2007. 154 p. Master's thesis (literatures in English). Porto Alegre: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), 2007. Available at <http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/12102/000619440.pdf?sequence=1>. Access on July 20, 2011.

_____. *Evil and Abjection in Haunted*. (pp. 205-213) in **Revista Contingentia**. Volume 3, number 2, 2008. Available at www.seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/contingentia/article/view/6962/4493. Access on December 18, 2008.

ZIMBARDO, Philip. **The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Into Evil**. New York: Random House, 2007.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I– COMPARATIVE CHART OF CHUCK PALAHNIUK’S NOVELS

TITLE / YEAR	IMPORTANT MALE CHARACTERS	IMPORTANT FEMALE CHARACTERS	THEMES
<i>Fight Club</i> ©1996	1. Tyler Durden 2. Jack	1. Marla Singer	The Double (double personality)
<i>Survivor</i> ©1999	1. Tender Branson	1. Fertility	1. Airplane hijacking 2. Terrorism 3. Religious obsession
<i>Invisible Monsters</i> ©1999	Shane McFarland (later Brandy Alexander) Evan Cottrell (later Evie Cottrell)		1. The Double (siblings) 2. Transexualism 3. Mutilation
	2. Manus Kelley	2. Shannon McFarland	
<i>Choke</i> ©2001	1. Victor Mancini 2. Denny	1. Ida Mancini 2. Peggy Marshall	1. Sex addiction 2. Dysfunctional mother-son relationship
<i>Lullaby</i> ©2002	1. Carl Streater 2. Oyster	1. Helen Hoover Boyle 2. Mona	1. “Conspiracy theory” 2. Supernatural 3. Mysterious African tradition
<i>Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon</i> ©2003	Real people		Memories of Palahniuk’s hometown and early years
<i>Diary: A Novel</i> ©2003	1. Peter Wilmot	1. Misty Wilmot	1. Loss 2. Art 3. Oppression
<i>Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories</i> ©2004	Real people		Autobiographical short texts
<i>Haunted: A Novel of Stories</i> ©2005	19 in total *		*
<i>Rant</i> ©2007	1. Buster “Rant” Casey	1. Echo	1. Vandalism 2. Violence
<i>Snuff</i> ©2008	1. Branch Bacardi (Mr. 600) 2. Mr. 72 3. Mr. 137	1. Cassie Wright 2. Sheila the wrangler	1. Pornography 2. Death through sex 3. Cinema
<i>Pygmy</i> ©2009	1. Operative 67 (Pygmy) 2. Operative 23 (Tibor) 3. Operative 19 (Ling)	1. Operative 36 (Magda)	1. Communism 2. Conspiracy theories
<i>Tell-All</i> ©2010	1. Webster Carlton Westward III	1. Hazie Coogan 2. Katherine ‘Miss Kathie’ Kenton 3. Lillian Hellman	1. Cinema and fame 2. Biography writing 3. Film noir 4. Movie divas
<i>Damned</i> ©2011 **	-	1. Madison	1. Hell 2. Sins and punishment (?)

* See appendix II.

** Unpublished work. Information accurate as of August 23, 2011.

APPENDIX II - CHART OF SHORT STORIES IN *HAUNTED*

Author	Title	Main themes and images	Ending
1. Saint Gut-Free	<i>Guts</i>	Guts Masturbation Body mutilation Unforced Incest	Survives.
2. Mother Nature	<i>Foot Work</i>	Masseuses Murder Mafia	Survives.
3. Miss America	<i>Green Room</i>	The American Dream TV commercials	Bleeds to death.
4. Lady Baglady	<i>Slumming</i>	Homeless people Ring made of husband's ashes Inversion of values Vain society	Mutilates herself to death.
5. The Earl of Slander	<i>Swan Song</i>	Murder Planting fake evidence (pedophilia & zoophilia) Brown press	Survives.
6. The Duke of Vandals	<i>Ambition</i>	Falsification or artworks murder	Dies of a skull fracture.
7. Mrs. Clark	<i>Post-Production</i>	Decadent couple having sex Pornography Artificiality	Stabbed in the stomach. Has her left leg eaten by Director Denial.
	<i>The Nightmare Box</i>	Teenage Cassandra comes across a mysterious object	
	<i>Poster Child</i>	Deterioration of Cassandra's body and mind	
	<i>Cassandra</i>	Killer returns to talk to victim Cassandra's death	
8. Director Denial	<i>Exodus</i>	Anatomically correct dolls Pedophilia and rape	Survives.
9. Reverend Godless	<i>Punch Drunk</i>	Transvestitism Apology to Violence	Survives.
10. The Matchmaker	<i>Ritual</i>	General dictator Cruelty in the army Rape Unforced self-mutilation	Has his penis cut off by Reverend Godless. Dies of hemorrhage.
11. Sister Vigilante	<i>Civil Twilight</i>	Bowling balls Serial killer	Survives.
12. Chef Assassin	<i>Product Placement</i>	Butcher Serial killer Blackmail	The narrator implies he is going to die in a near future.
13. Comrade Snarky	<i>Speaking Bitterness</i>	Transsexualism Sexual abuse Bullying	Apparently dies, has her flesh cut and eaten by the others. Dies of shock.
14. Agent Tattletale	<i>Crippled</i>	Liars – pension collection Murder Tattletale	The narrator implies he is going to die in a near future.
15. The Missing Link	<i>Dissertation</i>	The werewolf Collective murderer	Chokes to death with the head of the

		Social prejudice	Matchmaker's penis.
16. Countess Foresight	<i>Something's Got to Give</i>	Psychic powers Marilyn Monroe Murder	Her chest does not move at the end. Implicit death.
17. Baroness Frostbite	<i>Hot Potting</i>	Mouthless woman Religious man Mouth mutilation Body Melting	Survives.
18. Miss Sneazy	<i>Evil Spirits</i>	Virus contamination	Stabbed to death.
19. Mr. Brandon Whittier	<i>Dog Years</i>	Progeria Pedophilia Blackmail	Apparently dies, but returns at the end. Ends up locked outside the theater.
	<i>Obsolete</i>	Adam and Eve Body builders Apology to suicide Mass hysteria Conspiracy theory (life in other planets)	

ANNEXES

ANNEX A – SYNOPSIS OF *FIGHT CLUB* FROM *THE CULT*

Fight Club

"The first rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club." The second rule is the same. Should we even be talking about *Fight Club*?

Chuck Palahniuk's explosive first novel comes to us from the point of view of an unnamed narrator. Struggling with insomnia, the narrator find solace in crashing support group meetings for illnesses he pretends to be ailed with. Here enters Marla. With the same feelings towards these support groups and faking illness, Marla causes the narrator to be unable to sleep once again. And then we meet Tyler Durden, the narrator's socially arrogant controller. Spinning out of control, the narrator, Marla, and Tyler develop a strange triangle of sex loathing and soap.

With the kiss of a mad man decorating his hand, the narrator joins forces with--or, more accurately, is forced into business with--Durden and starts an underground fight club to help men relieve themselves of pent-up aggression. Free to beat each other into semi-conscious conditions during secret basement meetings, fight club becomes an obsession for everyone involved and a life-style for Tyler Durden.

Enter Project Mayhem. From blowing up the narrator's apartment to destroying anything and everything in their path, the members form an alliance of sorts to wreak havoc on whatever they can. They destroy cars, burn buildings, and generally screw up things for everyone. But no one talks. Fight club and Project Mayhem don't exist because no one says a word.

Palahniuk's work here offends, comically excites, and provides thought-provoking scenarios to readers. And if that's not good enough, the jaw-dropping twist at the conclusion of *Fight Club* should be enough. And if that doesn't leave you wanting more, then there's nothing to be done with you.

ANNEX B – SYNOPSIS OF *SURVIVOR FROM THE CULT*

Survivor

Beginning at the end, Tender Branson is on a suicide mission, flying an empty 747 that he hijacked. He is telling his story into the black box as the plane goes down.

Tender Branson is one of the ones they let go. He is one of the ones that was let out to explore the world beyond. He is part of the Creedish Church—a cult to outsiders—and almost completely alone at this point. Ten years in the past, someone spilled all of the secrets of the Church and put their “integrity” at risk. Fearing the discovery and forced demise of the Church, the members commit mass suicide. And all of those like Tender—the ones let out to explore—are expected to kill themselves, as the Deliverance is here.

Trying to lay low, Tender works as a housekeeper to a family he never sees. He cleans, cooks, tends the garden, and does whatever else they want him to do. He starts receiving phone calls from people wanting to kill themselves—the newspaper accidentally published his number under a crisis hotline ad—to which he responds with a go-ahead-and-end-it attitude more often than not. A member of a suicidal cult fielding calls meant for a crisis hotline. The perfect scenario for a rise in suicide.

Meeting with a therapist that specializes in members of cults with suicide pacts, Tender tries to live a decently normal life. But we learn about what the Creedish Church did and we realize that Tender Branson could never be normal.

**ANNEX C – SYNOPSIS OF *INVISIBLE MONSTERS*
FROM *THE CULT***

Invisible Monsters

One more time, please. This time with a little less face.

Invisible Monsters initially unnamed narrator was once a beautiful fashion model. But only to draw the attention of her parents away from her brother, Shane. The narrator has it all until the fateful day of the accident where the bottom half of her face gets completely blown off leaving her with nothing more than top teeth and a tongue that hangs out of the gaping wound.

Now unable to speak and constantly wiping drool from her mouth, the narrator still gets attention, but only because she is a hideous monster. So here comes Brandy Alexander, the queen of overly coifed hair and heavily painted face. Only one surgery away from being a “real” woman, Brandy takes the narrator under her awkwardly large wing and equips her with the things she needs to be beautiful again. At least as beautiful as she can be with only half a face.

When Brandy isn’t giving our narrator hats with face veils, new clothes, “speech” lessons, and completely new identities, she is finding houses for sale. Not for purchase, but for prescription drugs to steal.

There are drugs, wounds, blood, fire, and new identities. Palahniuk delivers a dose of jilted beauty queens, messed up transsexuals, and twists on top of twists on top of twists. *Invisible Monsters* will only leave you wanting. Wanting what, I’m not sure. But you’ll want something.

ANNEX D – SYNOPSIS OF *CHOKE* FROM *THE CULT*

Choke

Next time you think about giving someone the Heimlich maneuver to prevent them from choking, take a good long look at that person.

Victor Mancini plays a colonial servant by day and reveals his true sex-addicted con artist self by night. All for the purpose of trying to cope with and fix a withered relationship with his ailing mother. Mancini purposely chokes on food at restaurants to gain the attention of other diners and force someone to save his life. These saviors send him money for birthdays, Christmas and no occasion at all, feeling a sense of pride and obligation for saving his completely woeful life. As if Victor couldn't get any more pathetic, his raging sex addiction sends him to sex addicts anonymous meetings to troll for sexual partners.

Although his Alzheimer's-suffering mother has no idea who he is, she tells him--through a diary written completely in Italian--that he is a direct descendent of Jesus Christ himself. The son of Jesus, conning people out of money, having sex with "recovering" addicts. Even Victor can't understand, "It's pathetic how we can't live with the things we can't understand. How we need everything labeled and explained and deconstructed."

Chuck Palahniuk does it again with *Choke*. He turns an utterly pathetic character with very few redeeming qualities into a character that everyone can sympathize with and that everyone eventually learns to love. But, seriously, keep your eyes peeled next time you dine out for someone stuffing steak down their throat for a little attention. Does that person have mommy issues or are they really dying?

Available at <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/books/choke>. Access on January 21, 2011.

ANNEX E – SYNOPSIS OF *LULLABY FROM THE CULT*

Lullaby

Journalist Carl Streator just lost his wife and only child. They both dropped dead after he read them what he thought was a simply beautiful lullaby. Turns out it was a little more.

The culling song—an African chant from a story book entitled *Poems and Rhymes from Around the World*—is a song that kills anyone it is read to. Stressed out due to his double loss, Streator starts to see people drop dead in front of his eyes. Turns out all he has to do is think about the culling song and he can kill anyone he directs that thought to.

Instead of using this new found ability to his advantage—admit it, you’d play around with it a bit—he sets out to find and destroy every copy of this book. He meets Helen Hoover Boyle, her assistant Mona, and Mona’s boyfriend, Oyster. Helen has experienced the destruction of the culling song and joins Streator’s crusade. On the way around the country, Streator discovers the existence of the grimoire, a spell book that contains the culling song. Now they must find and destroy that as well.

Streator has a tough time not killing everyone who pisses him off while trying to keep the culling song out of the wrong hands—most hands, actually.

Sounds like a pure horror/sci-fi novel. But it’s weird and funny and is still a Palahniuk novel that will have non-Palahniuk people lifting an eyebrow in confusion when you tell them what you’re reading.

Available at <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/books/lullaby>. Access on January 21, 2011.

**ANNEX F – SYNOPSIS OF *FUGITIVES & REFUGEES*
FROM *THE CULT***

Fugitives & Refugees

There is no other travel guide that you need when going to the Pacific Northwest.

In *Fugitives and Refugees*, Palahniuk takes you on a journey through the Pacific Northwest and shows you things that only a native could know about. He takes you to the self-cleaning house and teaches you how sexual Portland, Oregon is—sexual fetish organizations and clubs galore!

Palahniuk also takes you on his acid trip in 1981 where he ate part of a woman's fur coat during a showing of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. With the memoir sections of *Fugitives and Refugees*, you get a sense of what it was like growing up in Portland. At least what it was like for Chuck Palahniuk.

Being the cheapest city to live in on the west coast, Portland has its share of washed-up nothings making it rough around the edges. In some places, that is. So it's not all fun and games and sex all the time.

Do not forget to bring this book with you when you go to the Pacific Northwest which, as a Palahniuk fan you inevitably will.

ANNEX G – SYNOPSIS OF *DIARY FROM THE CULT*

Diary

"CAN YOU FEEL THIS?"

Misty Marie Wilmot was an artist. Misty Marie Wilmot was full of talent. Misty Marie Wilmot was in love. Was is the important word here.

A maid in a hotel on the beautiful tourist island Waytansa, Misty is playing clean-up crew for her comatose husband, Peter. He was a contractor who wrote despicable messages in the walls of homes he remodeled before his failed suicide attempt. Now he is being sued by the angry owners who are discovering these messages, leaving Misty with nothing but failed dreams of being a famous artist.

With her mother-in-law and daughter cheering her on—or coercing her with backwards threats—Misty starts painting again. Each piece she paints becomes a masterpiece to be shown at the hotel for all of the tourists to fawn over. Her husband's expected death and daughter's unexpected death put her in a state of pure creativity during which she gets locked up in the hotel, given a catheter so she doesn't have to leave the room, and fed every so often.

People start acting abnormally, interesting things start happening, and Misty is no longer sure if she is painting because she wants to or painting because they are forcing her to.

Palahniuk gives readers a look into the convoluted world of a washed up artist with no idea how to think for herself. He hands out a gaze into an island of seriously venomous people. A twisting end brings Misty full circle in *Diary* and leaves us wanting to never travel to an island again.

ANNEX H – SYNOPSIS OF *STRANGER THAN FICTION FROM THE CULT*

Stranger Than Fiction

It's true. Chuck Palahniuk has a knack for finding the bizarre, whether it is in his head or in everyday life.

In *Stranger Than Fiction*, he goes from the Testicle Festival in Montana—where everyone is free to be naked and fornicate in any way imaginable on stage for everyone else to cheer-on—to a wrestling Olympic trial full of bleeding ears and busted knees.

Learn all about what it takes to be the king of a tractor demolition derby—it takes determination, heart, and a lot of leaking brake fluid. After which Palahniuk details how people react when he and a friend dress as giant fury dogs and walk around Seattle—“you think you're cute? Well, you're not. You're just stupid.” Pretty much describes peoples' reactions.

Not only does *Stranger Than Fiction* tell details of events, it profiles people from musician/actress Juliette Lewis to author Amy Hempel. Palahniuk's probing interviews bring readers into the lives of these people like a typical Ryan Seacrest interview never could.

This collection of stories will take you into the world where Palahniuk gets his ideas. It's strange, funny, and slightly heartwarming. Only slightly, though. *Stranger Than Fiction* will not disappoint. Even though this is a nonfiction collection, you should still think twice before eating a meal prior to cracking it open.

ANNEX I – SYNOPSIS OF *HAUNTED FROM THE CULT*

Haunted

Stuffing only what they need into one suitcase, seventeen people board a bus for what promises to be the most creative three months of their lives.

Each character tells their story as they are instructed to write the next great American novel during the three month writing retreat. From Lady Baglady talking about pretending to be a homeless person just to get out of the boredom of interacting with her rich friends to Sister Vigilante who speaks of religion and carries around a bowling ball with which she may or may not have killed someone.

Haunted has an unconventional construction. Each chapter has three parts: a story about the retreat and a specific writer, a poem by an unknown author about each participant, and a story which the writer wrote.

This writers' retreat seems like the perfect deal for a writer. A place where there is nothing to do but write, enough food and water to last, and electricity, bedrooms, bathrooms, and clothes. It's the perfect environment for the next great novel to be written. That is until each writer gets the idea that they must upstage the next writer with what they do. Everyone is sure everyone else has an ulterior motive so food gets destroyed, water dumped out, electricity shut off, and self-inflicted amputation ensues. They all must survive unbearable conditions while trying to write.

Haunted is one of Palahniuk's darkest funniest novels. It houses his most infamous story, *Guts*, which is known to make audience members at book readings pass out. This novel will make you think before sending yourself or a loved one away to a retreat. Will you come back fully intact?

ANNEX J – SYNOPSIS OF *RANT FROM THE CULT*

Rant

Be careful. You may be infected with rabies.

Buster “Rant” Casey uncovers a huge wealth that turns his tiny rural town on its head. He needs to get out of there. So he becomes obsessed with getting bitten by anything venomous—snakes, spiders, and whatever else he can find. Loving the side effect that is a big ol’ erection, he uses it to get an early diploma and a nice fat check to get him out of town.

Rant arrives in the city which the reader discovers is the opposite of a utopian society. All the residents take on their appropriate character of respectable Daytimers and oppressed Nighttimers—all due to a strictly enforced curfew.

A new Nighttimer, Rant tries to fit in with the “Party Crashers”, a group of demolition derby-ers who crash into other cars adorned with that night’s “flag”. A mattress on top of the car, words written on the rear windshield. As Rant becomes more entwined in the life of the “Party Crashers” he meets and falls in love with Echo Lawrence. He also starts a nationwide rabies epidemic that causes everyone who is infected to be shot and killed on the spot.

Rant comes from the point of view of people who knew Rant Casey. Through changes in space and time, you find out that Rant may be present in more than one person, could possibly be dead, and may have tried to kill or marry his mother. Seriously.

So, next time you think about tying a mattress or Christmas tree to the top of your car, think again, my friends.

ANNEX K – SYNOPSIS OF *SNUFF* FROM *THE CULT*

Snuff

From the vantage point of three men waiting in line to be three of the 600 men Cassie Wright plans on having sex with on camera to break a world record, *Snuff* is not for the shy and reserved.

Number 600 is the man who introduced Cassie to the industry and the man who introduces us to the rest of the men waiting in line. Number 72 is not only one of the youngest ones there--20 something years old--but he is one of the too many men claiming to be Cassie's son. The last man, number 137, has been in the television biz and is looking to get his career back on track by screwing an on-the-verge-of-being-dried-up porn queen.

This is not a sex novel--sorry, gentlemen. It is a story of men bonding over a similar interest, getting to know one another through their future sexual conquest, and, for a few, trying to find--and twistedly bang--their misplaced mother. There is a surprising lack of sex for a novel about a porn star and her 600 exploits. But don't be turned off by this. There's still some sex, plenty of laughs, and some telling moments as each of the three main narrators finds something buried deep within himself.

One more time, Palahniuk approaches, pushes, and mockingly steps over the line with *Snuff*. If it isn't enough to have a woman conquering 600 men in one day and to get a first class voyage deep inside the porn industry, throw more mommy issues and even some daddy issues into the picture. Just when you thought Palahniuk couldn't get any more off the wall, in walks Cassie Wright.

ANNEX L – SYNOPSIS OF *PYGMY* FROM *THE CULT*

Pygmy - Now Out In Paperback!

***The Manchurian Candidate* meets *South Park*—Chuck Palahniuk’s finest novel since the generation-defining *Fight Club*.**

In a time of heightened security, more threats of terror, and more terror attacks, what does Chuck Palahniuk do? He comes out with a satire about a group of terrorist teenagers coming to the United States.

Pygmy is a member of a teenage terrorist group from an unnamed country posing as foreign exchange students to infiltrate American households. Their final goal is to take over and destroy the country. With a pre-made agenda, fierce military-esque training, and very poor English-speaking skills, Pygmy sets out to impregnate his host family sister, all part of the plan to take over and destroy. An awkward existence and lack of typical American social skills hinders his ability to carry out the plan.

The plans start coming together and everything is in place. But it’s a group of teenagers—extremely violent highly trained teenagers, but still teenagers. It can’t possibly go as planned, can it?

The first few pages of *Pygmy* make you feel as though you’ve stepped off a plane in a country that you can’t pronounce the name of. But get used to being in that said country, and *Pygmy* will take you on a hilarious ride full of social commentary on terror, religion, and the seriously screwed up American mom-dad-2.5 child family.

ANNEX M – SYNOPSIS OF *TELL-ALL FROM THE CULT*

Tell-All

Boy Meets Girl. Boy Gets Girl. Boy Kills Girl.

The hyperactive love child of Page Six and Whatever Happened to Baby Jane? caught in a tawdry love triangle with The Fan. Even Kitty Kelly will blush.

Soaked, nay, marinated in the world of vintage Hollywood, *Tell-All* is a Sunset Boulevard - inflected homage to Old Hollywood when Bette Davis and Joan Crawford ruled the roost; a veritable Tourette's syndrome of rat-tat-tat name-dropping, from the A-list to the Z-list; and a merciless send-up of Lillian Hellman's habit of butchering the truth that will have Mary McCarthy cheering from the beyond.

Our Thelma Ritter-ish narrator is Hazie Coogan, who for decades has tended to the outsized needs of Katherine "Miss Kathie" Kenton—veteran of multiple marriages, career comebacks, and cosmetic surgeries. But danger arrives with gentleman caller Webster Carlton Westward III, who worms his way into Miss Kathie's heart (and boudoir). Hazie discovers that this bounder has already written a celebrity tell-all memoir foretelling Miss Kathie's death in a forthcoming Lillian Hellman-penned musical extravaganza; as the body count mounts, Hazie must execute a plan to save Katherine Kenton for her fans—and for posterity.

Tell-All is funny, subversive, and fascinatingly clever. It's wild, it's wicked, it's bold-faced—it's vintage Chuck. - Random House

ANNEX N – PREVIEW OF *DAMNED* FROM *THE CULT*

Chuck's Next Novel Is "Damned"

Release Date: October 18, 2011

[Pre-Order Damned on Amazon](#)

Update: We have set up a [new forum](#) to discuss *Damned*. Go join in on the action!

In a recent Q&A Doubleday conducted with Chuck Palahniuk, he revealed plans for his next novel, to be released in Fall 2011. And most recently, Chuck talked a little more about *Damned* in his interview with [SuicideGirls.com](#):

So *Damned* is about an eleven-year old girl who wakes up basically and finds that she is in hell and that she's dead, and that she's going to be eleven-years old and dead in hell for the rest of eternity. So she has to, number one, make friends and figure out how hell works and make the best of it. But she's also got to figure out why she's in hell and how she died, and then ultimately whether or not she wants to petition to go to heaven, to try and uncover some mistake that might have been made. So it's about an eleven-year old, a very optimistic, cheerful, pushy little girl who finds herself in hell.

From the Random House Q&A:

My next novel, the one for 2011 -- argh, my life is so mapped out -- is a novel called *Damned* about an eleven-year-old girl who finds herself in Hell and learns how to manipulate the corrupt system of demons and bodily fluids. Imagine if *The Shawshank Redemption* had a baby by *The Lovely Bones* and it was raised by Judy Blume, and you have my next new project. It's so frustrating when this girl, Madison, realizes that she'll never grow up and become an adult... and believe me, I know just how she feels. Each new day, I look at my chest in the bathroom mirror, sideways, and hope it's grown.

Maybe if they could invent a 3-D mirror...

Available at <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/books/damned>. Access on January 21, 2011.

ANNEX O – REVIEWS OF *HAUNTED* PUBLISHED ON THE INTERNET

Whitney Pastorek (May 16, 2005)

Chuck Palahniuk is up to his old tricks, going to vast lengths to shock and appall. But when a book kicks off with a teenager getting his intestine sucked out by an intake valve as he's masturbating at the bottom of swimming pool. . .well, there's really nowhere to go from there, ya know? Linked under the umbrella of a hellish writers' retreat (19 aspiring scribes, the narrator included, are locked inside a movie palace for three weeks with a decreasing and sabotaged supply of food, water, heat, and plumbing), this story collection ends up lulling the reader into a desensitized nap — despite the introduction of severed genitalia and cannibalized newborns. The only thing saving *Haunted* from disaster is Palahniuk's prose, which is, as always, gorgeous (on smelling newborn-baby soup: "The teeth inside our mouths, waiting. Our tongues, swimming in drool"), even when his subject matter really, really isn't.

<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1060756,00.html>

***New York Times* Tom Shone (May 22, 2005)**

When a story from Chuck Palahniuk's new book was serialized in *The Guardian* of London, it was flagged on the cover as "the most gruesome short story ever published," a come-on that tells you all you need to know about the allure of Palahniuk's work, which is best thought of as a close literary relative of NBC's

"Fear Factor," in which contestants compete to see who can best retain their composure while being deluged with buckets of bugs. Opinion is still divided as to whether his oeuvre amounts to a tenacious attempt at reinventing the Gothic tradition for the 21st century, or a sustained, career-long attempt to put you off your lunch.

Skip to next paragraph

HAUNTED

Palahniuk first came to light with "Fight Club" (1996), the story of a group of young men who seek to escape the numbing conformity of their 9-to-5 jobs by being beaten to a bloody pulp. It was made into a Brad Pitt movie, which must have really hurt, but Palahniuk recovered nicely, and was soon furthering his reputation with a series of fragrant odes to the milk of human kindness: "Survivor," in which a man dictates his life story into the black box recorder of a plummeting 747; "Choke," about a man who pretends to choke in restaurants and then emotionally blackmails those who attempt to save him; and "Lullaby," which gently broached the topic of infant genocide.

The new book, "Haunted," takes its cue from the old story about Mary Shelley, Lord Byron and friends holing up in the Villa Diodati during a thunderstorm and brainstorming the stories that would form the basis of "Frankenstein" and "The Vampyre." In Palahniuk's version, 17 writers answer an advertisement for

a writer's retreat and hole up in a cavernous theater for three months to write their masterpieces. Any hopes, however, that what follows will amount to a searching drama of collective literary endeavor -- egos clashing, fur flying, a sort of "Survivor" for the creative writing set -- are immediately dashed by the discovery that all of Palahniuk's writers turn out fiction that bears a startling resemblance to the fiction of Chuck Palahniuk.

It's nothing but Chuck here, sliced and diced. In "Foot Work," one of several "colonic-irrigation assassins" takes us on a tour of "the dark side of reflexology"; in "Post-Production," a couple shoot porn movies together to pay for the cost of raising a child ("instead of some old birthing video, someday they'd show their child his conception"); in "Guts," a young man manages to unspool most of his large intestine while masturbating on the bottom of his swimming pool. I hate it when that happens. Couldn't one of these aspirant literary geniuses have turned out to be -- I don't know -- an old-fashioned pastoralist, or a delicate minimalist in the manner of Raymond Carver? Instead they all go under mythico-thuggish names like The Earl of Slander and The Duke of Vandals, sport complexions the color of dog food ("red-raw meat around a nose and eyes, steak stitched together with thread and scars") and write stories whose themes range, in a timely tribute to the global compendiousness of Saul Bellow, from the queasily gynecological to the queasily gastrointestinal.

What would be really shocking, of course, would be if one of them turned out to be Anita Brookner. But then that would never do. The curious weakness of Palahniuk's neo-brutalist aesthetic is how hermetically sealed it must remain from anything that might challenge it: the air of hard-core debauch must be wall to wall or else crumble to nothing. Palahniuk's work has a tone of snarling X-rated confrontation, but reading his stuff is uncannily like being buttonholed by your younger brother and led up to his bedroom so he can show off his book of Weegee photographs. Palahniuk's work feels raw but insular, angry but self-coddling, like a teenager's moods. The single most horrifying fact about "Haunted," though, is that his publishers have called it "a novel," which turns out to be a cunning euphemism for "a collection of short stories." The stories all follow much the same course. Palahniuk digs up some disgusting factoid; he devises a narrator to deliver the disgusting factoid; and then sits back to watch him or her deliver it. End of story.

BOOKS OF THE TIMES; The Enduring Charm of Freaky Violence (June 14, 2004)

Portland Journal; A City Proud of Its Underbelly Slims Down and Tones Up

(December 1, 2003)

BOOKS OF THE TIMES; Two People in Comas, But One's Still Awake (September 4, 2003)

New York Books

Palahniuk: Ghost writing

Chuck Palahniuk's seventh novel has already inspired *Canterbury Tales* and *Decameron* mentions, but its connective tissue better resembles *Short Cuts*' earthquake sequence, the last cinematic straw in Robert Altman's overstated take on Raymond Carver. Palahniuk's always been hammy, but in the past, speedster plots and glossy prose salvaged the sitcom shallowness. Here, *Haunted*'s wonky framing device tries to hold together 23 tales (and 21 accompanying poems) that would've best been served without garnish.

The padding involves a pack of writer wannabes who respond to a flyer for a three-month retreat promising to separate them from the everyday so they can tap their true potential and pen a masterpiece. After quitting jobs and ending myriad relationships ("I am not fat" written in pink lipstick on a mirror, dial "1-800-FUCK-OFF" for a parole officer), the crew's locked in an abandoned, Huysmans-style theater with "old man" Mr. Whittier and Mrs. Clark, whose retelling of a heartbreaking dalliance with amateur porn explains why she got her "frosty peach" blowjob lips and gravity-defying breasts, "chosen by a much braver woman . . . with a much stronger back."

A standard Palahniukian mouthpiece ("people fall in love with their pain, they can't leave it behind"), workshop leader Whittier brings up the Shelleys' Frankenstein-birthing jaunt to Lord Byron's Lake Geneva cabin as his project's archetype, but it turns out his real plan is "to create just one ghost—fast." See, he's dying and—quite illogically—wants the posse to hate and perhaps haunt him after they die, thereby proving an afterlife. (Where's Nietzsche when you need him?)

As self-involved internment drags on, participants one-up each other's suffering, so that when they're discovered they can have the best chance of selling their story (while sporting a larger mythology). Oh, reality television! Self-mutilation, pet killing, cannibalism, murder, afterbirth stew, sabotaged food, clogged toilets, and even a broken washing machine ensue.

Because it's Palahniuk, each character proves monstrous (or sleazy, or annoying) via interpersonal activities (see above) and self-incriminating fireside anecdotes—e.g., crotchety shopkeeper is killed for faux Marilyn Monroe fetus, chronic masturbator has intestines sucked out by pool filter, little-kid sex dolls with razor blades in their orifices scar a police force, cross-dressers charge people money to punch 'em stupid, mass suicide ("emigration") as lifestyle fad, a chef kills critics who give him bad reviews. Many of these are humorous, but rarely more than that.

Railing against consumerism, the American dream of leisure, our victim culture, Palahniuk's whoopee-cushion transgression sputters. The author's one coup is the most noteworthy presentation of a progerian since Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*: a 13-year-old skate rat who beds then blackmails sympathetic soccer moms.

Janet Maslin (May 5, 2005)

Not for a Full Stomach (or an Empty One Either)

In his new ad hoc diet book, Chuck Palahniuk assembles two dozen of the most appetite-suppressing stories he can imagine. "Tell me a story to make me never want to eat, ever again," one character in "Haunted" requests - and, boy, does the author oblige. Mr. Palahniuk all but dares the reader to be seasick as he explores various forms of spiritual and literal putrefaction. If books had aromas, this one would reek of "old potatoes melting into a black puddle under the kitchen sink."

Here's how it works: "Haunted" is a string of gross-out fables, each accompanied by a prologue and a poem. Amazingly, in light of the book's subject matter, none of its characters are teenage boys trying to out-sicken their friends. Each of these one-dimensional figures has a repellent nickname ("Saint Gut-Free," "Missing Link," "Chef Assassin"), and they are trapped together for three months to express their creative impulses. Best case scenario: a grotesque latter-day artists' colony that will produce its own form of "Frankenstein." Worst case scenario: Donner party.

As it turns out, the Donner group's notorious cannibalism is small potatoes - small, rotting, black ones - compared to what "Haunted" will dish up. "We don't want you to die," one of the book's wittier characters says, "because we don't have a freezer." Fingers and toes begin to vanish; one woman is fed a cooked piece of her own buttock, made recognizable by its rose tattoo. Another woman's dead husband has been compressed into a three-carat diamond. In this crowd, that qualifies as a lucky break.

When one teenage boy's effort to masturbate goes awry, he winds up with his lower intestine extracted from his body. Admirers of Mr. Palahniuk's envelope-pushing bravado will contort themselves no less painfully in trying to justify "Haunted" and its ugly overkill. As the author of "Fight Club," Mr. Palahniuk legitimately and brilliantly shocked readers, but he also opened the floodgates for wretched excess of a less inspired kind.

Like Neil LaBute and Todd Solondz, he can turn the revenge of the nerds into a bold feat of liberation. Or he can throw in one dead dog too many, which is what happens here. The trouble with "Haunted" is not conceptual; the book's structure is viable, and some of its individual premises have their malevolent merits. But one of the better stories here, entitled "Slumming," illustrates what can go wrong. The story begins with a woman who has replaced her television with an aquarium containing a lizard to avoid watching the news. "You flip the switch for the heat lamp," Mr. Palahniuk writes tautly, "and it's not going to tell you another transient wino was shot to death, his body dropped in the river, the 15th victim in a killing spree targeting the city's homeless, their bodies found stabbed and shot and set on fire with lighter fluid, the street people panicked and fighting their way into the shelters at night, despite the new tuberculosis." So we know why this woman has become a shut-in. Then it turns out that New York's charity ball elite ("imagine going to your senior prom every night for the rest of your life") has become similarly disaffected. "Social divers," a woman nicknamed Inky says, "are the new social climbers." Now the most chic of the rich and famous live like derelicts and are loving their new freedom. "Give up bathing until you stink, and just a hot shower feels as good as a trip to Sonoma for a detoxifying mud enema," the story advises.

It could and should end here. Instead, Mr. Palahniuk piles on the extras: a naked kidnapping victim, her severed ear, a police hunt for witnesses and the butchering of bag ladies. By the time he's done bludgeoning this tale it has lost its sharp edges. And this is a 400-page book, with 23 other nightmares where that one came from.

Too often, like Mr. Solondz's tactic in the film "Palindromes" of having the same character played by wildly different people, Mr. Palahniuk's underlying thoughts are startlingly simple-minded. "Exodus" is a grotesque foray into the recreational use of child-size, anatomically correct dummies. And it is written with the incisive brutality that accounts for Mr. Palahniuk's intense popularity. (About sexually abused children: "Every grass-stained knee, a clue.") But the author goes on to let this story turn to mush: the dummies represent the way we turn ourselves into objects and turn objects into ourselves.

Another shockingly told but ploddingly conceived story, "Speaking Bitterness," has a group of feminists denouncing male-perpetrated violence but raping the transsexual in their midst. The whole book ends just as fatuously, with the sudden, blue-sky notion that facing up to the monstrosity described in "Haunted" is a way of saving the world. "Don't create shades of gray that a mass audience can't follow," one of the book's shut-ins advises, about the way these people can market their adventure some day.

Don't worry: "Haunted" is strictly black-and-white. Its most welcome extra flourishes are not dramatic ones; they are bizarrely medical, concerned with the minutiae of how living things grow damaged and decayed. Mr. Palahniuk can be eerily precise and knowledgeable about, say, exactly what happens to someone who swallows water at a temperature of 205 degrees Fahrenheit. He knows about nail fungus. Anyone wishing to know exactly how flies lay eggs on a corpse need look no further than this set of nightmare-laden bedtime stories.

***The Boston Globe* Adam Mamsbach**

Overexposed in a collection crammed full of macabre characters and their gory doings

From one of America's smartest purveyors of the macabre comes "Haunted," the seventh fictional outing from Chuck Palahniuk. It is a novel only in name. More accurate would be to call the book a series of stories linked by a filament of plot, and more accurate than that would be to call it "Chuck Palahniuk Cleans Out His Closet."

Had these been stand-alone stories, the collection would have been mixed. Palahniuk's ability to viscerally disgust a reader with imaginative, gory set pieces is still unparalleled, and the conceptual engines that drive his stories are often compelling. Too many of these pieces, though, can easily be reduced to just that formula: offbeat concepts spun out to their gross conclusions -- conclusions usually preordained by the fundamental amorality of humankind. Many of them read like sketches for novels, discarded because they were too thin and then reinvented as short fiction.

But not as Palahniuk's short fiction. Instead, the stories that compose "Haunted" are presented as the work of 23 writers who have answered an advertisement for a writers' retreat. Amazingly, though, every single member of this motley crew of damaged scribes happens to write exactly like Palahniuk, whose

gimmicky, macho prose is anything but inconspicuous. The lack of any attempt to grant these narrators voices of their own is the reader's first clue that Palahniuk's investment in "Haunted" may be less than total.

Quickly finding themselves imprisoned in a hulking, ornate theater, the writers are left with nothing but their stories and one another -- and the communal fantasy that when rescued they will all enjoy fame and prosperity as survivors of such a grueling ordeal, and sell their stories to Hollywood. Thus, as a means of upping their talk-show capital, they set about destroying the theater's heating system, their food supply, and ultimately themselves with the help of a set of butcher's knives provided by a character named Chef Assassin. Even in a book overbrimming with viscera, one of "Haunted" 's crassest ideas is that all writers are in it for fame and fortune.

We hear, in turn, from aspiring authors with names like Director Denial, Miss America, the Duke of Vandals, and Agent Tattletale. Each story is preceded by a poem about the author, and each poem by a chapter's worth of present action, written in the seldom-a-good-idea first person plural. The body counts, self-mutilations, and microwaved body parts add up, but the stories continue unabated. The characters don't much care who lives or dies -- one less way to split the royalties -- and neither does the reader. Palahniuk's cast is so large and unwieldy that it's difficult to remember what degree of revulsion we're supposed to maintain for whom. Interchangeable in their degradation, no one is memorable. Some of the stories, however, are. Framing devices and narrative issues aside, Palahniuk can still dream up truly retch-worthy scenarios. "Haunted" 's standout moment comes in its leadoff piece, "Guts," a story by Saint Gut-Free in which the protagonist's intestines are sucked out of his body by a swimming pool's suction pump. In some sense, the story sets the bar too high; no number of flash-boiled bodies, war sex criminals, or Bigfoot murder fests can match "Guts" in terms of sheer inducement to nausea.

The multipart story Mrs. Clark writes about her daughter, whose life is ruined after she looks into a "nightmare box," is another highlight. Palahniuk invests more deeply in its characters than he does elsewhere, and the result is a vivid, suspenseful set piece -- one that doesn't feel like a mere run-up to some climactic gross-out.

At Palahniuk's best -- in the subversive cult classic "Fight Club," or the twisted mystery "Diary" -- trenchant and wryly observed social commentary lies beneath the surface gore; the perversity at the core of our beings is what's really on display. The ideas that underwrite "Haunted," though, are too pedestrian to probe such depths: the assertion that we need to demonize others in order to make sense of our lives, and the fact that all of us (the narrator's "us," at any rate) are desperate, eager consumers of the misery of others. Repeated endlessly -- one of Palahniuk's many stylistic ticks is the use of refrains -- these notions do not take on additional layers of profundity. Rather, they shrink until they read like hollow maxims. The ideas that serve as spines for many of the more socially ambitious stories are just as weak. The central premise of "Slumming," by Lady Baglady, is that "poverty is the new wealth." It follows a cast of elderly socialites as they luxuriate in pretending to be homeless. With such a derivative, obvious inversion as its reason for being, the story never goes anywhere. "Foot Work" by Mother Nature imagines an underground world of reflexologists whose anatomical expertise is so profound that the ultra-rich hire them to perform earthshakingly orgasmic foot massage. Things get complicated when foot prostitution gives way to foot murder, but the story never makes the leap from whimsical to compelling.

Palahniuk will do better work than this -- and given his novel-a-year pace, chances are he will do it soon. "Haunted" feels like something he had to get out of his system (and plenty of other, less appealing stuff is expelled from other systems throughout the novel, to be sure) -- a gaggle of intriguing-to-middling ideas he had to write his way through in order to move on. Hard-core fans might find enough vintage moments here to make it worth their while, but the rest of us won't be haunted at all.

<http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2005/05/22/overexposed/>

***The Guardian* Christopher Priest (Saturday, 11 June 2005)**

After earlier novels such as *Fight Club* and *Diary*, it doesn't seem likely that anyone would pick up a book by Chuck Palahniuk incautiously, but even so the incautious should be warned. This most recent novel is definitely not for the faint-hearted.

Haunted takes the form of 23 short stories, each introduced by a poem identifying the purported writer of the story that then follows. These are linked by short pieces of narrative. Although superficially it might appear to be a fix-up (a collection of individual stories welded together in an attempt to make them seem like a novel), in fact the stories in this case are the novel. At least one of the stories can be seen as a stand-alone work (more on this later), but none the less this is a unitary novel of exceptional originality.

The formal shape of the narrative is just as unusual. The book is told in the first person plural, but unobtrusively. It is written with such deftness that it takes many pages before the reader realises what's going on. The narrative voice, written in Palahniuk's distinctively flat and declarative language, is a collective one. The narrator does not exist as a character as such in the story: the novel is written jointly by everyone in it, and yet as a result of some sleight of hand I could not discern, it is also by none of them. This innovative approach is not a gimmick. The style is the book, and it is a substantial constituent of the appalling events that are described throughout the novel. The narrator becomes an accomplice to them, but because of the first-person voice, so too does the reader.

A bus tours the empty pre-dawn streets of an unnamed city, halting to pick up one passenger after another. Almost none of them is named, but they are stereotyped with a label: Miss America, Comrade Snarky, Agent Tattletale, Duke of Vandals, Chef Assassin, and so on. All are grotesques, all are writers (not usually the same thing), and all have responded to an advertisement offering three months of seclusion in a writers' retreat: "Abandon Your Life for Three Months".

Already on the bus are three people who seem to know what's going on: a prematurely elderly disabled teenager in a wheelchair, a buxom Mrs Clark, and the driver, Saint Gut-Free. It turns out they know as little as anyone else about what is to happen, but they have at least been entrusted with a few practical arrangements. The bus deposits everyone at an empty building, an abandoned theatre. The doors close, the building is dark and unwelcoming, the retreat begins.

As the cold takes its grip, as food and fresh water run out and the toilets become unusable, as the characters begin to harm each other and damage the building, one by one they come forward to tell their stories. Some of the stories appear to be fiction as it might have been written by the character, others are artless accounts of their lives. They are all in different ways horrific.

Palahniuk is not a writer who makes his intentions or meaning clear, which in this case is a great strength. The intrigue he creates is wonderful. The reader has to grope around in the cold darkness, finding out who these people are and what is happening to them at more or less the same time as they themselves find out. You become dependent on them for information about what's going on, and so are drawn further into their guilty doings. While the author never once seems to be holding back information, the suspense is constant. Anyone who has been to or taught at a writers' workshop will feel at first that they are on recognisable, if extreme, territory. The stereotyping of the characters is observed with telling accuracy, because in the real world of writers' seminars all the participants of these notably claustrophobic encounters, including the tutors, do quickly adopt roles that are caricatures of their normal personalities: the killer critic, the ingenue, the performance artiste, the unrelenting cynic, and so on. Just as the reader starts to sense satire, a possible familiarity with the ambience, Palahniuk undermines it. There's a clue in the epigraph, which is a quote from Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death", the story of hellish souls locked away in a castle to carouse while the plague rages outside. Another clue lies in the frequent references to the Villa Diodati, that house on the banks of Lake Geneva where Lord Byron, John Polidori and the Shelleys hid away while they dreamed and wrote of monstrous events.

The modern reader suddenly remembers those Agatha Christie stories, in which the cast of cliché-ridden characters is bumped off one by one, while the éminence grise who invited them to the island or the country house lurks somewhere behind the walls. A similar memory even emerges of one of those old portmanteau horror films: Ralph Richardson in a studio-built crypt, dressed in a monk's habit, listening to the ghoulish confessions of damned souls. *Haunted* reminds us of both of these.

Then, towards the end, an even more contemporary resonance sounds. Is Palahniuk making a point about reality television? The parallels seem deliberate. While the éminence grise (unseen TV producer) continues to lurk behind the walls, the remaining writers (celebs, housemates) await the end. Many of their former confrères are absent, already out in the world being mutilated by the tabloids, or worse, discarded as unsuitable even for that. The set is scrawled with graffiti and smeared with filth, the last witchetty grubs have been eaten, the remaining survivors squabble about sharing the pot of money they imagine is waiting for them when they come to tell the story of what has gone on. The reality of false reality has overtaken them, and they are unwilling to leave their retreat, dreading what real reality might be like outside. If this is satire it is of a complexity and a degree of intellectual ferocity few writers have attempted before.

In *Haunted*, confessions are the substance of the stories the writers tell: explanations, self-justifications, excuses. Never explain, never complain - the old advice seems not to have reached them. While they perform hideous acts of abuse (slicing off their own toes and fingers, cannibalising each other, and much worse) they anxiously supply the details of the dysfunctional backgrounds they spring from, wishing us to know. Not long after you have calmed down from reading about the "Nightmare Box" - a uniquely terrifying invention - Breather Betty will enter your imaginative experience, someone and something you are unlikely ever to forget. Horrified, the reader soaks all this up, gasping for more.

Prime among these confessionals, indeed the first of them, is a story called "Guts". I had not come across this before, although its reputation did precede it. Palahniuk apparently performs this story at public readings, routinely putting St John's Ambulance Brigade to work. Listeners almost always pass out in the climactic scenes. In these days when our sensibilities are dulled by the excesses of TV and films, when terror outrages come only third or fourth in the news headlines, I had felt myself to be more or less hardened against horror stories. Reading "Guts" proved me wrong. While it did not make me faint, it certainly put me off my lunch. It is a remarkable passage in a remarkable book, the most original work of fiction this year.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jun/11/fiction.chuckpalahniuk>

***The Onion A.V. Club* Tasha Robinson**

Palahniuk does have a point to make about the self-abasement of modern celebrity, and the current price and nature of fame. But getting to it involves slogging through a mountain of fanatically detailed descriptions of self-mutilation, suicide, murder, gruesome sex, even more gruesome masturbation, corpse desecration and decay, child molestation, cannibalism, and pyrrhic self-annihilation, all piled up to such extremes that it seems like Palahniuk is just double-daring himself to top each new vile degradation with something worse.

***Booklist* John Green**

This novel will please Palahniuk's hardcore fans and few others. [1 Mar 2005, p.1102]

Kirkus Reviews

While a number of the stories here are ingenious, in a devilish sort of way, the constant barrage of wicked sadism soon palls. [1 Feb 2005, p.143]

***Library Journal* Ken St. Andre**

The short stories would work if taken singly and at intervals, but strung together they become a catalog of atrocities. [1 May 2005, p.75]

Publishers Weekly

Palahniuk tells his story with such blithe disregard for these characters that it's hard not to wish he had dispensed with the novel altogether and published, instead, the 23 short stories that pop up throughout the book. [21 Feb 2005, p.154]

***The San Francisco Gate* Buzz Poole**

Writers' first rule: spill your guts out

Chuck Palahniuk's fiction has a reputation for disturbingly vivid imagery inflicted upon inhabitants of an amoral world. "Haunted," his latest novel, gives no reason to dispute such a claim. The words "carrot" and "prostate" share a scene, tame compared with how "candle wax" and a rude anatomical term follow only a few paragraphs later.

Brought together by a flyer that reads: "Writer's Retreat: Abandon your life for three months," the characters in "Haunted" have agreed to sequester themselves from family, friends, jobs and life for the sole purpose of manifesting the literary greatness they believe is inside of them. Facilitated by the elderly Mr. Whittier, the motley crew of participants agrees to his terms of absolute seclusion, and they are picked up one predawn on street corners, in alleyways and beneath on-ramps and deposited in a boarded-up, dilapidated theater that will serve as their home for the duration of the retreat.

It does not take long for the writers to realize that their expectations of a halcyon, inspiration-filled environment were unfounded. After a few days of no hot water, no laundry, mildewy lodging and meals of nothing but vacuum-sealed dehydrated food packets, the writers accuse Mr. Whittier and his partner in crime, Mrs. Clark, of kidnapping. Mr. Whittier's only response: "Until you can ignore your circumstances, and just do as you promise ... you'll always be controlled by the world." To further this claim, the writers receive a literary history lesson from Mrs. Clark about Villa Diodati, the summer home where during the rainy summer of 1816 the legends of Frankenstein and Dracula were created by the villa's bored Romantic renters: Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Godwin.

Palahniuk devotes a little more than 400 pages to short stories created by the captives, interspersed with bad poetry and narrative updates on his characters and their subsequent mental and physical deterioration. Through their actions as victims of Mr. Whittier's abduction and the stories they tell to pass the time, it is made clear that every single character has committed an atrocity or grotesquerie and now must escape the world. They don't even use real names with one another, just handles such as Miss America, Reverend Godless and Chef Assassin. The only people who may care about the whereabouts of these characters are the police.

What is worse, though, is that they are clichéd deviants, flat with absolutely no humanity. No, what is worse is that they are bad writers and storytellers doing what bad writers do, writing autobiography poorly veiled as fiction without any of that wonderful stickiness of intimacy that brings good writing to life; here, the only stickiness results from various bodily excretions. The

stories range from men in drag who travel from bar to bar charging patrons \$50 to "punch a chick" to holistic physical therapists who get caught up in the world of "foot jobs." All the stories share the protagonists' need to withdraw from society and parlay their acts into fictions that validate their lives.

Between tales, conditions in the theater dramatically decline, but the characters thrive because they interpret their suffering as a pathway to fame and fortune. As starvation, self-mutilation, dementia and cannibalism set in, the survivors -- the ones who endure the most torture -- think of their plight only in terms of how it will make them more famous when they get out and the whole ordeal is turned into a movie of some sort. As characters die, the others revel, not out of any form of hatred but out of sheer greed; every death is one less person with whom they will have to split the movie-deal money.

The subject of suffering as a means to creation has been put through its paces before. Palahniuk's previous novel, "Diary," hinges on the idea that mental and physical anguish create great art, but great art is not the concern of "Haunted." Time and again during the novel, in light of the grotesque that fills their fictions and their shared reality, multiple characters concede: "This is just what human beings do -- turn objects into people, people into objects." They all surrender their personal identities because they live in worlds where individuals are not valued. Through objectification, they permit themselves to understand people as nothing but commodities, and in this particular economy, the object most thoroughly brutalized will be appraised at the highest worth.

Palahniuk's overall point certainly grounds itself in a brand of absurdity borrowed from the most obscene reality television. One writer, Agent Tattletale, films the retreat, three months recorded and rerecorded on a single tape, footage often played back immediately as if an echo. To produce a tract on the cultural depravity that's devouring culture, Palahniuk would have been better off writing a snappy essay; as for this work of fiction, even the most ardent of his fans may have trouble mucking through this world of ingrates.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/05/15/RVGDPCCKGJ51.DTL&type=books>

***The Globe And Mail [Toronto]* Jason Anderson**

Haunted is itself haunted by the sense that there's little here Palahniuk hasn't done already, and sharper, faster and funnier, at that. [14 May 2005]

***The Washington Post* Elizabeth Hand**

The Hunger Artists

This guy Chuck Palahniuk, he wrote *Fight Club* and *Choke* and *Lullaby* and some other good books. *Fight Club*, that was really good, and it was a great movie, too. It was dark, that kind of dark you get when you have a really clever idea, a surprising plot twist, some scary disturbed characters. But this

writer, Palahniuk, he makes them feel real to you, like you might not want to sit next to these people on a bus but if you met them in another situation -- like a 12-step meeting or summer camp or the fight club in *Fight Club* -- under those circumstances, you might think, "These are people I could relate to, these are people I'd like to know more about, maybe, as long as I could get away from them if I had to."

Just so you understand, this guy Palahniuk, he's written some good books. But not this one.

You might pick this one up and read the premise on the back of the dust jacket: "WRITER'S RETREAT: ABANDON YOUR LIFE FOR THREE MONTHS. Just disappear. Leave behind everything that keeps you from creating your masterpiece. Your job and family and home, all those obligations and distractions -- put them on hold *for three months*. Live with like-minded people in a setting that supports total immersion in your work. Food and lodging free for those who qualify. . . . Before it's too late, live the life you dream about. Spaces very limited."

You'd think that sounds like an ideal scenario for Palahniuk -- a chance to skewer our notions of fiction, of reality, of our culture's obsession with fame and the notion that writing is just another route to celebrity; that anybody, just anybody, can write a book. Because he gets this group of people together, people with silly cartoony made-up names, and they all want to be writers, or at least they all want to be famous. And they all get on a bus and go to this place that they think is going to be great.

Only it's not. It turns out to be an old movie theater, and once they're inside, they can't get out, like they're *locked in* for three months; and the food is all freeze-dried, not gourmet at all, and everything is pretty disgusting and shabby and meaningless and depressing and disgusting. Did I say that twice? I forget, because this book, it's kind of repetitive, and it's also really, really gross.

Each character in the book tells a short story. Each also tells a poem, which is not such a good idea, as the poems aren't very good. In *Lullaby*, Palahniuk's really creepy novel from 2003, there's a poem that kills people who hear it, but I don't think anyone's going to die reading stuff like this: "The film: a shadow of a reflection of an image of an illusion."

In between the stories, there's a narrative about the people locked up in the movie theater. This isn't a very good idea either, as the people mostly complain about each other, and the freeze-dried food. They also talk a lot about celebrity and reality shows, without really saying anything new about them. After a while they start cutting off their fingers and toes, I guess because they're hungry. Some of them die. They start eating each other. Which isn't in itself a terrible idea, because some people like to read about stuff like that, as in the Hannibal Lecter books, and Marianne Wiggins's *John Dollar*, and even stories about the Donner Party. But in *Haunted*, even the cannibalism is kind of boring.

But some of the stories are good. Maybe you've heard about this story, "Guts," which is the one story everyone's heard about, because Palahniuk, when he read it at bookstores and readings and places, people who heard him read it, they threw up, or fainted, or something.

But that story, "Guts," it's pretty funny, in a totally gross-out way, and I laughed at it, and I didn't throw up. But only a few of the other stories are as good as that first one. "Foot Work," the hippie Mother Nature's story, is funny in a satirical way; it's about foot reflexologists and people like that who become assassins. And "Obsolete," the last story in the book, is excellent; kind of like a George Saunders story, or an episode of the old "Twilight Zone" TV series gone berserk. But that's only two

stories out of 23. And don't forget the poems, and the linking narrative. So not a lot of bang for your book.

The stories in *Haunted* reminded me a little bit of stuff by Roald Dahl; not his kids' books, like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or *The Witches*, but his stories for adults, the ones in *Someone Like You* and *Switch Bitch* and *Kiss Kiss*. Only the stories in *Haunted* have a lot more explicit sex in them. But it's not much like real sex. It's more like the kind of sex you imagine if maybe you're a 13-year-old boy who doesn't really know anything about it and likes jokes about bodily fluids and really bad smells. Sort of Garbage Pail Kids sex. Only, like I said, kind of boring.

"To become a household word," says Chef Assassin, "all you need is a rifle." Or maybe just a movie and a big book contract.

Because, by the end of this book, I was wondering if maybe Chuck Palahniuk got his idea from real life. Like, I was wondering if maybe his publishers locked him in a room *for three months* and told him he had to write a book really fast, and they'd pay him a lot of money if he did. That happens to writers when they become celebrities. They think maybe it's a good idea, because it's a lot of money, and their fans -- the people who buy their books no matter what -- well, they're going to buy this one too.

But you know, if something like that happened, not in a story I mean, but in real life, to a cult writer as talented and cutting-edge and interesting and popular as Chuck Palahniuk -- well, that would be *really scary*.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/26/AR2005052601_296.html

Haunted is the stuff of nightmares. Not the tearful dreams of childhood but a lurid and terrible awakening of the old fears, the bloody torso, your broken bones and running, running, running away from that thing, that thing that you know is going to kill you. Twice this week, I've erupted from bed in stark fear, soaked through, melatonin and adrenalin coursing through my veins in equal measure, heart pounding, *afraid*.

Now this is more like it.

After stumbling with a gender experiment in *Diary*, Chuck Palahniuk has returned to form with his inspired new book, a weird amalgamation of poetry and 23 short stories integrated through an outlandish novel straight out of Lovecraft. It's an inspired form that allows the author not only to explore different voices, albeit ones that are so bleakly like his own staccato style, but also to wander further into the depths of the human psyche.

Is it sick? Well, sure, but I'm not sure what else you were expecting. This is, after all, the collection that contains the infamous "Guts," a story so knee-buckling that over sixty people have passed out, dropped right there on the bookstore floor, during the past year's readings.

"The first time I read 'Guts.' nobody fainted," explains Palahniuk on the *Haunted* web site. "My goal was just to write some new form of horror story, something based on the ordinary world. Without

supernatural monsters or magic. This would be a book you wouldn't want to keep next to your bed. A book that would be a trapdoor down into some place dark. A place only you could go, alone, when you opened the cover. Because only books have that power."

Haunted reflects the enormous and underestimated cultural influence of the ghost story, the dark tales told around campfires and over flashlights, although I can guarantee that nobody ever told a horror story like Palahniuk. Some of the stories in this particular volume can give Poe a run for his money and send fans of modern storytellers like King screaming for the hills.

In a smart twist, the book is set in a writer's retreat, marginally modeled after that bleak summer on the coast of Italy when Lord Byron gathered Percy Shelley, his lover Mary and a handful of others to read ghost stories and spin their dread tales, Mary's becoming the basis for *Frankenstein*.

"Abandon Your Life," says the advertisement. "Just disappear." In Palahniuk's version, there are no stormy nights or fictional monsters but there is lots and lots and lots of blood. It's a weird twist of ego, these writers have taken names not based on their bylines but their stories: Saint Gut-free, the Earl of Slander and the Baroness Frostbite matching stories with Miss America, the Reverend Godless and Miss Sneezzy. They want nothing, nothing so much as to be famous so for them to be abandoned to Palahniuk's anonymous writer's retreat is a rich stab at irony. Trapped together in a freezing theater with the food running out, locked away from the world, they start spinning their stories.

Write your best story. This is your last chance. Write your very best fiction ever. No pressure or anything.

They're horrible, in that brilliantly written, completely original way that made *Fight Club* a sensation and *Survivor* a cult masterpiece. There is no way to describe the shocking and excessive self-violence of "Guts" but there are plenty of other dark tales to be told here.

There's the subtle jab at the New Age in "Foot Work," where a massage therapist explains the murderous art of pressure points. Palahniuk paints an X-Files-worthy portrait of a speedy serial killer in "Civil Twilight," with just enough oddity to live in the real world. The Earl of Slander tells his "Swan Song," in which a tabloid journalist plies his trade by poisoning a former child star, splashing little Kenny's drug-fueled suicide and falsified sins across the front pages in the grocery store. Darkest of all is "Exodus," an expose of a local child and family services office where a beleaguered clerk can't keep the sex dolls used in abuse interviews in stock.

Like much of Palahniuk's work, there are the creepy, almost obsessive details that punctuated the best parts of *Fight Club*. Although they're often changed just slightly to prevent the reading masses from blowing themselves up (in point of fact, equal parts gasoline and frozen orange juice concentrate will only give you a poisonous breakfast beverage, which seems no less dangerous than Napalm), *Haunted* is still packed with weirdly detailed research into everything from kitchen knives to insurance fraud to cannibalism.

<http://contemporarylit.about.com/od/mysteryreviews/fr/haunted.htm>

Mostly Fiction Cindy Lynn Speer

(Published on September 5, 2005)

Comparisons between this book and **The Canterbury Tales** or **The Decameron** are fair ones, for, like those books, there is a framing story: A group of writers have answered a want ad -- for three months they would live in utter isolation, all they had to do was produce the work they'd been putting off, the writing they all swore they'd be able to finish if only the world wasn't keeping them from it. They weren't allowed to tell anyone where they were going, they just packed one suitcase and left. Their heads are filled with thoughts of paradise -- warm beaches, perhaps, or thick pine forests surrounding a hunting lodge. What they get is an abandoned old theater. Whittier, the man who placed the want ad, locks them inside, promising to let them out when they have completed their masterpieces.

We never know their names so much as we know who they are, thanks to the labels they give each other in lieu of real names. Comrade Snarky, Duke of Vandals, Chef Assassin, Sister Vigilante, Director Denial...all names that hint at the true nature of the person who bears them. The only real names we know are of Mr. Whittier, who arranged for the whole event, and Mrs. Clark, a sad, tragic woman who is his hired help and therefore considered just as evil as he for keeping them locked up, but who may be the greatest victim of all.

Each person tells a story. We learn how they earned their name, and the real reason they are here. A poem about the person precedes each story and prepares us a bit for what we are about to read. In between the stories we see how the environment of the theater effects each person, the lengths that people, willing to sacrifice everything for the one chance, the one shot at fame (without having to work for it or having the right to earn it through talent) are willing to go to. They pour suffering upon themselves in ridiculous ways then pretend to be innocent, making Whittier and Clark into the villains so that no matter what their lives were like outside, they are now painted "the virgin white of victim." Sometimes you think that the people have gone too far, impossibly far, that no one could possibly do this or that, but it still feels possible, particularly so when you read the personal stories...stories that run the gamut between sad and pathetic to cruel and murderous.

One can say this book is about creating art at any cost, but I fight this because while they do pay a high price for their stories, they do not actually sit down and work on their writing, they are all far too wrapped up in becoming the center of their own private drama, too worried about how their story will be told, for they are all convinced once they escape the "evil" clutches of Mrs. Clark and Mr. Whittier they will be surrounded by people wanting to pour money over them for the rights to their stories for movies and books. They are certain that everyone will want to know their version of events, and so they must look like they have suffered. It is a satire about reality TV and our preoccupation with having our own stories...no matter how mundane...told. Shows like fear factor are not far off from doing the same disgusting things these men and women did in order to win their fame. But most of all, it is a satire about human nature. About our need to be seen, to be pitied, to be acclaimed for our suffering. And, most of all, to be paid for it.

Palanuick creates some unforgettable images here. He's known for writing very hard edged, gritty, emotionally wringing stuff...and this novel is his harshest yet. Fascinating, if often uncomfortable, reading.

<http://www.mostlyfiction.com/scifi/palahniuk.htm>

Observation: All reviews were retrieved from the Internet on March 30, 2008.

ANNEX P – ARTICLE ABOUT A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER SUSPENDED FOR ASKING HIS STUDENTS TO READ *GUTS*

[Teacher suspended for giving 'self-pleasure' reading to students](#)

The first rule about having an edgy English teacher is don't talk about your edgy English teacher.

A beloved city schoolteacher has been suspended by the Department of Education after giving his 11th-grade students a copy of a graphic short story about masturbation written by "Fight Club" author Chuck Palahniuk.

Greg Van Voorhis, 30, handed out copies of Palahniuk's "Guts" late last month to about 100 students studying for the English Regents exam at The Bronx School of Law and Finance in Marble Hill.

The story -- written for Playboy magazine -- discusses a teenage boy's use of a carrot in a sex act on himself and autoerotic asphyxiation. While Van Voorhis took the copies back at the end of class, students blabbed about the ribald tale, and school officials soon caught wind of the lesson in self-love.

"We found out about it kind of through the grapevine," said the school's principal, Evan Schwartz. "It's a small school. It's hard to keep a secret." Van Voorhis, who has taught at the school for seven years and has a reputation for pushing the envelope, was immediately reassigned out of the classroom while the Department of Education investigates.

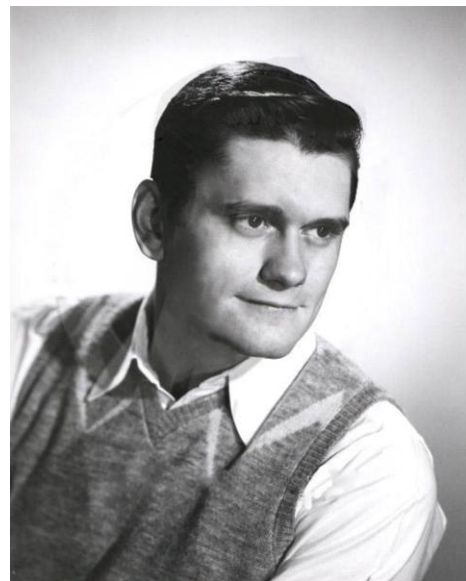
The suspension has the student body up in arms, leading to a letter-writing campaign to Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and the creation of a "Save Mr. V" page on Facebook.

Students last week said they were appalled that school officials had acted so prudishly. "We're not little kids. We are in high school," said 15-year-old junior Omar Caminero. "It's not like we've never read anything like that -- we have." "He didn't mean it to be anything other than something we could learn from," said junior Frankchesca Jimenez, 16.

A spokeswoman for the DOE declined to comment. Schwartz stopped short of calling the story inappropriate but said he was required to act. "I deemed for someone else to decide whether it was inappropriate," he said. "I had to report it." Although the school did not send a letter out to parents, Schwartz said they had "been made aware of it." Van Voorhis did not respond to messages for comment. Palahniuk's agent said the author was unavailable for comment.

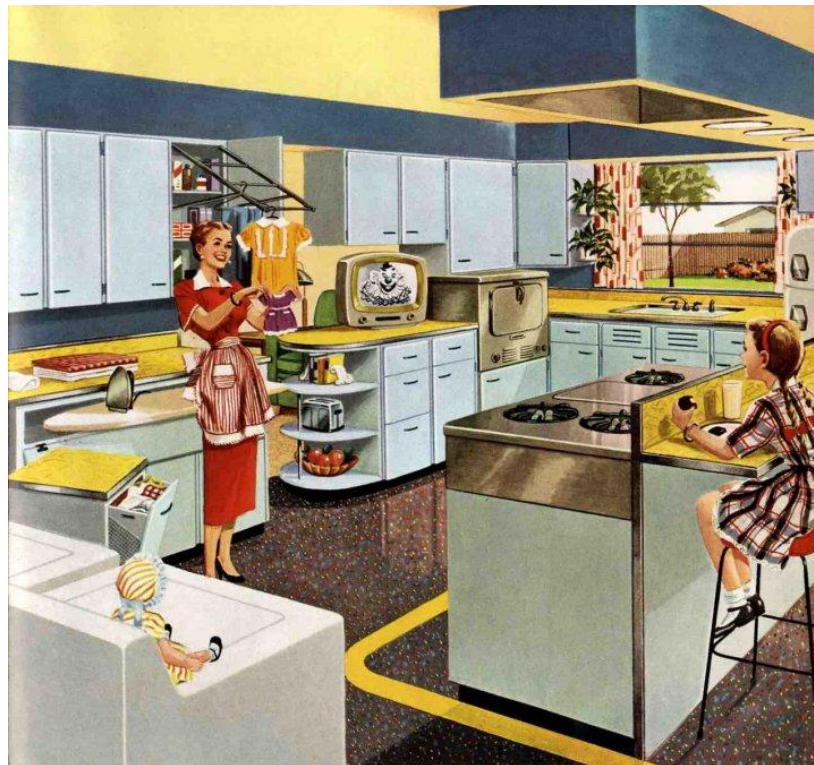
Available at http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/bronx/item_nV6xCRYzrjDVUIZFbd_XD2L#ixzz1BgvGzyfV.
Access on January 21, 2011.

ANNEX Q – “THE SHRINE OF PAIN”, OR CASSIE WRIGHT’S ARTISTIC MARTYRS



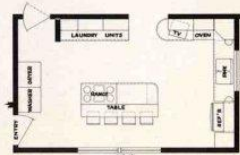
Clockwise, from top left: Buddy Ebsen as the Tin Man in *the Wizard of Oz*, Margaret Hamilton as the Wicked Witch of the West in *the Wizard of Oz*, Dick York some years before his accident in *They Came to Cordura*, and Gene Kelly in the famous scene in *Singin' in the Rain*. The images were all retrieved from the Internet on July 20, 2011, in the following addresses, respectively: <http://www.thewizardofozmovie.com/ebsen.html>, <http://www.thewizardofozmovie.com/hamilton.html>, <http://caylabirk.blogspot.com/2010/09/gene-kelly-v-clockwork-orange-singin-in.html>, and http://www.giprado.com/Feit_bio_york.html.

ANNEX R – EXAMPLES OF HYPERREALITY



THE TELEVISION KITCHEN

Mother will not be isolated here. This compact kitchen has ample space for the preparation and serving of meals, has laundry facilities, and a television set on a swivel which can be viewed either from the kitchen or the living room. Built-in features, which not only simplify work but make fullest use of wall and floor areas, make such compactness possible. In addition to the cooking-oven units in specially designed cabinets, there are three built-in laundry aids: The retractable Hide-A-Rack for hanging freshly ironed clothing; Ironette, a slide-out ironing board; and the Laundry Cart with its lift-out clothes hamper and storage shelves. A large picture window behind the breakfast bar looks out on the garden.



The “realer than real”, or, in this case, the “more perfect than perfect”: an ideal kitchen for the ideal housewife. Image available at <http://www.decoracaoblog.com.br/2009/12/>. Access on July 25, 2011.

ANNEX S – EXAMPLES OF HYPERREALITY



In this piece of advertisement, hyperreality is based on the ideas of “whiter than white”, “brighter than bright” and “more colored than colored”. Based on the girl’s face, we could also consider “happier than happy”. Image available at <http://www.artflakes.com/en/shop/advertising-archives>. Access on July 25, 2011.

ANNEX T – EXAMPLES OF HYPERREALITY



Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) and her friend Kitty (Toni Collette) in Laura's ideal kitchen in *The Hours* (2002). Image available at <http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1807859436/photo/457931>. Access on July 25, 2011.



As a more perfect than perfect housewife, Laura Brown waves her husband goodbye on his way to work. Image available at <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/01/14/1073877894564.html>. Access on July 25, 2011.

ANNEX U – EXAMPLES OF HYPERREALITY

Different moments of Bree Van de Kamp, the “more ideal than ideal” housewife in *Desperate Housewives*.



Baking a pie. Available at <http://janathetiger.wordpress.com/>. Access on July 25, 2011.



Bringing a basket of muffins to a funeral. Available at <http://blonderevelations.blogspot.com/2010/03/i-am-no-bree-van-de-kamp.html>. Access on July 25, 2011.

ANNEX V – EXAMPLES OF HYPERREALITY



The Truman Show (1998) is frequently associated to Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and hyperreality because of its plot: Truman Burbank, an insurance salesman, discovers after over thirty years that his whole life had been a TV show. The photo shows Laura Linney as Meryl Burbank, Truman's perfect wife/co-star of the show, advertising *The Chef's Pal*, "a grater/dicer/peeler – all in one!" Image available at http://www.blurayshop.com.br/the_truman_show_blu_ray_o_show_de_truman_o_show_da_vida-b1953/. Access on July 25, 2011.

ANNEX W – INTERVIEW WITH CHUCK PALAHNIUK ABOUT *HAUNTED*

Those burnt tongue moments - Chuck Palahniuk in interview

"Words are the first step we take to turn intentions into reality", declares American author Chuck Palahniuk. "All our vows, - he explains, - and declarations and signatures: Words. And ceremonies where we speak words (pledges and promises) in front of our peers. Again, that's how human beings develop their dreams into a physical reality". It seems as if Palahniuk has an almost mystical belief in the power of words and stories. His 2002 novel *Lullaby* told the story of a poem that is in reality a 'culling song', possessing the power to kill when spoken. In 2004, on a book tour, Palahniuk read a new story, *Guts* (that now forms a part of his new novel *Haunted*), that was apparently so powerfully horrific that people fainted (67 to date).

Palahniuk is the author of cult novels like *Fight Club*, *Choke*, *Invisible Monsters* and *Diary*. Cult in the sense that the subject matter is far from mainstream. Not in the sense of popularity. Palahniuk is a regular in the bestseller lists. This, his detractors suggest, is because he writes the sort of books that people who don't read books like to read. That part of his audience are not regular 'book readers' is certainly true. He has managed to connect with a generation reared on MTV in a way that few others have. In truth, many of his detractors focus on the audience profile because they object to the graphic nature of his work. Stories about disembowelment don't belong in the literary canon it would seem (space must be left for more novels where writers ponder the lives of writers pondering life, à la McEwan). He's thoughtful and unrepentant about the themes that run through his work: "Please consider - he writes - that books are the only form of mass media that address risky, potentially offensive topics. Consuming a book depends on the reader's consent. That effort – compared to the passive nature of watching movies or listening to music – gives books a privacy and permission no other medium has. Plus, it cost so little to produce a book (again, the reader does all the work), that a book doesn't have to return the huge profits that a television program or movie or album does".

“
books
are the
only form
of mass
media
that
address
risky,
potentially
offensive
topics.
”

The extreme nature of his work is as much a structured effect to draw both the author and audience further into the story. "I always want to keep the story moving, - he explains. - This means a constant flow of plot points, occurring in short scenes. Over the length of a novel, this forces the plot beyond any moderate crisis. What might be the dramatic peak of another book will just be the first-act peak in my books. If I have a bold, upsetting idea, I'll use it as soon as possible. Otherwise, I find my flow of ideas stops. No matter how appalling the scene, you can always top it eventually. Plus, - he concludes, - books have such a tiny share of the public attention. No one reads. With all these strikes against books, I think their advantage is the ability to address topics and depict scenes that no other medium can. If writers don't go to these extremes, no one will."

There is much more to Palahniuk though than just the shock factor of addressing issues and events that don't normally crop up in literature. He is one of the leading exponents of 'minimalism', as practiced by writers such as Tom Spanbauer, and Amy Hempel (of whom Palahniuk said that after reading her story *The Harvest* "almost every other book you ever read will suck"). It's a stripped back form where, not surprisingly, words take on an important weight. His chapters are short, and he practices what are called 'burnt tongue' moments, in his own words "a way of saying something, but saying it wrong, twisting it to slow down the reader. Forcing the reader to read close, maybe read twice, not just skim along a surface of abstract images, short-cut adverbs, and clichés". It's a style that, it seems to me, dismisses reader-response theories such as those given by Stanley Fish, who famously as an experiment wrote a list of names on his students' blackboard telling them it was a discovered poem; in turn they produced a meaning for the poem, suggesting that meaning is in the hands of the reader, not the writer. "I subscribe to the theory of Derrida, - Palahniuk argues, - that fiction is a sort of software that runs in the reader's mind to produce an emotional result. This way, the story is a very calculated formula that must use every means possible to 'land' or occur to best effect. This includes complete control of the 'pace' or delivery of the material". I'm too slow off the mark to ask whether in writing *Guts* fainting was included in the programme!

Instead of copying current literature styles, - he further elaborates, - I base my work on poetry or spoken-word storytelling, where timing is all-important and rhetorical devices must work to remind the reader of the story's total content, at all times. For best cumulative effect. With that in mind, all my single-sentence paragraphs and echoing choruses and miss-stated 'burnt tongue' deliberate mistakes are methods to slow the reader and control the speed of the plot. It's a style based more on 'beats' of time, like music. Beyond that, I can't control the reader's interpretation of the story's content. I do make an effort to never state my personal issue around each work. To do so would impose a 'correct' interpretation and exclude the reader's experience and participation."

Re-inventing the Horror Story

Palahniuk is a structurally experimental writer, his latest novel *Haunted* being the strongest example to date. Often you get the impression that how to tell the story is as important as the story itself to him. *Haunted* is a collection of short horror stories formed into a novel. A number of writers are invited to a writer's residence with the promise of peace and tranquillity, instead they find themselves imprisoned in a bizarre theatre, forced to create stories. "Odd as this sounds, - explains Chuck, - I wanted *Haunted* to consist of as many 'textures' as possible. I loved writing the little travel book *Fugitives and Refugees*, because it combined interviews with stories with essays with recipes with definitions with lists, etc. All those textures keep the reader's eye interested. The page never looks boring or threatening. And if the reader doesn't care for one type of information, another type arrives quick enough. In *Haunted*, I wanted to mimic the appearance of "Best of" collections. For example, *The Collected Works of Poe*. Those books alternate stories with novellas and poems. Fiction with non-fiction. In *Haunted*, I use a 'wrap' or 'envelope' story to connect 23 short stories. Plus, each story is introduced by a poem. This creates a variety of 'textures' of information, making the pages more visually interesting. And combining one large story with many small ones lets me hit a long series of climaxes instead of the single major climax of a typical novel. And, - he jokes, -if the reader isn't appalled by one gruesome climax, heck, there's plenty more to come!"

Haunted, taken with *Lullaby* and *Diary* is part of a trilogy of what Palahniuk terms 'horror stories'. For a generation that was reared to believe that horror had to include either a) a cape and fangs, or b) a twisted mask-wearing killer with an obsession with high-school students indulging in immoral acts, Palahniuk's terming of his fiction as 'horror' is interesting. How are his stories horror stories? "Consider that we're moderately afraid of some topics, - he responds, - and we can discuss those and give ourselves a little thrill and goosebumps. But also consider that we're so afraid of other topics that we'll never discuss them. Some fears are so threatening that we can't allow them into our minds. My goal is to cross that line, and depict the fears we can't face. You can argue that Stoker's vampire represented venereal disease or the migration of Jews from Eastern Europe (two old theories), then King's *Carrie* foretold school shootings. In my horror, I want to deal with personal humiliation and failure - a kind of internal monster, where the villain and victim are the same person".

Following in a similar vein, there's a strong tradition of horror writing in Anglo-Irish literature, whether it be Bram Stoker or people like Maturin or Sheridan le Fanu, and many academics have suggested that their fiction developed out of a subliminal need to address the change and violence inherent in their society at the time (relating it for instance to the question of Irish Nationalism). Where does the horror novel fit in, then, in post 9/11 America? "Again this is my take or 'angle' on horror, - he replies, - but by combining the villain and victim, I'd like to gently remind people that we create most of our own problems. The same people who wail about the need for imported oil, and global warming, and the war in Iraq - they still drive a six-banger SUV twenty miles to the store when they need a carton of milk. They still put three garbage cans on the curb each week. If we all recognize a personal responsibility in current politics, that might resolve them".

While it may horrify the Christian right, Palahniuk takes much of his inspiration from Christian imagery. In an interview with readers of the [Guardian](#), he commented: "In almost all my work, I try to re-invent Christian images and stories and themes". What is it that draws him towards this type of imagery? "I'm always attracted to social models and metanarratives that allow people to co-exist in a community, - he explains, - I love being with people. But I need a script, a role, something that will help me overcome my fears of rejection and shame. Most religions and belief systems provide a blueprint for some sort of community. And the religion's leaders model a way of being. For example, in my book *Choke*, a character enacts his own death and resurrection every night - as does the narrator in *Fight Club*. Here's Jesus, allowing himself to look terrible in front of his peers. That's the biggest purpose of religious gathering: permission to look terrible in public. We used to go to church to confess our worst behaviour, to be heard and forgiven, then to be redeemed and accepted back into our community. In most of my books, people achieve this same reunion with their peers, but through the new 'religious' forums of 12-step groups, support groups, and in *Haunted*, a writer's colony."

The Personal, the Political and the Big Ideas

There's a fascinating documentary, *Postcards from the Future*, filmed at a [conference](#), instigated by fans and the honours programme at Edinboro University Pennsylvania, to discuss the work of Palahniuk. (It included papers like *Freud and Fight Club*, and *Salvation through Disbelief: The Cult as a Social Phenomenon in Palahniuk's Novels*.) Palahniuk attended and participated at the conference. During one of the workshops he proposed that storytelling, in itself, is and could be a force for social change, far more powerful than, for example, street protests. "My conviction comes from just watching how humans work. Now, coming through forty years of protest and rebellion, the only real visions being presented are by advertising: Buy this. Live this way. Look like the model... It's time people stopped protesting – and thereby giving more power to their enemy, by reinforcing the enemy with opposition – and humans began to offer their own visions for a better way to live. Not just products, but new plans or blueprints by which to live. And those models, again, will probably start with words in the form of rules, goals, philosophies, statements, observations."

Watching how humans work forms part of the idea behind *Haunted*, a book where writers are cramped together to suffer, and believe that their suffering can itself in turn be converted to fame. Critics have been quick to label it a satirical punch at the 'reality-TV' culture of recent years. "I never intended *Haunted* to parody reality television, - Palahniuk counters. - The last such show I saw was *An American Family* in the 1970s. I haven't owned a television since 1990. *Haunted* is more about the way people tend to create their identity out of their external circumstances – while refusing to generate themselves from their own will and intentions. People seem happier to gripe about their suffering than to create a world without that suffering. People seem to be in love with drama and conflict – but refuse to admit that. We love it when shit happens, or more accurately... when we make shit happen. And then we love to complain about it. And then we want to get paid for complaining. Everyone is a critic, but fewer people bother to create anything. We can say what's wrong, but no one bothers to fix it."

In *Diary*, the female narrator, a failed painter, writes to her husband, who lies in a coma. That, obviously, is a simplistic way to put it - the husband for example has attempted suicide, leaving behind numerous problems, while his wife contemplates the life she could have had without him. There is an argument to say that *Diary* is autobiographical, in the sense that it describes the essence of the artist and the pains that torment creative people. Is it true that art, be it literature, painting, or music, is born off suffering? Can happy people be artistic? "The way I write, I have to be exploring and exhausting a personal issue, hidden inside the story, - Palahniuk responds, frankly. - Since I started, with no promise of money or attention, I needed some reward for the effort of writing. I had to have fun. And to process and resolve some problem. That's still how I work. So, I begin each book from a problem, some personal issue that I can't resolve and I can't tolerate. An illness or injury or failed relationship or disappointment or death. By masking it with metaphor, I can research and write and be around people, but always be exploring and exhausting my emotional reaction to this upset. Happy people don't need this kind of therapy. On a basic physical level, illness or injury or emotional breakdown sits you in a chair long enough to create something. Being incapacitated gives you permission to learn the skill you need to execute your ideas. Happy healthy folks (or folks on Zolof) are too busy, running around, laughing, to bother with learning how to paint."

His work may be dark, but he dares to be creative, and to aim high. With *Guts* for example, the faint-provoking story, he reveals that his "goal was to write a kind-of 'landmark' horror story, like Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*. When Jackson's classic story first came out in *The New Yorker* in the 1950s, hundreds of readers cancelled their subscriptions to the magazine. So, yes, the first reaction to horror is shock. Years later, people can see the metaphors. With *Guts*, people laugh at first. Then, when they see where the story is headed, they squirm in dread. Then – sometimes – they faint. Ultimately, the story gives them permission to explore and express their own most-secret horror stories. Now, after each reading event, I'll find a dozen people eager to tell me stories a lot darker and most upsetting than *Guts*".

Guts combines three actual stories that Palahniuk had heard (leading him for years to pray, he says, before boarding planes, "Please God, do not crash this plane because I'm the only one of Your children who knows all three of these great stories..."). Masturbation, in a variety of forms, and physical mutilation are at the core of the story. It is disgusting (without being prudish - read it), certainly, though this reader didn't faint. And rather than horror at the end, I was left with a curious sense of sadness and empathy. Empathy for a character who had done something that I would never wish to do. "According to the letters I get, - Chuck responds, confirming that I'm not alone, - many people find the story to be the funniest and saddest story they've ever heard. The end is impossibly heart-breaking, as the father calls his son 'the family dog.' It's the same sadness that Jackson achieves when the 'Lottery' children help stone their mother to death."

This year Stephen King caused a rumpus in the American world of letters by a) being awarded the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, from the American National Book Foundation, and b) suggesting that

there is a certain elitism at work when critics divide work between popular and literary fiction –(he questioned: "Do you get social academic brownie points for deliberately staying out of touch with your own culture?"). Palahniuk's response to the controversy is as good a place to finish as any. It again reiterates the fact that stories, to this American author, are far more than just blood and guts: "Far be it from me to judge anyone else as 'literature'. Most 'literature' bores the piss out of me. But give me good 'storytelling', and I'm a happy clam. King is a good storyteller, and his success proves that. Consider that stories serve different purposes. Some people want comfort. Some want confrontation. Some want a story to be exciting, but some want a sedative. Me, I want to be shocked and delighted, and maybe a bit traumatized. When I read, when I take that much time and effort, I want to be changed – transformed – by the story. And working on a story – I want to be a largely different person by the time I write "the end". What you expect from a story is probably what you expect from life."

Available at http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/als_page1/_chuck_palahniuk_haunted_interview.html. Access on January 21, 2011.

ANNEX X – PROGERIA



Available at <http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/resultados/progeria.html>. Access on September 20, 2011.



Available <http://www.americanspectator.biz/breaking-news/girl-in-9-grows-eight-times-faster-than-normal-progeria/>. Access on September 20, 2011.

ANNEX Y – MADONNA, VIRGIN FRUIT OF THE AEROBIC SPHERE

**ANNEX Z – LADY GAGA, THE TRANSVESTITE BAUDRILLARD
(UNFORTUNATELY) COULDN'T SEE**



Top left: the meat dress. Available at <http://veja.abril.com.br/noticia/celebridades/vestido-de-carne-de-lady-gaga-sera-exposto>. Access on September 20, 2011.

Top right: bubbles. Available at <http://ordinaryordinary.blogspot.com/2010/08/bubble-frenzy-stirred-by-lady-gagas.html>. Access on September 20, 2011.

Bottom left: Jo Calderone, the male alter ego. Available at <http://tvfoco1.wordpress.com/2010/07/01/lady-gaga-posa-vestida-de-homem-para-a-%E2%80%98vogue%E2%80%99-japonesa/>. Access on September 20, 2011.

Bottom right: cigarette glasses. Available at <http://www.signature9.com/beauty/no-fragrance-deal-for-lady-gaga-yet>. Access on September 20, 2011.