

Escape from freedom

Fight Club: Hollywood's Sucker Punch for Fascism

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The movie *Fight Club* is a film Unabomber Ted Kaczynski might make while flying high on Prozac and methamphetamine. It's a cinematic version of Al Gore's followers on a rant about the "real" meanings of Al's *Earth in the Balance* after someone has slipped them a mickey with hallucinogenic mushroom powder in it. *Fight Club* is cinematic Nietzsche; Luddite revivalism; a screaming anti-capitalist tantrum; a sucker punch in the face of reason, markets, faith, redemption, and, well, God.

Jack the Narrator, played with rollercoaster energy by Edward Norton, is introduced as an alienated insomniac who worships IKEA furniture. This guy has even memorized the holy text, the stupid catalogue, for goodness sake. Jack describes to us his boring, aimless life revolving around consumer pressures, personal anxiety and sneering orders from his boss.

Despite the appearances of personal peace and affluence, Jack just can't shake his anomie. So off to the doctor he goes. Doc is not one bit sympathetic with Jack's afflictions: "You wanna see pain?! Swing by the Methodist Church Tuesday night. Guys with testicular cancer. That's pain!"

Jack visits that group, and others, eventually becoming addicted to multiple self-help groups, attending tuberculosis groups, intestinal parasite groups; you name it and Jack finds disease and fakes participation.

During his nightly addiction-group forays, he spies a woman apparently playing the same game. Marla (played with snooty emptiness by Helena Bonham Carter) is an oddly kindred soul, but Jack confronts her, telling her the fake 12-step world is his turf, not hers. They come to a negotiated agreement, trading nights at the TB Group with sessions at the Intestinal Parasite Group, as if talking about baseball cards.

Jack's life literally explodes after he meets Tyler Durden (played with a driving tension by Brad Pitt). Jack's perfectly ordered apartment is mysteriously dynamited, leaving him homeless. Jack calls Tyler, who embodies all Jack secretly desires: no conscience, reckless, uninhibited sensuality. He finds refuge with this libertine in his ramshackle, leaking hovel of an urban townhouse. There Tyler introduces Jack to the liberating power of life-as-dung and "freedom" through beating the living daylights out of each other.

From their bloodlettings, *Fight Club* is born. Soon young men around the country secretly meet to fight and bloody each other in dank basements. "Nothing was settled, but nothing mattered . . . Afterwards we all felt saved."

Jack's life becomes more complicated when Marla becomes the sex toy of crazed Tyler. Marla is the only continuous female presence in the film, and believe me, that is not good for women. "We're a generation of men raised by women," Tyler reveals. "I'm not sure we need another woman." Tyler proceeds to slam fathers and God Himself in his tirades. "If our fathers bailed, what does that say about God? . . . We're God's unwanted children."

Project Mayhem

Tyler reveals The Vision: a network of anti-capitalist fascist cells selected from *Fight Club* participants. Individuals are lost in the group identity of Project Mayhem. No questions asked. No individuality. Faith must go too. "F-damnation! F-redemption!" Here *Fight Club* is right in line with the godfather of postmodernism, Friedrich Nietzsche. As "better-red-than-dead" philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, "Nietzsche is nauseated by repentance and redemption, which he calls *folie circulaire*."

Tyler and Jack also echo one of Dostoyevsky's characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who teaches if God is dead, all things are permissible. "It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything." In the end Jack realizes Tyler is a figment of his imagination. All the organizing of the anti-capitalist fascist network was actually done by Jack.

Fight Club ends with Marla and Jack holding hands as they gaze, not into a sunset, but into the nighttime cityscape, while credit card, bank, and insurance buildings explode before them as Project Mayhem bears its rotten fruit.

The key to cultural destruction is to confuse a few generations about absolutes, reason, liberty, truth, and God. Writing about "The Great 'Liberal' Deathwish" Malcolm Muggeridge said, "Some future Gibbon. . . is likely to be greatly intrigued by this 'liberal' salvage operation that turns out to be a demolition squad; this deathwish fulfilling itself in terms of utopianism whereby slavery comes to be enforced in the name of liberation."

In *Fight Club* fascism becomes the liberating fellowship of alienated, conscienceless men banded together in a network of blood and death. "Like a space monkey . . . ready to sacrifice. Ready to be sacrificed for the greater good," says Jack, a/k/a, Tyler. That's postmodern fascism on celluloid.

Muggeridge warned the great liberal deathwish can "bring about the very authoritarianism it ostensibly finds abhorrent... When men and women persuade themselves that they can shape . . . their own destiny in the dimensions of their own mortality, we infallibly fall into the servitude of self-gratification or collectively into one form or another of Gulag Archipelago."

If Jack/Tyler has his way, there will be a lot of Gulags for those who disagree. As postmodern prophet Prof. Stanley Fish of Duke University once sneered, "Someone is going to be restricted next and it is your job to make damn sure that someone is not you."

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The Ted K Archive

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Strange review, but it's a part of the Unabomber commentary cycle.

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