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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku
Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 19. rujna 2022.

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1. Introduction

In this master's thesis we will take a closer look at the phenomenon of consumerism in the context of Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and Alexandra Kleeman's *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, three novels that all provide a critique of the postmodern American culture of their time and are best known for their satire of postmodern consumerism. Before we touch on *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, the most recent of the three novels, we will first mention *White Noise* and *Fight Club* as two of the most prominent and frequently discussed works of literature on the subject. After exploring the different aspects of the ideology of consumerism and its varied social implications, we will briefly mention mass media and advertising and the important role they play in constructing and maintaining our consumer society. We will also examine the ways in which consumer culture has come to profoundly shape and affect postmodern identities, leading to a (global) identity crisis that has become prevalent in postmodern society, as clearly shown in the portrayal of our three protagonists. We will extend on this issue by taking a brief look at the slow but sure disintegration of postmodern relations, as this constitutes one of the main themes of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, as well as another important aspect of the logic of consumption. In light of the aforementioned crisis of identities, *White Noise* and *Fight Club* will be discussed with regard to the widespread feelings of insecurity concerning the notion of masculinity that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s; feelings which have culminated in what is, in regards to *Fight Club*, often referred to as 'toxic masculinity.' In a similar vein, we will explore the notion of violence as it appears in the novels, looking at how violence can be seen as a modern man's response to this crisis of male identity, as well as forming an integral part of the ideology of consumerism. Subsequently, we will briefly touch on the notion of 'fatigue' as another important aspect of postmodernity and a necessary counterpart to (postmodern) violence. Conversely, in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* we will look at the ways in which consumerism impacts women and how it has shaped the current ideals of femininity. In this context we will also elaborate on the notion of 'the body' as the most prestigious of consumer objects which also constitutes an important part of the novel. All these seemingly unrelated phenomena, which are to a greater or lesser extent examined in all of the three novels, will be discussed against the backdrop of the work of the French author Jean Baudrillard, one of the most influential authors and critics in the field of mass media and postmodern culture. More precisely, we will turn to his 1970 book called *The Consumer Society: myths and structures* to look at how all these issues originate from the very logic of consumption and how the latter sets the stage for a society of oppression and alienation

disguised as personal freedom and choice. In other words, we will look at what consumerism really entails beyond its economic dimension and its profusion of commodities, and we will lay down some of the defining aspects of its ideology as they are discussed not just in *The Consumer Society*, but in two other influential works in the field as well; Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Daniel Boorstin's *The Image*.

2. Where the noise is coming from and why we fight

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* was first published in January of 1985 and it soon became one of the most widely acclaimed novels of the 1980s which also won him the U.S. National Book Award for Fiction. Although it discusses some of the same subjects as his previous works, *White Noise* is one of DeLillo's most famous works and is considered to be his 'breakout' novel. The first part of the novel, called 'Waves and Radiation,' has very little plot and serves as an introduction to the characters and the themes that will be explored in the second part of the novel called 'Airborne toxic event.' The storyline follows a year in the life of Jack Gladney, a college professor and chairman of the Hitler studies department in 'The-College-on-the-Hill' and his fourth wife Babette. The couple live with their four children from previous marriages in a town called Blacksmith. Jack is a typical American man from a small college town that spends time with his family, engaging in consumer practices such as watching TV and going to the mall. However, Jack and Babette both suffer from a fear of death and often talk about who is going to die first. Jack's fear grows worse after getting exposed to a toxic chemical following a chemical spill that occurred in Blacksmith. Without telling anyone, Babette agrees to take Dylar, an experimental drug that is supposed to eliminate fear of death. In order to participate in the study she has an affair with the project manager called Willie Mink. After finding out about their affair, in the third part of the novel called 'Dylarama,' Jack decides to shoot Mink. After confronting him in Mink's motel room, Jack shoots him but gets shot by Mink in return, after which Jack drives them both to a hospital run by nuns, where he finds out that even nuns don't believe in God anymore.

Fight Club by Chuck Palahniuk was published in 1996 and it remains one of the most famous novels of the nineties whose adaptation into a film three years later lead to the novel's cult status that it still enjoys today. The novel tells a story of an unnamed protagonist who, living on autopilot and working a job he hates, attends different support groups for cancer patients in order to fight his insomnia, since this is the only thing that helps him sleep. In one of the support groups he meets Marla Singer, another 'tourist' whose presence only reminds

him that he too is pretending, which in turn brings back his sleeping disorder. While on a vacation from one of his numerous business trips, he meets Tyler Durden, a charismatic nonconformist who lives life by his own rules, which often includes breaking the law. Tyler works many jobs; he waits tables in a hotel where he urinates in people's soups, he's a part-time movie projectionist who inserts snippets of pornography into family movies, and he also makes soap. When the narrator's apartment burns down in an explosion, he moves in with Tyler. On one occasion, Tyler asks the narrator to hit him as hard as he can, which is when the two men realize they like beating each other up. Soon after they start Fight club; a secret club where men get together to fight. In the meantime, Tyler and Marla start a sexual relationship. With more and more men joining fight club all over town and nationwide, Tyler recruits a group of followers for 'project Mayhem'; an attempt to take down corporate America in a series of crimes. Opposing the violence and the severity of the crimes, the narrator eventually realizes that he has been suffering from a Dissociate Identity Disorder and that he is in fact Tyler Durden.

Both *White Noise* and *Fight Club* have come to be considered classics in terms of the themes they analyse, which are first and foremost the negative effects of contemporary consumer culture and the ways they have impacted the modern man. Jack Gladney and the anonymous narrator of *Fight Club* represent the average American man of his time, defined by the products he consumes and unsure of his identity and his place in the world. Their lives are a perfect example of what Jean Baudrillard calls the 'standard package,' referring to a "standard model of middle-class life" where the emphasis is not so much on material goods, although these play an important role in consumer societies, as much as to the "ideal of conformity" (*The Consumer Society* 70). Whether flicking through TV channels or browsing through furniture catalogues, both protagonists eventually become aware of the fragile and superficial nature of their own identity. Identity which, in Jack Gladney's case, is constructed through his professional image and his consumer practices, and in terms of *Fight Club*, through the many objects the narrator has accumulated. Furthermore, not only do they realize that the American dream has failed them, promising that "one day we'd all be millionaires, and movie gods, and rock stars," but they also begin to see that the heroic narrative inherent in the American dream is nothing but an illusion (Palahniuk ch. 19). As Stephanie Halldorson points out in her book on the hero in contemporary American fiction, the postmodern American hero has been "reduced to accumulating rather than conquering" (11). Moreover, with society shifting further away from the old values of labour and production towards what is usually considered a feminine activity

of consumption, and with the gradual collapse of traditional notions of masculinity, the postmodern man began to question his own identity in a time when the binary opposition between femininity and masculinity started to fade. *White Noise* and *Fight Club* tackle these issues by, among other things, addressing the questions surrounding masculine authority and the crisis of masculine role models. It is precisely the insecurities of the two protagonists regarding their own masculinity and a fear of their own mortality which, as we will see later on, eventually lead them both to violence in hopes of returning to a more real, natural state in which old notions of masculinity were much more clear-cut. Violence that essentially proved futile in the commodified world of 'hyperreality.'

3. You too can have a body like mine

Sometimes referred to as *Fight Club* for girls, *You too can have a body like mine* is the debut novel of the young American writer Alexandra Kleeman born in 1986 in Berkeley, California. Published in 2015 to much critical acclaim, the novel was a New York Times Editor's Choice and in 2016 it won Kleeman the Bard Fiction Prize for promising young writers. Kleeman has also written short stories and her work has been published in many literary magazines over the years, including *The New Yorker* and *The Guardian*. The protagonist of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* is a young girl only referred to as A, who works as a proofreader and lives in a suburban apartment with her roommate B. Theirs is an unusual friendship as B can't stand to be alone, she requires a lot of attention from A and even seems to want to turn into her by following her around and trying to look like her. This in turn makes A even more anxious and uncertain of her own identity as she feels B is slowly morphing into her. A also has a boyfriend named C that she spends a lot of time with in order to get away from B. However, C doesn't seem to agree with A on anything and the two of them spend most of their time together watching TV and discussing commercials, such as the one for Kandy Kakes; an entirely synthetic, extremely processed sugary snack that A becomes obsessed with. She also becomes intrigued by the so called 'Disappearing Dad Disorder' taking place in her town which, alongside Kandy Kakes and a local supermarket chain called Wally's, eventually lead to her joining a cult following her breakup with C. The cult, called the 'Church of the Conjoined Eater,' seeks to help people return to themselves by erasing all of their personal memories and by having them eat nothing but Kandy Kakes which are, due to them being so processed that they don't contain anything living, considered a pure, 'bright food' by the Church. A eventually realizes that Kandy Kakes, Wally's, as well as some other advertised products in the novel, are

all owned by the Church, which is also the reason behind the 'Disappearing Dad Disorder.' However, not being able to erase her memories of B and C, A is eventually expelled from the cult and sent to work as a decoy in 'That's My Partner,' a couple's game show her and C used to watch on TV which, as it turns out, is also owned by the Church. One night at work she encounters B and C as a new couple participating in the show.

The world of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* is best described as a world of hyperreality dominated by television, game shows, supermarket chains and advertisements, which all appear more real and seem to have more substance than the characters themselves. In fact, the author gives very little information about the characters and they are mostly described in relation to one another and in relation to the things they consume, as evident in the absence of their personal names. Through the portrayal of A and her agonizing search for herself in a simulated reality of TV commercials and supermarket produce, Kleeman exposes the fragility of modern identity and she puts forward the idea that identity has now become directly linked to the things we consume. And while in this sense the author continues the tradition of more popular works on consumer culture, such as *White Noise* and *Fight Club*, what makes the novel stand out is the fact that she approaches some of the same ideas from a specifically female perspective, discussing topics such as romance, beauty products and body image. This gives the book a "sense of gender, and fear and emotion" which are "so often missing from the more detached and more overtly political works of canonical consumer critique" (Neely-Cohen). Kleeman also adds her spin on things by elaborating on the notion that food can be used as a means of getting in touch with one's real self and taking control of one's life. This idea that one can now construct one's identity around food is well alive today with different dietary movements and regimes, and it shows that just about anything can become a commodity fetish in the logic of consumerism. Underneath the seemingly superficial title and Kleeman's humorous writing, the novel is a great portrayal of the feelings of anxiety and paranoia that come with being a consumer and simply existing in a body, in this case the female body. Furthermore, while the television dominated world of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* can be seen as a thing of the past in comparison to the world of the internet and social media we have today, the novel has an eerily familiar feeling to it and A, B and C somehow feel like they are of today. The sense of anomie and fatigue we encounter with the characters who spend their days anxiously watching over their appearances, counting calories, binging on empty content of TV and advertisements reminds all too well of people scrolling through Instagram searching for likes and short term distractions. A's inability to find her place in the world, as well as within

her personal relationships, coupled with the feelings of loneliness, alienation and loss of self running through the book also resonate, and the presence of big corporations taking hold of majority of life also give it a very present-day feel. Watching A's doubts and insecurities slowly turn into paranoia which eventually prompt her into joining a cult and abandoning her life entirely, gives the impression that what happened to A could just as easily happen to us, which gives the book a dystopian and unsettling feeling. Similarly to *White Noise* and *Fight Club*, A's attempt at ultimate escape fails as she exclaims "Life [consumer culture] is everywhere, inescapable, imperative" (Kleeman 283).

4. Society of consumption

Consumerism as a phenomenon has to do with a lot more than just the overwhelming production and acquisition of goods in an economic sense. More importantly, it can be argued that it is the dominant ideology of our time, one that underpins the very structure of our postmodern society. Looking at the world today, it is becoming increasingly more obvious that the logic of consumption has come to determine and shape so much of people's lives, from their personal desires and their environment to the very nature of their interpersonal relationships. The extent to which it has taken hold of majority of life is also a testament to the work of authors such as Baudrillard or Debord who, having written about this topic in the 1960s and the 1970s, were able to grasp the widespread implications and the growing devastating effects that consumer logic has had and has continued to have on the individual lives of people, as well as society in general. Moreover, the fact that the practice of consumption only seems to be accelerating also makes is a topic worthy of discussion. In Baudrillard's and Debord's breakdown of consumerism, consumption takes on an active social dimension and it is presented as a collective phenomenon ruling all spheres of life, a dominant model of life that cannot be questioned. Baudrillard, himself heavily influenced by structuralism, treats consumption as a language, i.e. a system of signs through which we communicate with the world and with one another. In a similar vein, Debord points out that 'the spectacle,' a popular term coined by himself which is often used synonymously with postmodern consumer societies, is not a collection of objects or images, but a "social relation between people that is mediated by images" (7). Looking at consumption from this angle points to one of the most important things to note about it. This is the fact that, contrary to popular belief, consuming now has very little to do with objects, although these are being produced at unprecedented rates and never before have people been surrounded with as many objects as they are today. In other words,

objects are no longer being used for a specific practical purpose, as they once were. According to Baudrillard, what is actually being consumed in the society of consumption are not objects *per se*, and he even differentiates between the purchaser/consumer and the traditional user. Instead, he claims that objects are now being defined by what they signify, not by their intended use. Consequently, it is these signs and messages, i.e. that which a particular object signifies or implies, that we consume. We can draw a parallel here between these signs and significations that Baudrillard talks about and what Daniel Boorstin refers to as 'the image' in his 1962 book called *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, where he explains how we live in a world where "the image, more interesting than the original, has itself become the original. The shadow has become the substance" (Boorstin ch. 5). This is essentially the principle we find behind popular terms such as those of 'simulacra' or 'hyperreality' coined by Baudrillard, even the notion of 'the spectacle' in Debord's terms, which are all commonly used to refer to the simulated nature of our postmodern reality where signs, images or 'pseudo-events' as Boorstin also refers to them, have replaced direct experience. The notion of 'simulacra' for example, is used to denote infinite copies and reproductions without an original; a concept Baudrillard talks about in detail in his most famous book called *Simulacra and Simulation* which we will also be referencing as we go on. It is important to clarify that, as both Baudrillard and Debord emphasize in their work, we are not talking about imitation here or some sort of a distortion of the truth. In other words, "it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real," meaning that the real has now been replaced by the signs of the real (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 1). "The territory no longer precedes the map…it is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory, that engenders the territory" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 1). We can mention French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's notions of 'the signifier,' usually described as the sound-image, and 'the signified,' or the concept that the signifier is referring to, as these tie into what Baudrillard views as the great trauma of today, which is the loss of referentials. They can also help us to better understand the nature of hyperreality or simulacrum. Simply put, signs and images, which is what we are really consuming today, function as empty shells where they no longer refer to anything real. This is because, according to Baudrillard, the signifier has today taken precedence over the signified, or as he puts it: "The signifier becomes its own signified" (*The Consumer Society* 124). This has led to a blurring of the boundary between the actual object and its image; between reality and 'the spectacle.' Or as Boorstin puts it: "By sharpening our images we have blurred all our experience" (*The Image* ch. 5). It's easy to see how this would

create confusion with the modern consumer who becomes more and more removed from reality and his own identity, which are now being constructed and mediated almost exclusively by images. At one point in the novel, after deciding to join the Church, A says that: "These masked men were going to bring me to a cleaner place, where things were more sharply distinguished from one another and where I would finally have the space to figure out who I was…" (Kleeman 185) This complete loss of meaning and alienation on all levels stem from the fact that the structure of consumer societies rests on the superficial level of the image and the sign (the signifier) and not reality itself (the signified). Not even the reality of the object in terms of its actual use. Another good example of this can be found in a discussion Jack Gladney has with his colleague Murray Siskind when they arrive to visit 'the most photographed barn in America.' With several signs leading up to the barn, what they find upon arrival are groups of tourists with cameras and tripods, as well as people selling postcards and slides of the barn, when Murray tells Jack: "Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn…We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies…We see only what the others see" (DeLillo ch. 3). This example clearly shows how the signifier, created and perpetuated by mass media, eventually replaces the signified; the image replaces the actual content. Consequently, the individual can no longer differentiate between the image, in this case the representation of the barn, and direct experience, i.e. the barn in its objective reality. This is why Murray Siskind says that "the deeper we delve into the nature of things, the looser our structure may seem to become" (DeLillo ch. 17). Furthermore, in his work Boorstin talks about 'image-thinking' as another important characteristic of consumer societies, and he claims that 'image-thinking' has now replaced 'ideal-thinking.' He explains that unlike an image, an ideal is not synthetic, passive or ambiguous, but was rather created by tradition or history and it is something "we actively strive toward, not what we fit into" (ch. 5). In other words, the turning point for him occurred when "instead of thinking that an image was only a representation of an ideal, we come to see the ideal as a projection or generalization of the image" (Boorstin ch. 5). This type of 'image-thinking' goes in line with Baudrillard's theory of the loss of referentials we mentioned earlier and is probably most obvious today in the widespread use of social media platforms which have, by the very nature of the medium, doubtless popularized this kind of image-thinking. However, this shift from the signified to the signifier, or a shift from meaningful action to passive appearance has many negative implications for individuals in terms of their identity, as we will see later on. This is

partly because, as Boorstin puts it, “Image building is the building of reputations, not of characters” (ch. 5).

Having established that objects are not what is really being consumed today, but rather that which they signify, we should mention another important aspect of consumer logic. This is the fact that, having ‘lost’ their finality and their practical purpose, objects have now become “a term in a much greater combinatory, in sets of objects in which [they have] merely relational value” (*The Consumer Society* 115). From a structuralist point of view, these significations are then defined not by the use of an object, but by their relationship to the entire system of signs and commodities, reducing the logic of consumption to a sheer manipulation of signs. Baudrillard explains that once objects lose their specific reality, what becomes most important is their “serial, circular, spectacular arrangement – the future model of social relations” (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 7). Kleeman echoes this idea when A says: “It was terrible the way resemblances ran wild through the things of the world, the way one place or time mimicked another, making you feel that you were going in circles, going nowhere at all” (258). The fact that a system designed in such a way offers countless possibilities and combinations of signs, and at the same time remains so restrictive, since all it provides the consumer with are empty signs with no actual substance, doubtless contributes to the overwhelming feelings of alienation and loss of self one finds with modern consumers; in a world of hyperreality “everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy” (Palahniuk ch. 2). Nonetheless, the fact that objects are no longer defined by their use doesn’t imply that actual needs don’t exist anymore, since needs are true for all people regardless of their cultural of historical background. According to Baudrillard, what’s important to grasp is that consumption should not be analysed from this perspective. In fact, he sees the “reorganization of this primary level [of needs] into a system of signs” as the defining element of consumption and as “*the* specific mode, of transition from nature to culture in our era” (*The Consumer Society* 79). In a similar vein, Guy Debord talks about the changes that took place in terms of use value and exchange value of objects, explaining that use value has been on a constant decline whilst exchange value, which used to be representative of use value, has now become autonomous. According to him, usefulness has come to be considered exclusively in terms of exchange value and is now “completely at its mercy” (23). This circular nature of consumption is something Debord also touches on in his work when he speaks of the spectacle’s tautological character and describes it, among other things, as the “ruling order’s non-stop discourse about itself” (13). We can see how an individual with his distinctive character has no place in such a system which, due to its

superficial and operational nature, simply cannot accommodate him or showcase his uniqueness. It is also worth noting that signs and images of the consumer society aren't something we can interpret, choose or appropriate for ourselves as we are browsing the shelves of the supermarket or window shopping at the mall. The ideology associated with the system seems to have convinced people that it is them who choose among the endless selection of merchandise, deciding on something that 'speaks' to them or reflects their unique personality, or that it is them who give meaning to the chosen item. This isn't however the case. Not just because, in the consumer society, an object is defined in relation to all other objects within the system, as we just mentioned, but also because its meaning is outlined in advance. In other words, it is already contained within the object before one even purchases it and takes it home. Baudrillard explains that objects now function as tests which are interrogating us, not the other way around, and that it is us who are called to answer them when in fact "the answer is included in the question" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch.7). This is what Debord is talking about when referring to the "omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production" (8). In this sense, we see that objects always carry within them a certain meaning, ideology or a certain sense of identity, and this is why the narrator of *Fight Club* says that "the things you used to own, now they own you" (Palahniuk ch. 4). He admits to being a slave to his "nesting instinct," sitting in the bathroom with his "ikea furniture catalogue" conscious of being trapped in his "lovely nest" (Palahniuk ch. 4). Similarly, A talks about a graceful consumer as someone who "could consume without being consumed in return" (Kleeman 31). This does not only demonstrate why real individuality can never be achieved through consumer practices, no matter how much advertisers promise exactly that, but it also explains why many authors often describe modern consumption as repressive and totalitarian. We could also argue that the object, glorified by mass media, loses its appeal the moment it's taken home, and very soon a new one will have taken its place, promising to deliver on what the previous one clearly failed to do. In this sense, we could also say that the society of affluence seems to have convinced people that the apparent unlimited choice of commodities in postmodernity has somehow enlarged human experience, when in reality it seems to have narrowed it down. To a large extent, this is due to it "replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs with an incessant fabrication of pseudoneeds," revealing the essential poverty of modern day consumer lifestyle (Debord 24). It is also because of its never ending circularity, the fact that in the consumer society everything is already predetermined and no real meaning, transcendence or individuality is possible anymore. Objects are simply used to mask this fact

and sell a narrative. As Debord puts it "The real consumer has become a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this materialized illusion, and the spectacle is its general expression" (23).

This idea that objects are defined not by their use but by their significations, which are in turn defined in relation to the entire system of signs leads to an "infinite range of difference available in this system," and according to Baudrillard this makes for a defining aspect of consumption, which he refers to as its "social logic of differentiation" (*The Consumer Society* 61). In other words, what defines consumer society isn't the need for objects, but a need for difference or "the desire for the social meaning" and, as he points out, this search for difference is never ending (*The Consumer Society* 78). Baudrillard goes on to explain that to differentiate oneself in the society of consumption by definition entails bringing into play "the total order of differences," and that in the process of trying to score his points in this system of differences, each consumer in turn maintains that same system (*The Consumer Society* 61). Indeed, this argument seems to be the only thing that can account for the growing rate of consumption, as the demand for difference grows much faster than material production: "the language of cities is competition itself" (*The Consumer Society* 65). In other words, "When the whole social world becomes urbanized, when communication becomes total, 'needs' grow exponentially – not from the growth of appetite, but from competition" (*The Consumer Society* 65). Similarly, in his book Boorstin talks about the competition for prestige. This is why, according to Baudrillard, the main characteristic of consumption remains its 'unlimited character' and he sees this logic of differentiation as central to understanding how objects are being exploited as differential, as signs. In other words, objects are put in the centre of social life by advertising precisely to steer us away from the fact that the object as a means to an end is long gone and to keep people in constant competition for prestige disguised as a search for individuality. With consumers trying to satisfy this need for difference through empty purchases, it becomes clear why nowadays we are witnessing such an overwhelming prevalence of commodities. Or as Baudrillard puts it: "what every society looks for in continuing to produce and overproduce is to restore the real that escapes it," thus making material production "a production of hyperreality of itself" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 1). At one point in the novel A says that: "All this wanting created an appetite in me that was terrifyingly shapeless. I had no idea how to feed it. I didn't know how to make anything vanish" (Kleeman 103). This appetite, a hunger that cannot be defined or understood let alone satiated, is a thread running through the entire novel, and we can argue that it represents precisely this hunger for clarity, meaning and real difference or individuality which keep slipping further away from A. To sum up, we can say

that this growing need for commodities is masking the actual need for difference, but because signs and images function like a language, where they are always relational and combinatorial, this need for difference can never be satisfied since the possible combinations of signs are endless. This is what makes it so that the consumer finds himself trapped in a never-ending quest for meaning and fulfillment in a system which was never designed to provide that in the first place (*The Consumer Society* 7).

Furthermore, this underlying need for difference is important to grasp as it unveils an important contradiction of consumer ideology; the fact that the pressure we find in modern society towards individuation, towards difference and standing out, is incongruent with the essentially collective nature of consumption, as well as production. In other words, consumption, while holding promises of individuality and authenticity, at the same time functions as a collective phenomenon. This is so because, as Baudrillard explains, its real function is the production of differences and "like all material production, [it is] not an individual function, but an immediately and totally collective one" (*The Consumer Society* 78). Another thing to keep in mind is that consumption isn't a function of enjoyment and it has nothing to do with satisfaction or fulfilling of personal needs. This is another common misconception as the entire ideology of consumerism rests on the idea that consumption is something we do to satisfy our individual needs and showcase our unique personality. However, it's not difficult to see that it isn't our actual needs that are being satisfied through consumer practices, for if that were the case the society would have long reached its breaking point, but rather our needs for difference, needs to either stand out or blend in with a particular social group or a particular image. Consumption is therefore not something we do for our own pleasure, since enjoyment is something personal and final, and the rate of consumption worldwide only seems to be accelerating. Baudrillard further explains that if enjoyment were the actual objective of the ideology of consumerism, then consumption would be something autonomous, something one does for oneself. However, we have seen that consumption is inherently a collective phenomenon where "one enters into a generalized system of exchange and production of coded values where, in spite of themselves, all consumer are involved with others" (*The Consumer Society* 78). Furthermore, not only does consumption have nothing to do with the satisfaction personal needs, but Baudrillard even goes on to say that consumption is something that is forced upon us which he doesn't see a way out of: "There is no question for the consumer, for the modern citizen, of evading this enforced happiness and enjoyment, which is the equivalent in the new ethics of the traditional imperative to labour and produce"

(*The Consumer Society* 80). Consumption then becomes a "duty of the citizen," something imposed on the consumer and, ironically, the modern consumer interprets this endless possibility of choice not as an obligation to choose, or to be different, but as freedom (*The Consumer Society* 80). This is what Stephanie S. Halldorson is referring to in her book on the hero in contemporary American fiction when she says that "each person not only has the right but the responsibility to prove oneself heroic" (3). And the way one proves oneself heroic today is through consumption of images and signs, more specifically commodities, which always carry within them a particular (heroic) narrative, a story or an ideology. And while the consumer is constantly being reminded by mass media and advertising of the different narratives to choose from, these always fall short because they function as empty shells and the sense of identity attached to them is only ever implied. In other words, the object contains no solid narrative, has no depth or any actual meaning. As Baudrillard explains, no meaning or transcendence is possible in the logic of consumption, only "immanence in the order of signs" (*The Consumer Society* 192).

Another important shift that took place within the context of postmodern consumer societies has to do with the fact that, while for a long time people's fundamental experience was related to their work, what we are witnessing today and have been for a while now, is an estrangement and a separation of the worker and the actual product of their work. In other words, the modern man no longer comes into contact with the product of his labour. This can be seen in the prevalence of corporate jobs where people, crammed together in small office booths, work for unscrupulous companies with a vague sense of what their contribution is. Take, for example, the narrator of *Fight Club* whose job includes calculating whether it is worth for his car company to initiate a recall. He hates his job, he travels all the time and all he remembers from his trips are the different airports he wakes up in: "I do my little job. I go airport to airport to look at the cars that people died in. The magic of travel. Tiny life. Tiny soaps. The tiny airline seat" (Palahniuk ch. 18). Similarly, he speaks of the "tiny friendships" he makes during his travels and, wanting out of his "tiny life" and his "little shit job," he prays for a crash (Palahniuk ch. 15). Debord talks about this separation of the modern worker and the product of his work as one of the biggest contributing factors to the modern day alienation, because it eliminates for the worker a comprehensive sense of what it is that they are producing, i.e. how it is that they are spending their time. Moreover, Baudrillard points out that not only are people now spending less of their time in production related to work, but they are spending more and more of it in "the production and continual innovation of [their] own needs and well-being" (*The Consumer*

Society 80). This is another reason behind the growing rate of consumption we are witnessing today as much as, at the same time, it stems from the logic of consumption itself. The mass reproductions and combinations of signs we talked about earlier have, according to Baudrillard, replaced direct experience, meaning and value in life. But in more practical terms, we could say that they have replaced the old values of work and production. What's more, both Debord and Baudrillard argue in their work that people's fundamental experience has now been replaced with leisure or inactivity. In other words, people have now come to identify life with the way they spend their time outside of work. However, as Debord points out in *The Society of the Spectacle*, this type of inactivity nevertheless remains dependent on productive activity and it is in no way free from it. He goes on to explain that not only is there no freedom apart from activity, but that within the 'spectacle' activity becomes "nullified," since all real activity is being "forcibly channelled into the global construction of the spectacle" (15). Therefore, the increase in leisure we are witnessing today is according to Debord "neither a liberation of work itself nor a liberation from the world shaped by this kind of work" since "none of the activity stolen by work can be regained by submitting to what that work has produced" (15). Similarly, Baudrillard sees this division into work and leisure as a myth, explaining how leisure is nothing but a 'consumption of time' and that the same restrictions we find during working hours merely carry over to free time. This can be seen as another reason behind the exploitative nature of consumer societies. In *The Consumer Society* Baudrillard dedicates an entire chapter to the notion of (free) time and leisure in postmodernity as these, alongside objects and images, constitute the fundamental experience of postmodernity. In a nutshell, he argues that the real problem lies in the fact that one can no longer waste one's time, which is according to him precisely what leisure is striving for, because in today's system of production one can only earn one's time, not waste it: "We are in an age when men will never manage to waste enough time to be rid of the inevitability of spending their lives earning it" (*The Consumer Society* 155). The idea that the laws which govern working time spill over to leisure could explain why today we are witnessing such a strong demand for activity and achievement in leisure, the same "ethics of pressured performance" (*The Consumer Society* 155). Baudrillard also sees leisure as a time of production of value, whether it is "distinctive value, status value or prestige value" (*The Consumer Society* 157). In other words: "No one needs leisure, but all are charged to prove their freedom not to perform productive labour" (*The Consumer Society* 157). Finally, he argues that leisure can never be something autonomous, an independent activity, since its determining factor lies in the fact that it differs from working time.

Before we touch on mass media and advertising and their role in consumer societies, we will briefly mention the supermarket or the shopping mall as a popular 'site' of consumption that has not yet lost its appeal. Completely self-contained, a place where "everything seemed to be in season, sprayed, burnished, bright," the supermarket plays an important role in both *White Noise* and *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* and it functions as the perfect metaphor for the world of simulation or simulacra, a microcosm of our simulated reality (DeLillo ch. 9). It is a place where all aspects of life, all activities are at once brought together and where one can find absolutely everything he may need, as if the whole of reality has been reduced to a single place. For the modern consumer, who no longer has any myth or religious narrative with which to transcend his own mortality, the shopping mall functions as a form of a miracle, with its endless display of meaning, values and identities just waiting to be consumed. Shopping then becomes a sort of a religious experience: "This place recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, it's a gateway or pathway. Look how bright. It's full of psychic data" (DeLillo ch. 9). At one point in the novel, after a shopping spree, Jack describes the sense of replenishment he gets from his purchases: "…in the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls-it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening (DeLillo ch. 5). In his article on *White Noise*, Tom LeClair points out that even the description of the cloud formed by the chemical spill in Blacksmith, resembles that of the supermarket: "Packed with chlorides, benzenes, phenols, hydrocarbons" the cloud "resembled a national promotion for death, a multimillion-dollar campaign backed by radio spots, heavy print and billboard, TV saturation" (LeClair 17). Similarly, in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* we observe A as she wanders around DoubleWallys, "the largest grocery store within a thirty-mile radius," trying to find her way around the store whose layout was "designed to baffle," completely absorbed by the "shiny and hard" produce in the aisles (Kleeman 113). Although she's mostly looking for Kandy Kakes, A's visits to the supermarket are usually described as a kind of personal adventure through the endless display of mesmerizing products and, other than watching TV, A doesn't do much else with her free time. Similarly to the way the shopping mall is portrayed in *White Noise*, A talks about the "fuzzy color" or the "velvety texture" of the supermarket produce she comes across, which are always described very vividly, more alive and real than the characters themselves (Kleeman 122).

4.1. Mass media, TV and advertising

Earlier in the thesis we have mentioned how, in the society of consumption, we have moved away from the "message centred on the signified" to the "message centred on the signifier," and we can use television as a prime example of this (*The Consumer Society* 124). Omnipresent in the household of the Gladneys, so much so that it could be considered one of the main characters in the novel, television works in such a way that it takes real life events and presents them as something spectacular, thus neutralizing and downplaying its very content. In other words, the TV is where we consume the image as such, not the actual event. In *White Noise* television remains the focal point of the novel and, besides shopping, a favourite pastime of the Gladneys who often gather around the TV, binging on takeout food, immersed in the world of natural disasters: "We were otherwise silent, watching houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite in a mass of advancing lava. Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (DeLillo ch. 14). Here we can clearly see how television reduces all phenomena to mere information, alienating us further from reality. In this sense, we can also argue that TV presents news, no matter how shocking or relevant, as pure entertainment. Television plays such an important role in *White Noise* that it often intervenes in the plot through random announcements and repetitions of brand names and slogans such as "MasterCard, Visa, American Express" (DeLillo ch. 20). We even see Jack's daughter utter car commercials in her sleep, demonstrating to what extent the TV [media] has crept into our lives and become "a primal force in the American home. Sealed-off, timeless, selfcontained, self-referring" (DeLillo ch. 11). Therefore, Murray Siskind isn't too far from the truth when he says that "for most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set. If a thing happens on television, we have every right to find it fascinating, whatever it is" (DeLillo ch. 14). Similarly to *White Noise*, in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* characters spend all their free time glued to the TV and A even prefers watching advertisements over anything else. Television is also the primary focus of A's and C's relationship, which mostly boils down to two of them commenting on the TV shows and commercials they watch together. The extent to which this simulated reality of television has replaced objective experience is nicely portrayed in a passage from *White Noise* where, after the evacuation that followed the chemical leak, we see a middle aged man carrying a TV set address everyone in the room. He openly expresses disbelief and anger at the fact that the media isn't reporting their situation, almost doubting its severity or even its existence because it hasn't been reported in the news: "Is it possible nobody gives substantial coverage to such a thing? Half a minute, twenty

seconds? Are they telling us it was insignificant, it was piddling?" (DeLillo ch. 21). This example shows how much people have become dependent on the media to validate their experiences and give shape to their reality, to the point that the information presented on television sometimes holds more weight and validity for people then their personal experience. Just like television, advertising works much the same way in the sense that it takes objective reality and turns it into signs and images which are then mistaken for the events themselves. More specifically, Baudrillard considers advertising as a mass medium par excellence because it functions on the level of its own code, not the message. In other words, advertising, when referring to a particular object or a brand, automatically refers to all objects and brands in their totality, and the reason it functions on such a massive scale isn't because of its content or its message, but because it functions "from one sign to the other, from one object to the other, from one consumer to the other" (*The Consumer Society* 125). As Baudrillard also puts it: "Mass communication is everywhere defined by this systematization at the level of the technical medium and the code, by the systematic production of messages not from the world, but from the medium itself" (*The Consumer Society* 125). These are the infinite reproductions without an original we mentioned previously, and we can see how they are being generated directly from the media and are everywhere perpetuated by them. In this sense, Baudrillard adopts McLuhan's famous 'medium is the message' formula which he calls the "first great formula of this new era" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 1). According to Baudrillard, this implies the end of the message as well as the end of the medium. It also means that all distinctions and oppositions, including the oppositions between the medium and the message or reality, are abolished. In other words, "the medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 8). This inability to distinguish between the two is something we find throughout *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* as A is not able to discern between reality and the world of TV and advertisements: "It wasn't my mind, which seized the fake lives of television people with greater enthusiasm than it did its own" (Kleeman 33). This dissolving of the boundary between reality and the television (media) is also implied in the novel when A talks about how C likes to watch pornography while they're having sex, and she describes how she would position herself the same way as the actresses on the screen, emulating their movements. As she explains: "He [C] was thickening the moment by laying fantasy upon reality upon fantasy" (Kleeman 89). The production of messages from the medium and the disappearance of both the medium and message is another reason why, just like with television, what we find in advertising is an equation of significant historical events with minor news. One

example of his can be found in the radio news reports where the news of a devastating natural disaster for instance, will be followed by news of a celebrity visiting a local restaurant or an advertisement for a car wash. It is in this sense that Baudrillard sees mass media as neutralizing the "lived, unique, eventual character of the world" and substituting it for a "multiple universe of media" which are all essentially homogenous and refer back and forth to each other (*The Consumer Society* 123). In *The Image*, Boorstin talks about advertising as a prototype of a 'pseudo-event,' explaining how "modern advertising began when the advertisement was no longer a spontaneous announcement and had become made news" (ch. 5). In other words, advertising takes an object and turns it into something spectacular, into an event. In this respect, we can see how advertisers no longer sell products by mentioning their specific characteristics as they once did. Instead, advertising creates a kind of mythology around the product which appeals to our emotions and imagination more than anything else. However, it is important to note that advertisers are not lying or distorting the truth in any way, and Boorstin stresses that we shouldn't look at advertising statements as being either true or false. If anything, according to him they are closer to being true since, what is important today, is only that the advertiser's story be credible, i.e. believable. In this sense advertisers don't "violate the old truth-morality," they evade it (*The Image* ch. 5). In fact, advertisers often take true statements and use them in such a way as to create a certain image of a product or a brand. For example, at one point in the novel, A runs into an acquaintance at Wally's and starts talking about Kandy Kakes and how they are (advertised as) preservative free. And while technically they are preservative free, they are also completely synthetic and contain ingredients like plastic. Here we can see that by using a true statement the advertisers were able to create an image of the product which implies the exact opposite of what the product actually is; healthy or natural. A similar characteristic of advertising has to do with the "desperate gymnastics" of the advertisers, as Baudrillard calls it, which refers to their use of language which seems to promise an "impossible, magical synthesis," a naturalness, a getting in touch with one's true self (*The Consumer Society* 87). In *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* these kinds of ads and commercials appear throughout the novel: "Words appear on the screen: TruBEAUTY, TruSKIN. YOUR REAL SKIN IS WITHIN" (Kleeman 7). In this sense, advertisers often promise a kind of a completeness, a fulfilling of one's true potential through the consumption of a particular product, which is often advertised as personal, gratifying or as an extension of the consumer. However, this automatically implies that the consumer isn't complete as he or she is, and that they have a personal obligation to become the best version of himself. Moreover, it is the advertisers who

decide what this best version or ideal is, not the consumer, and in this very process the individual with his unique character is denied and ignored. Ironically, the consumer will then try and 'rebuild' himself through consumption of such products. In this sense, A talks about "Our faces," which are "made of hundreds of different parts, each parte separate and tenuous and capable of being ugly, each part waiting for a product designed to isolate and act upon it" (Kleeman 56). Finally, when it comes to information in the context of consumer societies and mass media, Baudrillard points out that today information destroys or neutralizes meaning and, because "information devours its own content" as much as it devours communication, instead of creating it, "it exhaust itself in the act of staging communication," in the act of staging meaning (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 8). Similarly, in *The Image*, Boorstin claims that when we talk about informing people today, we are talking about a "free marketplace of ideas where people are confronted by competing pseudo-events and are allowed to judge among them" (ch. 1). This destruction of meaning and the fusion or rather disappearance of the message and the medium can all be seen as contributing to the overwhelming ambiguity of the modern day experience. The more the consumer immerses himself in and identifies with the images he consumes via TV and advertisements, the less he understands himself and the world. At the beginning of this chapter we mentioned television and, although the TV has now almost become a thing of the past, its impact should not be underestimated, as it has paved the way for other mass media in terms of how information is presented and, consequently, how we view and process information. In more contemporary terms, we could say that the fragmented and sensationalized nature of TV has carried over to popular social media platforms such as Facebook or YouTube. Moreover, we could argue that these have the same or possibly an even stronger impact than television once did, due to the development of technology and their consequent overwhelming presence. It is interesting to note how, with the rising popularity of image friendly platforms such as Instagram, or even Tick Tock with its extremely concise format, the content or the information presented is becoming more and more condensed, and the language of these media resembles that of advertising and TV commercials.

5. Identity (crisis) in consumer culture

So far we have looked at some of the main characteristics of consumerism, such as its social logic of differentiation, the separation of the worker and his product, the signifier becoming its own signified etc., and we have briefly mentioned how these phenomena impact the modern consumer in terms of his identity and his place in the world. Furthermore, we have outlined

some of the contradictions inherent in consumer societies, such as the postmodern pressure towards individuation which goes against the collective nature of consumption. We have also seen how the exploitation of objects as signs and the destruction of information make it so that the desire for meaning and individuality can hardly be achieved in a world of hyperreality. In Stephanie Halldorson's book, this desire for meaning and value in life translates into a "hunger for the heroic," which she identifies as the "defining feature of the American dream" (16). However, the notion of the American dream, which perpetuates the idea that anyone can achieve success, wealth and fame, can also be seen as part of consumer culture since it insists on the physical proofs and symbols of success, i.e. it places all emphasis on the image or the signifier. This idea leaves the 'non-heroes' as Halldorson calls them, i.e. the majority of the population, in a precarious position because, unlike in the past, the non-heroes no longer have any spiritual or religious narrative with which to achieve transcendence and meaning in life. Halldorson goes as far as saying that there is no longer any position left for non-heroes in America because, in the context of the American dream, "there are only successful heroes or heroes in waiting" (124). Not only does this inability to become heroic and the simultaneous pressure to do so contribute to the feelings of anxiety and insecurity about one's identity in postmodern America, but "the creative pressure exerted on a society demanding millions of individualized heroes with their own created and chosen systems of identity, and the impossibility of fulfilling this demand is a huge consumer market waiting to be tapped" (Halldorson 124). This is where mass media and advertising come in, selling images and commodities filled with false promises of meaning and different heroic narratives.

Before we look at how these feelings of anxiety and instability regarding one's identity are portrayed in the three novels, we will first will briefly consider some of the general characteristics of identity in the postmodern context. In this sense, we will reference the work of Douglas Kellner, an American media culture theorist who, in his 1995 book on identity and politics talks about an important change that took place in the way identities were perceived and acquired in modern, as opposed to premodern societies. Kellner points out that unlike nowadays, in premodern societies identity wasn't something problematic and people would not reinvent or rethink their identities as they do nowadays. In other words, one's identity was not up for debate, as it was perceived as something fixed and unquestionable. He also mentions how, in premodern societies, people's identities were acquired through their roles and functions as members of a tribe. Similarly, Baudrillard mentions the difference between the essential human differences of the past as opposed to those of today. As he explains, unlike today,

differences of blood and religion that differentiated people in the past were not exchanged and were not consumed: "They were not differences of fashion, but essential distinctions" (*The Consumer Society* 93). Furthermore, and following on from what we discussed earlier about the social logic of differentiation, Baudrillard also claims that differences of the "'personalizing type' no longer set individuals one against another," but that they are "all arrayed hierarchically on an indefinite scale" (*The Consumer Society* 88). In other words, he explains that differentiating oneself nowadays means affiliating to a particular model and that differences of this type inevitably all imply one another, meaning that real differences between people have been abolished: "Here too, it is upon the loss of difference that the cult of difference is founded" (*The Consumer Society* 89). According to Kellner, many of the issues we encounter today in terms of identity, already appeared in modernity which is when, according to him, identity became "multiple, personal, self-reflexive and subject to change and innovation" (231). It is true that a sense of self and meaning in life had already come under scrutiny in the context of the existentialist movement, where one's identity was seen as a lifelong project for the individual, a personal undertaking of sorts. However, the sense of responsibility for who one becomes, as well as the perceived fragile, constructed and malleable nature of identity also came with a feeling of deep anxiety and dread. These feelings are reflected throughout *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* and at one point in the novel, after being expelled from the Church and taken away to work for their TV show, A says: "I feel just like a child again, safe in the understanding that anything bad that were to happen to me it would be someone else's responsibility. Maybe that was the secret to happiness, I thought, being free of the responsibility of yourself" (Kleeman 247). According to Kellner, this has to do with "the experience of modernité" being "one of novelty, of the ever-changing new, of innovation and transitoriness," which doubtless contributes to the feelings of instability when it comes to identity (232). Nevertheless, with postmodern identities being even more changeable and unstable, Kellner points out that, unlike today, identity in modernity was a "serious affair involving fundamental choices" which concerned one's profession, family, political views, their role in the public sphere etc. (242). Postmodern identities, on the other hand, are constructed through one's image, leisure and consumption, as we have seen earlier in the thesis. He also sees anxiety as forming an integral part of the modern self. However, besides what we have discussed thus far, we can argue that one of the causes of this postmodern anxiety has to do with, not just the necessity to choose, but also the overwhelming number of choices we find nowadays, which always leave the consumer wondering whether they have made the right choice. Another

characteristic of consumer societies that leads to identity issues and brings about this sense of anxiety has to do with the disappearance of the subject in Baudrillard's terms, or what Guy Debord refers to as "the spectacle's estrangement from the acting subject" (16). This is the same phenomenon Boorstin is talking about when he explains how "the rise of pseudo-events has mixed up our roles as actors and as audience" or as the subject and the object (ch. 1). More specifically, Baudrillard talks about the disappearance of the "opposing poles of determination" in the world of the simulacra, of the "old polar schema that always maintained a minimal distance between cause and effect…precisely the distance of meaning" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 1). We have seen how this works on the example of TV and mass media where the medium and the message have now become indistinguishable. However, we can also argue that the consumer as an individual, now absorbed into and identified with the dominant images stemming from the ideology of consumption, not reality, and definitely not from his own unique needs and desires, simply disappears. This disappearance of the subject is especially prominent in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* as A continues to lose her grip on reality and can no longer distinguish between herself and her roommate, between the world or the TV: "I wasn't much of an expert on myself anymore" (Kleeman 270). Last but not least, and probably the most prominent characteristic of postmodern identities, has to do with the fact that identities are now being constructed through consumption, more specifically through the consumption of commodities. In the following part of the thesis we will explore this link between identity and consumption as it is portrayed in *White Noise* and *Fight Club*.

In *White Noise* we follow the life of Jack Gladney who, having invented Hitler studies in North America, has had a relatively successful carrier and is regarded highly in his field. Nevertheless, his sense of identity is fragmented, both on a personal and a professional level. This fragmentation is reflected in a typical postmodern family of the Gladneys, which is more or less a concoction of ex-wives and children from previous marriages, who only get together to watch TV or go shopping. In this sense, the Gladneys can be seen as representing the disintegration of a traditional family structure we find in postmodernity. Nevertheless, Jack still relies on his family to give him a sense of purpose and protect him from his inevitable death: "Murray says we are fragile creatures surrounded by a world of hostile facts. The family process works toward sealing off the world" (DeLillo ch. 17). Furthermore, it is the children in the novel who seem to be better informed of what is going on around them than the actual parents, and they are portrayed as being more authentic and having a stronger sense of self. We could argue that DeLillo is trying to make a point that children, because their participation in consumer

practices is limited, are closer to nature and to their true selves. Furthermore, Jack's authority as professor and head of department, which relies exclusively on empty signifiers (despite his academic position Jack doesn't even speak German), proves to be false. Jack talks about his professional identity as something he has constructed through his physical image; back in the 1960s, his chancellor had suggested he did something about his appearance if were wanted to be taken seriously as an innovator of Hitler studies. Thus he gains weight, starts wearing thick glasses and a robe, and even adds an extra initial to his name. All of this functions as a means of compensating for his feelings of insecurity regarding his professional position. This way Jack becomes the "false character that follows the name around" (DeLillo ch. 4). Always carrying a copy of *Mein Kampf*, we can argue that Jack also uses Hitler, a powerful, well-known figure of authority to hide behind. As Murray Siskind tells him: "Some people are larger than life. Hitler is larger than death. You thought he would protect you" (DeLillo ch. 37). However, for the reasons we have outlined in the first part of the thesis, an identity constructed through empty signs or signifiers proves to be very fragile. When he runs into one of his colleagues in a shopping mall, they point out just how plain and harmless he looks without his robe and his glasses, just a "big, harmless, aging, indistinct sort of guy" (DeLillo ch. 17). Having exposed the arbitrariness of his identity, Jack feels threatened and this automatically puts him in a mood to shop. He gets into a shopping frenzy, looking once again to 'purchase' his identity at the shopping mall. This gives him a fleeting sense of power and control: "I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. Brightness settled around me" (DeLillo ch. 17).

Jack Gladney is not the only one who relies on his possessions to provide him with a sense of identity. After his apartment blows up in an explosion and all of his possessions get destroyed, including his Njurunda coffee tables and his Haparanda sofa, the narrator of *Fight Club* exclaims: "The plants were me. The television was me. It was me that blew up. Couldn't he see that?" (Palahniuk ch. 11). In a similar vein, when the chemical leak occurs in Blacksmith, i.e. as soon as something happens that doesn't fit the image of who he is or what his life is supposed to look like, Jack feels lost and his world collapses around him: "I'm not just a college professor. I'm the head of a department. I don't see myself fleeing an airborne toxic event. That's for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the county, where the fish hatcheries are" (DeLillo ch. 21). In other words, the realization of the superficial and fragile nature of their identity brings about feelings of depression and paranoia in the two protagonists. Another interesting postmodern moment can be found at the end of *White Noise* when Jack is

talking to a nun, and she tells him that nuns no longer believe in God, finding it surprising that Gladney would be naïve enough to believe such a thing. She explains to him that nuns only pretend to believe because they know people need somebody to believe. In other words, she is aware of the need for a religious or spiritual belief in an alienated, postmodern society, and in this sense spirituality too becomes a means to an end used to ward off the side effects of consumer ideology. The conversation between Jack and the nun is a powerful moment in the book, not only because it exposes the simulated nature of our reality, but because the nun reflects Jack's own feelings about his professional image, which lacks authenticity and is based solely on symbols.

In terms of *Fight Club* and the postmodern crisis of identity, we could argue that the very fact that the narrator remains anonymous throughout the book showcases his lack of identity and establishes him as a typical consumer of his time. The narrator of *Fight Club* is dissatisfied with his life, he hates his nine to five job that brings him no real satisfaction, and his ikea furniture no longer helps to suppress this understanding: "I envied people dying of cancer. I hated my life. I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't see any way to change things" (Palahniuk ch. 20). On top of that, he suffers from insomnia, making him never fully awake or fully asleep, a passenger in his own life. We could argue that the insomnia is another symptom of his empty consumer lifestyle, his desire and simultaneous inability to do something about it. The only thing that helps him sleep is attending support groups for cancer patients and the dying. It is as if being closer to death makes him feel more alive: "Walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I'd ever felt…Babies don't sleep this well. Every evening, I died, and every evening, I was born. Resurrected" (Palahniuk ch. 2). It is worth mentioning that notions of death and mortality are topics explored in both *White Noise* and *Fight Club*, and we could argue that these preoccupations also spring from the very principles of consumer culture. Death can easily be seen as the last threat to consumer society, the one thing that doesn't fit into the perfect, sterilized world of postmodernity. This is why, in his essay on *White Noise*, Frank Lentriccia calls Dylar the "ultimate postmodern drug," since it tries to eliminate fear of death, "nature's final revenge on postmodern culture" (Lentriccia 87). However, the ways in which the characters deal with death are quite different, with Jack and Babette trying to suppress the awareness of their own mortality, and the characters in *Fight Club* confronting theirs; whether it is Marla's suicide attempts, cancer support groups, the death of Robert Paulson (Big Bob) or just the idea of beating each other to death. Going back to the issues of identity, we could also consider the narrator's Dissociative Identity Disorder as a

symbol of the fragmented and alienated nature of hyperreality. His inability to cope with the oppressiveness of consumer culture and his own misery is what eventually leads to him 'create' Tyler Durden as a split personality, his alter ego. For if the narrator succumbs to the pressures of consumer culture, Tyler functions as a resistance to it, a violent response to consumerism itself. (His desire to destroy the headquarters of credit companies in order to eliminate public debt can be considered as the ultimate anti-capitalist move). In other words, we can say that Tyler embodies the narrator's own suppressed feelings regarding consumer culture and how it has come to affect him. In a time when self-help and personal-development were on the rise, Tyler's philosophies were full of anti-consumerist ideas and (self) destructive tendencies. He rejects consumer culture by inserting snippets of pornography in family movies, urinating in soups in fancy restaurants, making soap out of "liposuctioned fat sucked out of the richest thighs in America" and selling it back to them (Palahniuk ch. 8). But if Tyler brings to the surface all the feelings that the narrator has suppressed, he also represents everything the narrator wants to be, but cannot. Tyler possesses all of those things that were promised to him by his fancy furniture, but were never delivered: "I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I am not" (Palahniuk ch. 20). This lack of freedom reflects the general state of the postmodern man, deprived of any decision making power and of a possibility to prove himself heroic. In an otherwise simulated reality, the notion of fight club represents a safe space in which, through fist fighting, every interaction reaffirms the narrator's sense of identity and power. In the fight club he is no longer a powerless clerk, sitting behind his desk, taking boss' orders. Fight club becomes his "reason for going to the gym and keeping your hair cut short and cutting your nails" when otherwise he would just be buying more furniture (Palahniuk ch. 5). We could also argue that fight club functions as a replacement for his old support groups, which represented a place of genuine connection with others. In a nutshell, we could say that Tyler, as well as fight club, become a way for the narrator to release his suppressed anger and deal with his sense of powerlessness and lack of meaning in postmodern America.

5.1. Masculine anxiety

So far we have looked at how consumer culture impacts the average consumer, but we can also consider its impact on the postmodern *man* in particular, since the violence explored in both *White Noise* and *Fight Cub* can be linked to another kind of crisis in postmodern society;

the crisis of masculinity. As we have already mentioned in the introduction, the 1980s and especially the 1990s were marked by a kind of a cultural crisis of identity that resulted in "ambivalence towards and confusion about contemporary American masculinity" (LePique). In other words, the nineties were a time when masculine identity was undermined, not just by the empty consumer lifestyle, but also by the prevalence of white collar, corporate jobs. This is especially the case if we compare the postmodern man of the 1990s to traditional representations of masculinity based on physical strength, aggression and authority. Brought up in a 'feminized' world of shopping and nick-nacks, we have established that the modern man no longer has any heroic narrative to hold on to, he has no more wars to fight or new territories to conquer, no way of proving his toughness. As Tyler Durden puts it: "We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression" (Palahniuk ch. 16). Furthermore, due to the very nature of consumer culture, the postmodern man is forced to participate in the typically feminine world of consumption and images, one where more and more women are also working traditionally male dominated jobs. As Susan Faludi explains in her book *Stiffed* "the economic transition from industry to service or from blue to white collar, along with the shift from production to consumption or from building to buying things, is symbolically a move from the traditional masculine to the traditional feminine" (qtd. in Keesey 17). This blurring of the old gender roles, the pointless consumerism that has people "chasing cars and clothes…working in jobs they hate just so they can buy what they don't really need," alongside the exploitative nature of corporate capitalism can all be seen as emasculating (Palahniuk ch. 16). And while such ambiguity regarding gender roles is nowhere near what we're witnessing today, in the 1990s this kind of insecurity about masculine identity culminated in a so called 'mythopoetic men's movement' or referred to simply as 'the men's movement,' which sought to reestablish the lost, more primitive aspects of masculinity that have disintegrated in the postmodern society. In her article on *Fight Club* and the crisis of masculinity, Annette LePique draws a parallel between *Fight Club* and Robert Bly's *Iron John*, the most famous work of the mythopoetic movement. She calls attention to their "fairly radical call for homosocial ritual and intimacy," their emphasis on the destructive effects of corporate lifestyle and the disintegration of the father and son bond. This emasculation of the modern American man is portrayed in several ways in *Fight Club*, such as through the testicular cancer support group and the character of 'Big Bob,' an ex body builder who has had his testicles removed and has developed 'bitch tits' due to his hormonal therapy.

In fact, Bob's testicles or lack thereof, as well as his 'bitch tits,' can be seen as symbolic of the feminization of the postmodern American man. The narrator eventually finds relief in Big Bob's embrace, where they both cry and lament the loss of their masculinity. In his book on Chuck Palahniuk, Douglas Keesey argues that Big Bob functions as a physical representation of the narrator's underlining psychological condition (17). In other words, the narrator too feels emasculated, not by a tumor, but by consumer culture itself. Tyler Durden's anti-feminist attitudes are another reflection of masculine anxiety in the novel: "What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women…I'm a thirty year old boy, and I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need" (Palahniuk ch. 5). And last but not least, the lack of a father-son bond that both Tyler and the narrator confess to can also be linked to male insecurity, since fathers function as primary role models for young men in terms of what masculinity looks like and what their role as men is. However, with the destruction of the traditional family unit, an absent father becomes a common occurrence in many postmodern families. In this sense, fight club can also be seen as a means of reestablishing this lost feeling of male community. Finally, we can argue that fight club also functions as a way of connecting modern men to the lost, primitive notions of masculinity that relate to raw physical strength and power. In other words, fight club provides a place where the "the post feminized man of feeling is re-born as the masculinized man of action" (qtd. in Keesey 17). With regards to *White Noise*, we have mentioned how Jack uses Hitler to compensate for his lack of identity, especially when it comes to his professional life, but we could also argue that his obsession with Hitler as a famous, powerful male figure of authority reveals deeper insecurities about his masculine identity since, as we will see later, masculinity in *White Noise* is represented in essentially violent terms. At one point in the novel, when talking to his stepdaughter about Hitler, Jack says: "Look at it this way. Some people always wear a favorite color. Some people carry a gun. Some people put on a uniform and feel bigger, stronger, safer. It's in this area that my obsessions dwell" (DeLillo ch. 14). This could stem from the fact that Jack's masculine authority is undermined in several ways. As we have already mentioned, he has no authority as head of family (the Gladneys are portrayed as a fragmented, postmodern family in which children have a better understanding of the world than adults), nor as a head of department (his authority as professor and chairman of Hitler studies relies almost exclusively on his physical image). And last but not least, his role of husband is also undermined after his wife's affair. Therefore, we could argue that the reason Jack hides behind Hitler has to do with the fact that, in the novel, Hitler functions as a representation of real (traditional) masculinity, one linked to

the notions of power, roughness, directness and violence. In the same conversation with his stepdaughter that we mentioned earlier, Jack also talks about why he named his son Heinrich, explaining how it is a strong, powerful, impressive name that bestows authority: "There's something about German names, the German language, German things. I don't know what it is exactly. It's just there. In the middle of it all is Hitler, of course" (DeLillo ch. 14). In the novel, these more traditional notions of masculinity are also represented by Babette's father. An old man with 'scarred' and 'busted' hands, always on the lookout for things to repair, he sees Jack's lack of knowledge in such matters as "a sign of some deeper incompetence or stupidity," believing that "not to know or care about them was a betrayal of fundamental principles, a betrayal of gender, of species" (DeLillo ch. 33). These essentialist visions of masculinity that Jack sometimes ridicules, but at the same time strives for, also function as a defense mechanism against the fabricated and empty identities acquired through consumption. As Jeanne Hamming states in her essay on *White Noise*, "the more Jack experiences his own masculinity as a cultural construct the more he relies on mediated images of unmediated (read: authentic) masculinity, such as Adolf Hitler" (34). In the same work, Hamming argues that Jack's insecurities regarding his own masculinity also stem from his "fantasy of an impossible movement to a primal state," which are represented in the novel by historic figures of Hitler and Attila the Hun, who become his models of "masculine stoicism" (31). When talking about the death of Attila the Hun, Jacks says:

> I want to believe he lay in his tent, wrapped in animal skins, as in some internationally financed movie epic, and said brave cruel things to his aides and retainers. No weakening of the spirit. No sense of the irony of human existence… I want to believe he was not afraid. He accepted death as an experience that flows naturally from life, a wild ride through the forest, as would befit someone known as the Scourge of God (DeLillo ch. 20).

This example shows Jack's "idealized image of man-in-nature" in which Attila the Hun is "reconfigured as Hollywood action hero" (Hamming 34). The author also argues that what hides behind Jacks obsession with Hitler is his longing and nostalgia for nature, which is presented in the novel as "the last bastion of authentic masculinity" (Hamming 27). Another way nature is suggested in the novel is through the character of his wife Babette, who is seen as more present in her body, more grounded and thus closer to nature. Babette functions as Jack's safe place, his refuge: "whatever she is doing, makes me feel sweetly rewarded, bound up with a full-souled woman, a lover of daylight and dense life," and she is often described in 'physical'

terms, such as “tall and fairly ample,” “moist and warm” with “her long fleshy face” (DeLillo, ch. 18). Babette is also the nurturer of the family, in a ‘mother earth’ type of a way, who takes care of the kids, “talks to dogs and cats,” works with old people and reads to the blind (DeLillo ch. 1). This nostalgia for nature, a desire to reach a more natural state, can also be seen as Jack’s reaction against the technologically saturated nature of the postmodern world. To conclude, we can also mention that Hamming draws a parallel between Jack’s association of masculinity with ruggedness, strength and assertiveness, and the manly action films that were popular in the 1980s, such as *Die Hard* or the *Terminator*, which all exposed the muscular bodies of its protagonists. She argues that this ‘aggressive’ masculinity and the exposure of ‘hard bodies’ of such protagonists, can all be considered a response to the more liberal and sensitive man of the 1970s which “threatened to soften the heretofore rigid boundaries of gendered identities in American cultural life” (Hamming 28). In a similar way, the men’s movement we mentioned earlier can be seen as a reaction to the emergence of a postmodern, ‘feminized’ man of the nineties.

5.1.2. Violence vs. fatigue

In this chapter we will take a look closer look at two seemingly contrasting and unrelated phenomena that appear in all three of the novels; those of violence and *fatigue*. Although violence is more directly explored in *Fight Club*, towards the end of *White Noise* we see that Jack too eventually resorts to violence in hope of reestablishing his sense of power and gaining back his lost masculinity. The reason Jack opts for violence in the end has to do with the fact that, as we have previously mentioned, violence is closely linked to the way true masculinity is perceived in the novel. Murray Siskind, for example, divides people into ‘killers’ and ‘diers,’ with most people falling in the category of ‘diers.’ He explains that “to kill is to gain lifecredit. The more people you kill, the more credit you store up” (DeLillo ch. 37). Not only does Siskind indirectly categorize Jack as a ‘dier,’ implying that he is passive and lacks courage, but he also taps into his fear of death by claiming that violence is a “a form of rebirth,” which is a similar idea we find in *Fight Club*, and that “the killer, in theory, attempts to defeat his own death by killing others. He buys time, he buys life” (DeLillo ch. 37). Another way violence is associated with masculinity in the novel is reflected in the passage where Siskind talks about the ‘male animal’: “Let’s think about that. Let’s examine the nature of the beast, so to speak. Isn’t there a fund, a pool, a reservoir of potential violence in the male psyche?” (DeLillo ch. 37). However, it is his wife’s love affair, possibly the biggest threat to his manhood, that pushes Jack over the edge. On his way to confront Mink, Jack declares: “I was moving closer to things in their actual

state as I approached a violence, a smashing intensity" (DeLillo ch. 39). This example backs up Hamming's argument that Jack associates violence not just with real masculinity, but also with a natural, more primitive state he seeks to return to as a defense against the alienated and fabricated nature of hyperreality. Furthermore, at one point in the novel Jack even starts carrying a gun to school, and we see how the gun, a common symbol of violence, restores his lost sense of power and control: "The gun created a second reality for me to inhabit. The air was bright, swirling around my head. Nameless feelings pressed thrillingly on my chest. It was a reality I could control, secretly dominate" (DeLillo ch. 38). The fact that the gun was a gift from his father-in-law, who is presented in the novel as the epitome of traditional masculinity, only emphasizes the connection between masculinity and violence. Some critics such as Paul Cantor also bring attention to the strong presence of Hitler in the novel and his link to Nazi Germany (violence). We have seen how Jack's professional image revolves around Hitler, but he is also present in the home of the Gladneys: "He's always on. We couldn't have television without him" (DeLillo ch. 14). We can also mention Baudrillard's theory according to which previous generations lived in a 'march of history' or in a time of big revolutions, while it seems that, in postmodernity, history has somehow retreated. He sees this phenomenon as the reason for the revival of interest in retro fashions and ideologies, and we could argue that this is another reason behind Jack's obsession with Hitler or fascism. In other words, Jack may be using Hitler to try and "resurrect a period when at least there was history, at least there was violence, when at least life and death were at stake" (*Simulacra and Simulation* ch. 2). In his essay on *White Noise*, Paul Cantor argues that another reason for DeLillo's appeal to Nazi Germany has to do with the more general crisis of community. He claims that community is represented as deeply problematic in the novel and that it is precisely this 'group psychology' which is characteristic of fascism. He argues that Hitler's appeal as a totalitarian leader has to do with people seeking communal meaning, one which brings them "a restoration of their sense of belonging to a meaningful group" (Cantor 60). The importance of this 'group psychology' and the idea of restoring communal meaning can also be found in *Fight club*, where the fight clubs can be said to function as a safe place for men to, not only get rid of their anger and frustration, but also to restore their sense of meaning and value in life by being a part of something larger then themselves or sacrificing themselves for a higher purpose. Furthermore, the notion of fascism could also be linked to *Fight Club* in the context of Tyler's 'project Mayhem' with its strict rules, its unquestionable leader, its cult like mentality, as well as its desire to be a part of something bigger, a part of history. And while the violence in *Fight Club* is often portrayed as

extreme, ranging from small, mischievous acts to brutal beatings, even outright plans to destroy capitalism, it is also portrayed as liberating. At one point in the novel the narrator, pretending to rob a convenience store, points a gun to the head of Raymond Hessel, a young employee, and threatens to kill him if his doesn't quit his job and start pursuing his dream. In more general terms, we can say that the violence prevalent in *Fight Club*, so much so that the notion of 'toxic masculinity' is frequently used in reference to the novel, functions as a way of transcending the emasculation of the 1990s American man, as well as a response to the oppressive nature of consumer culture, as evident in the character of Tyler Durden himself.

Nevertheless, as it becomes evident towards the end of both novels, violence as a defense against postmodern consumer culture doesn't work. In terms of *Fight Club*, we see that Tyler's anarchist, anti-consumerist philosophy which at first felt liberating for the narrator, in the end turns against him, as Tyler creates the same kind of oppressive system for his followers that he was fighting in the first place. Furthermore, his actions have led to an almost dystopian ending in the novel where the narrator, who seems to have got rid of Tyler by shooting himself, wakes up in the hospital bed only to find out that the project Mayhem lives on. We can draw a conclusion that, in terms of *Fight Club*, violence is represented as an outlet, not a permanent solution. Similarly, towards the end of *White Noise* we see that Jack's attempt to gain 'life credit' and restore his masculinity by shooting Mink doesn't work either. It is important to stress that, just like Tyler who embodies anti-consumerist values, in *White Noise* Mink functions as the embodiment of consumerism itself. In fact, the description of Mink matches that of a television or even white noise: "The image was hazy, unfinished. The man was literally gray, giving off a visual buzz" (DeLillo ch. 28). Jack, expecting to confront an intelligent man, an authority figure, a scientist who came close to curing fear of death instead finds a neurotic, blurry image of a man that looks nothing like he had imagined him; Mink is described as a worn down man, popping pills and staring at the TV set in his motel room: "I thought, this is the grayish figure of my torment, the man who took my wife" (DeLillo ch. 39). In other words, there is no one for him to fight, nothing to confront, since consumer culture is only ever experienced and lived as a myth. Furtheremore, as Leonard Wilcox says in his essay on *White Noise*, "the encounter with Mink suggests the untenability of heroic self-fashioning, as Gladney's epiphany collapses into postmodern schizophrenia" (Wilcox 107). Therefore, what we see in the end is that modernist notions of violence do not work to shield us from the artifice and arbitrariness of postmodern consumer culture. We could also argue that, for DeLillo at least, neither technology nor science function as solutions to these postmodern issues either,

seeing how Dylar ultimately failed to eradicate fear of death. Last but not least, going back to the issues of violence, we can quote Chuck Palahniuk himself who said that "personal power cannot be defined by the 'other' without losing power to that other and becoming used by - a reaction to - that other. Patriarchal or matriarchal or whatever" (qtd. in Keesey 23). This is essentially the reason why Tyler (and consequently violence), who was created by the narrator as a solution to his problems, ends up being a part of the problem. Same goes for Gladney's attempt to take down Mink, i.e. his act of rebellion against consumerism itself. The reason these do not work is precisely because a reaction against such a system cannot exists outside of that same system which created the problem in the first place.

Although violence can be regarded as the postmodern man's attempt to regain his power and his masculinity in a postmodern context, according to Baudrillard and Debord, this violence also stems from the very logic of consumption and it is closely related to another widespread postmodern phenomenon, which is that of *fatigue*. When speaking of fatigue, Baudrillard is referring to a general sense of passivity or anomie one encounters with postmodern consumers who seem to have become very passive and apathetic. Sucked into their phones, the TV, their routine etc., they appear to be going through the motions: "We have an almost empty flight, tonight, so feel free to fold the armrests up into the seatbacks and stretch out. I set my watch two hours earlier or three hours later, Pacific, Mountain, Central, or Eastern time; lose an hour, gain an hour" (Palahniuk ch. 3). When it comes to *Fight Club*, this notion of fatigue is most evident in the way the narrator is portrayed (especially towards the beginning of the novel), while in *White Noise* this 'passive refusal' manifests more as anxiety or paranoia. Furthermore, this sense of fatigue is an important theme of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* which also sets up a general atmosphere of the novel. The characters, who are mostly trying to figure out who they are and what they're doing with their lives, usually resort to escapism, passivity or the many distractions of TV and advertisements: "But in all honesty all I really wanted to do was stay here in bed until everything changed around me" (Kleeman 70). Constantly burdened by thoughts of "what I was, what was becoming of me," A is often "thinking about how much easier it would be to have fewer things to think about, or no things at all" (Kleeman 93). However, this fatigue or passivity of the postmodern consumer should not be interpreted as simple laziness. Baudrillard argues that fatigue, in this context, is in fact a concealed protest which can be regarded as the postmodern man's reaction to the terms and conditions of consumer culture: "Fatigue is not passivity set against the social hyperactivity outside. It is, rather, the only form of activity which can, in certain conditions, be set against the constraint

of general passivity which applies in current social relations" (*The Consumer Society* 183). Similarly, Debord talks about the "passive acceptance" that the spectacle demands, implying that this sense of anomie not only derives from the spectacle, but is actually imposed by it, while Boorstin speaks of the "passivity of conformity" as the "passivity of fitting into images" (Boorstin ch. 5). We could also argue that postmodern fatigue, as well as a sense of anxiety, both stems from the constant pressure to find and reinvent oneself by engaging in empty consumer activities; pressure that implies that the individual as such is lacking in some way: "There's a kind of pressure that your own life muscles onto you, to do something just like you would do, to behave just like yourself" (Kleeman 13). Furthermore, Baudrillard argues that what this passivity really is, is potential violence that has no other choice but to turn against itself, against the subject:

> But it has to be seen that this 'passive refusal' is in fact a latent violence, and that it is, by this token, only one possible response, the others being responses of overt violence. Here again, we have to restore the principle of ambivalence. Fatigue, depression, neurosis are always convertible into overt violence, and vice versa…These are all forms of passive resistance; they are 'ingrowing' in the way one speaks of an 'ingrowing toenail', turning back in towards the flesh, towards the inside (*The Consumer Society* 182-183).

In fact, according to Baudrillard, passivity and violence are two sides of the same coin as he sees consumer society as simultaneously being a "pacified society" and a "society of violence" (*The Consumer Society* 174). He explains how "'pacified' daily life thrives on a diet of consumed violence" like the one we get from the news, and he claims that this necessary violence is simply "inoculated in small doses" into daily, consumer life in order to "to ward off the spectre of the real fragility of that pacified life" (*The Consumer Society* 174). In other words, according to Baudrillard "'spectacular' violence and the pacification of daily life are homogenous, because they are each equally abstract and each is a thing of myths and signs" (*The Consumer Society* 174). In this sense, he gives an example of hippies on the one side and rockers on the other, who are both able to coexist peacefully in consumer culture despite their obvious differences. Baudrillard sees these as 'fashion revolutions' and he claims that "the contradiction here resolves itself into a functional coexistence," meaning that both can be accommodated by consumer logic and are simply absorbed into the system (*The Consumer Society* 181). Similarly, Debord explains how, in the consumer society, "complacent acceptance of the status quo may also coexist with purely spectacular rebelliousness" (p. 29). In this context

we could argue that the narrator of *Fight Club*, who can no longer manage his chronic 'fatigue,' creates a split personality within his psyche and, by means of Tyler Durden, his fatigue and depression turn into overt violence. In other words, he turns on himself, both symbolically in terms of his Identity Disorder and literally through Tyler's influence and actions. Or, as Tyler Durden puts it: "Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer. Maybe self-destruction is the answer" (Palahniuk ch. 5).

5.2. Postmodern hunger

While *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* elaborates on many of the postmodern issues relating to identity we have discussed so far, such as that of fatigue for example or the disappearance of the subject, the main argument behind the novel remains the idea that personal identity is now directly linked to consumption. In other words, the idea that what we consume determines who we become, as well as our place in the world. Perhaps the author phrased it best herself in an interview for Vogue magazine when she said: "Well, we're living at this funny time, where we're all urged to express ourselves as unique individuals, but on the other hand, we share a limited set of tools for doing that. It's easy to feel like nothing more than the sum of your consumer choices" (Singer). This statement reflects some of Baudrillard's views on consumer culture that we talked about so far, but it also shows why identity in postmodernity can be so problematic. The numerous advertised objects that appear throughout the novel can be seen as representing the set of tools we use to express ourselves that Kleeman is referring to. However, on some level A seems to be aware of the arbitrary and superficial nature of such tools as they lead her further and further away from herself, to the point of giving up on her life completely in an attempt to rid herself of the burden that is postmodern identity. She speaks of wanting to "postpone reentering the construct of my life" and how "already it was taking me minutes each morning to remember who I was, how I had gotten there" (Kleeman 6, 13). In other words, through the character of A, the author exposes the dark side of defining oneself through consumption, as well as the overall fragility of identities constructed in such a way. The prevalence of advertisements and commercials for different items, mostly food and beauty products, which drive the novel and which seem to occupy the majority of A's thoughts, seems to be in direct proportion to A's feelings of meaninglessness and alienation. Besides their constant intrusion into the plot, these ads or TV characters, such as the Kandy Kat character for example whose endless pursuit of Kandy Kakes is described throughout the novel, or even the shiny supermarket produce, are all portrayed very vividly and with a lot more attention to detail than any of the characters. At one point in the novel, while grocery shopping, A describes a

new type of apple that appeared on the market: “grafted together from two popular types of apples and also a type of peach…It’s chromosomal structure was unstable, odd numbered, which meant new seeds and plants could be created only in a laboratory using a variety of specialized equipment” (Kleeman 122). She goes on to describe how “The apples were a fuzzy coral color with a velvety texture. When you took hold of one in your hand, they gave in a little bit, like a stuffed animal. Flesh on flesh” (122). On the other hand, the characters in the novel, especially A and B, are surrounded by an air of confusion, vagueness and uncertainty, all echoed in A’s assertion that: “People were such fragile things: they existed only from a certain angle, at a certain scale and spacing” (Kleeman 77). In other words, A’s fascination with these products or commodities, their apparent fullness, their bright colours and their multidimensionality, can be said to be in stark contrast to the sense of emptiness, alienation and lack of a sense of self that define the novel. At one point, when looking through C’s kitchen cabinet, she says: “I was impressed by how well the cans stacked together: they fit to each other the way I wished I fit to the things around me” (Kleeman 41). However, Kleeman takes the idea that identity is defined through consumption to the extreme, with notions such as those of ‘bright’ and ‘dark’ foods proposed by the Church of the Conjoined Eater, as well as Kandy Kakes. With their slogan ‘May We Eat As One,’ the Church is heavily focused on food, believing that by eating only good or ‘bright’ foods they can help people reach their ‘ideal ghost state,’ i.e. become their “truest and most recognisable self” (Kleeman 266). They also believe this can help them cleanse of certain ‘dark’ aspects of their environment, as well as their memories and their past, which are all seen as toxic: “A single taste of some pure and holy food could return you to your originary nature, your ability to discern good from evil as simply as one looks up into the sky and sees that it is blue” (Kleeman 181). Using food as a means of becoming ‘good’ or getting rid of everything wrong with the world and with oneself is an interesting take on one of the many facets of consumer culture. It is also a contemporary phenomenon that, although it may sound extreme, has been growing in popularity, as can be observed with certain movements such as veganism or fruitarianism for example. This search for purity or morality through food nevertheless has a strong ideological component, and we can argue that it functions as another one of the many heroic narratives of consumer culture, which aims to replace what appears to be forever lost in consumerism; nature, as well as a sense of a meaningful, purposeful life. We could also argue that the ideas represented by these kinds of movements provide people with a feeling of communal belonging, as well as a sense of identity which is constructed in a more tangible way, since eating is one of the basic human

needs and is therefore less abstract than the consumption of signs and images. Nevertheless, A is still left feeling hungry, hungry for a solid sense of self and clarity beyond the false promises of mass media and advertising. In this sense, the Church of the Conjoined Eater reflects her own feelings regarding life and identity in consumer culture. As one of the Church leaders says while holding a speech for the newcomers: "*You are all here because you have seen through the falsity of your everyday lives. You've seen that that there is something real beyond appearance of better or worse, buying and selling…*" (Kleeman 192). Furthermore, when speaking to A the man says:

> I'm talking about who's running you. Is it you, yourself, or someone adjacent, so similar that even you can't tell yourselves apart? Tell me, do you ever look in the mirror and mistake that face for your own? I see you and I perceive that the very edges of your body are a blur. You don't know where you end. You are nibbled at by a vagueness" (Kleeman 181).

This 'vagueness' can be said to represent the many aspects and pressures of consumer culture under which the consumer slowly falls apart. This example also demonstrates how the subject slowly disappears in the world of hyperreality, as we have discussed earlier. The general feeling of anxiety regarding postmodern identity, as well as the idea that individuality is a burden that weighs heavy on the individual, are also reflected by the Church: "…*we believe that there is nothing more hazardous to yourself than being yourself. That burden should be shared*" (Kleeman 193) A's inability to deal with not knowing what she wants or needs in life also means that she relies on the Church's daily lessons to tell her "what to avoid, what to remember, what to forget," and she speaks of the Conjoined Toxicology Center "where they'd tell us which bad feelings were our own and which had been planted by those who wanted us duped" (Kleeman 213, 165). Finally, unable to feed her "weird misplaced hunger for something intangible," A goes as far as trying to erase all her memories, especially those of B and C, as ordered by the church, but eventually fails to do so (Kleeman 186). This kind of complete abdication can be seen as anomie taken to the extreme and, in this sense, the Church can be said to represent the ultimate escape from the oppressiveness of consumer culture, as well as the postmodern crisis of identity. Furthermore, their assertion that "the quickest route to self-improvement is self-subtraction" reflects Tyler Durden's ideas regarding self-destruction (Kleeman 193). However, while the self-destruction of the men in *Fight Club* is directed outwards and expressed through fist fights, A withdraws completely, and we could argue that

this reflect the traditional masculine/feminine principle. We could also argue that the group appeal we find in all three of the novels, be it the fight clubs, the ideology of fascism linked to Hitler or the cult like mentality of the Church of the Conjoined Eater, can all be linked to what Kellner refers to as a return to "past forms of collective identities" whereby "individuals gain identity through membership in groups and affirmation of a collective identity" (258). In other words, belonging to a group, besides offering communal meaning and a sense of purpose, can be seen as a proposed solution for the aforementioned issues, as the individual shifts the responsibility for his identity to somebody else, in this case the group. However, as we have seen in all three novels, not just in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, this attempt at escaping in the end doesn't work either, as A is unable to quite literally run away from herself and the world. This failure to deal with postmodern identity crisis in such a way is already echoed in the first part of the novel when A reflects on the Disappearing Dad Disorder (also connected to the Church), where middle-class white men all over town started leaving their families behind and disappearing out of nowhere. As A says: "They might have thought that somewhere out there was a way to 'have their cake and eat it too.' That many of them returned to their homes months later, malnourished, dehydrated, and amnesiac could be interpreted as evidence that there is no cake anywhere in the world to be had or eaten" (Kleeman 67). Last but not least, going back to the idea that personal identity is defined through consumption, it is interesting to note how the majority of the products that appear in the novel, be it Kandy Kakes or different food and cosmetics, are all described as made in a laboratory, a result of some cutting edge science or containing ingredients such as plastic. For example, at one point in the novel A talks about *New Age Plastics*, a "magazine devoted to the spiritual uses and properties of different kinds of plastics" (Kleeman 151). Similarly, when talking about a doughnut sitting on a supermarket shelf, she speaks of it as "glazed or filled or sprinkled, sitting beneath colorless fluorescents that made it look inside as if it were always the same time of night no matter how bright it might be outdoors" (Kleeman 111). In this sense, we could argue that Kleeman is "exposing" the simulated or 'fake' nature or hyperreality and we could draw a parallel here with the character of Jack Gladney who also appears to perceive consumer culture as something that stands in opposition to nature. Last but not least, we could also argue that the omnipresent character of Kandy Kat, which is constantly pursuing Kandy Kakes as food but is unable to catch them, represents A's never ending search for herself in the consumer setting. However, much like the produce she consumes in hopes of restoring or finding her true self, Kandy Kakes is only good on paper, seeing how it is completely synthetic. In other words, we could say that

A is pursuing an image, a fake reality, and just like Kandy Kat, she is bound to never satisfy her hunger, since the chase in hyperreality never ends. Hyperreality is the chase. “This was an essentially contemporary problem, a problem of supply and demand. I had to solve it the way other problems of scarcity and desire were being solved: by finding something new to want and pursuing that wanting instead” (Kleeman 105).

5.2.1. ABCs of postmodern relationships

Another way in which identity issues are reflected in the novel has to do with the unique friendship between A and her roommate B, as well as A’s relationship with her boyfriend C. As much as A is struggling with her identity, B seems to be doing even worse, as she is portrayed as an extremely dependant, insecure young woman who spends her days moping around the house, watching TV and impatiently waiting for A to come home. A is unsettled by B’s strange behaviour, as she watches over A’s every move, trying to mimic her in different ways. B is described as so void of a sense of self that she keeps trying to get unnaturally close to A by constantly being around her, using her personal care products, doing makeup like her etc. At one point in the novel she chops of her own hair even gives a braid of it to A as a present: “Now you have a part of me forever” (Kleeman 12). Through their unusual friendship, we could argue that Kleeman puts forward the idea that what is relevant today in terms of one’s identity isn’t someone’s character or their innate, authentic qualities, as these would be much harder to emulate, but the products they use, the wat they dress etc. In other words, their image and their consumer habits. This makes the whole notion of identity an even riskier project as anyone can just copy you or become you, and this is why A says that: “B didn’t understand that the dangerous part of having a face was showing it off, not losing it. To see your face spread onto the faces around you, absorbed by others” (Kleeman 185). Furthermore, this is another way that the postmodern disappearance of the subject is portrayed in the novel, as A, unable to distinguish between her own life and that of TV characters, also can’t differentiate between herself and her roommate. B trying to turn into her provokes A’s paranoia and further aggravates her identity struggles, especially when we consider the fact that A and B are already quite similar in terms of their overall appearance: “If you reduced each of us to a list of adjectives, we’d come out nearly equivalent” (Kleeman 5). Likewise, A has a “long and extremely detailed dream where my roommate was turning into me and I was turning into nobody” and at one point in the novel the says that: “I didn’t know how to say I was afraid of diluting myself if I encountered B in this fuzzy state, where she resembled me more than I did myself” (Kleeman 140, 71). Furtheremore, if we take into account Baudrillard’s argument

whereby the constant need for objects is masking the growing need for difference or social competition, we can see how B slowly turning into A poses an even bigger threat to A's identity. In spite of her feelings towards B, she is still her best friend and, being roommates, they spend quite a bit of time together. Nevertheless, their friendship is characterized by underlying feelings of discomfort and irritability. This kind of friendship, as well as her relationship with C, can both be seen as reflecting the "social game of human relations," which functions as a "gigantic simulation model of the absent reciprocity" that Baudrillard talks about about in *The Consumer Society* (163). In other words, when talking about interpersonal relationships in consumer societies, he explains how "We no longer have dissimulation here, but functional simulation. It is a magnificent trompe l'oeil designed to smooth over the objective hostility and distance in all present relationships" (*The Consumer Society* 163). While Baudrillard's argument refers to sociability and human relationships on a broader scale, it's the same principle we find in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, as A and B's friendship is characterized by an underlying hostility, while her and C's relationship is characterized by feelings of distance and misunderstanding. Furthermore, A's interpersonal relationships in the novel back up Kellner's argument that since modernity, identity has become social and other related. For example, A's relationship with C can be described more as co-dependency than romance and, unsure of herself and her place in the world, A is dependent on C to validate her point of view. As she herself says at one point in the novel: "He had a chronic misunderstanding of me" (Kleeman 5). She also explains how "The things we said slid past each other without making contact, failed to land or fit together (158). In the novel, we also see that despite C's presence and all the time they spend together, A still feels lonely: "…for some reason I wasn't feeling that unalone feeling you were supposed to have when you were with someone else" (Kleeman 34). Her and C's relationship is also portrayed as perfunctory and lacking in substance when A says that: "Sometimes I thought about C and the idea came to me that any man's genitalia, however large or weirdly shaped, would be guaranteed to fit inside my own. Our pairing was coincidental or, at best, lucky. I wished that for once he'd just agree with me on any one thing about how I saw the world" (Kleeman 34). In other words, Kleeman puts forward the idea that postmodern relationships, romantic or otherwise, are characterized by a lack of understanding and a crisis of communication, which can be seen as an extension of the feelings of alienation one finds with personal identities in postmodernity. In other words, A feels alienated not just from herself and the world, but also from those closest to her. Her loneliness and alienation is also reflected in her statement: "It was lonely being the only one who knew how I was feeling, to not be stored

in the mind of someone else who could remind you who you were" (Kleeman 48). According to Baudrillard, this aspect of postmodern human relationships stems from the fact that, despite its appearances, consumer culture functions as a system of production, and as a system of production it "cannot but reproduce in its very functioning the social relations it aims to transcend" (*The Consumer Society* 162). In other words, "although designed to produce solicitude, it is condemned simultaneously to produce, and reproduce, distance, noncommunication, opacity and atrocity" (*The Consumer Society* 162). Everything considered, we could argue that A and C's relationship functions more like a simulation of a relationship, a going through the motions of sorts. As we have mentioned previously, A and C spend most of their time watching TV and commenting on commercials and B's strange behaviour, and even in their most intimate moments they can't escape the presence of TV. These feelings of distance and alienation present in postmodern relationships can also be seen as stemming from the fact that, as argued by Baudrillard, every social relationship in modern differential societies only "adds to individual lack, since everything possessed is relativized in relations to others" unlike in primitive exchange where everything possessed is "*valorized* by the very relationship with others." (*The Consumer Society* 67). This is an important shift as, according to Baudrillard, "Wealth has its basis not in goods, but in the concrete exchange between persons" (*The Consumer Society* 67). Similarly, at one point in the novel A says that "Even C, a thing I had that B didn't, created as much lack in me as he sated," (112) and she interprets these feelings as love, explaining how: "When we [A and C] put our faces close together sleeping or cuddling, he seemed to suck up all the air, leaving me sleepy, dizzy, partially undersupplied, and nuzzling at his mouth. *That's what love is like*, I would think…" (Kleeman, 137). Last but not least, what we see at the end of the novel is that A's fears and doubts have come true, as B is now dating C, suggesting that B managed to get a hold one of the few things left that differentiated her from A. In other words, she seems to have successfully turned into her while A, having given up on her life completely, has in fact turned into nobody.

5.2.2. Consumerism, women and the body

In this final chapter we will take a closer look at how consumerism impacts women in particular and how it relates to the notion of the body, which constitutes an important theme in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* and which occupies a special place within the multitude of consumer objects. Firstly, we could argue that one of the things that makes Kleeman's novel stand out is the fact that the author is able to translate so many of the postmodern issues we touched on thus far, such as those of fatigue or the disappearance of the subject, into the world

of physicality, the realm of the body. In other words, A's struggles with feelings of alienation from herself and the world are carried over to the relationship she has with her own body. This way, Kleeman is able to portray these underlining feelings of estrangement in a more concrete way, making them feel a lot more real or tangible, as we can see from the example above. Furtheremore, we could argue that the emphasis she places on the body reflects the idea that the body has become a locus of identity in postmodernity, especially for women, and this would also explain the overwhelming consumer investment that goes into it. As a says herself: "It's no surprise, then, that we care most for our surfaces; they alone distinguish us from one another and are so fragile, the thickness of paper" (Kleeman 2). While the identity issues explored in the novel do not refer to women exclusively; the Disappearing Dad Disorder for example touches on the issues of masculine identity in postmodernity and the breakdown of the family unit, the story of A is nevertheless told from a specifically female perspective. In other words, Kleeman elaborates on the female body in particular, relationships, romance TV shows, beauty products etc., and A's relationship with B could also be described as uniquely female. Without going too deep into the history and the implications of current gender representations, since this topic is beyond the scope of the thesis, we will briefly reference Venera Dimulescu's essay on the contemporary representations of the female body, since the author makes some interesting points regarding women's relationship to consumer culture which can also be observed in the novel. For example, she claims that the "association between women's personal identity, beauty and style is a contemporary construct within the consumerist hegemonic discourse," and we could argue that this is another reason behind A's preoccupation with her body and the attention she gives to its different aspects and functions (Dimulescu). For example, she ponders the levels of skin hydration promised by certain skin care products, ingredients in different foods and how they affect the body etc. In this sense, A also turns to different advertised beauty products in hopes of achieving the 'impossible, magical synthesis' that Baudrillard talks about, which is supposed to reveal her true self and fulfil all the potentials of her body. As Kleeman said herself in an interview for The Stanford Daily:

> I always felt like this seamless integration of my body and mind was the goal, and [that it] was something that seem[ed] to be promised to me by all these images of exercise, meditation or people who are behaving on TV as though they're perfectly one with their bodies, but I'm always surprised by my body" (qtd. in Taylor).

Similarly, at one point in the novel A says that: "Every time I looked at my face, I seemed to find another new piece to it, floating there next to or underneath or inside the others, all the parts together but impossible to connect," and we could argue that this example reflects deeper feelings of fragmentation and alienation that manifest on the level of the body as well (Kleeman 56). Furthermore, Dimulescu also emphasizes the obvious fact that the technological development inherent in our modern societies, in terms of the current prevalence of advertising and other mass media, has perpetuated and emphasized the existing representations of femininity and female beauty. This has resulted in the fact that the female body has now become an extremely profitable industry and, although men are not excluded from this, women still seem to be the main targets of consumer culture, as reflected in the myriad of products and services intended for women's bodies. For example, at one point in the novel, A talks about a commercial for the Fluvia cosmetics' new product: "The ad claimed that nobody would be able to resist falling in love with your new skin, then showed a beautiful woman holding still as her boyfriend, boss, best friend, and workplace nemesis gathered around, stroking her skin wonderingly with the tips of their fingers" (Kleeman 31). However, according to Baudrillard, the body does not only serves as a means of selling products and services, but it becomes itself a consumed object. As he explains, in the context of consumer culture the truth of the body in terms of its functionality and its real meaning disappears, and he speaks of "the body which is no longer 'flesh' as in the religious conception, or labour power as in industrial logic, but is taken up again in its materiality as narcissistic cult object or element of social ritual (*The Consumer Society* 132). This way of perceiving the body in terms of its materiality is exactly what we find in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, and we can argue that it is one of the main reasons behind A's feelings of estrangement from her body. Nevertheless, Baudrillard explains that in order to be exploited in such consumerist ways, the body first needs to be rediscovered, and according to him this is done through the consumption of objects and commodities. This way, the body becomes equivalent to all the other objects one finds in advertising, but at the same time it functions as the most precious of such objects as it unleashes an unlimited demand for its investment. Furthermore, B's eating disorder, which is a phenomenon that typically affects women, can also be seen as a representing the unhealthy postmodern relationship with the body, as well as the pressures exerted on it by consumer culture: "Except for the Popsicles, tea, cigarettes, and sloppy cocktails made out of the lemon-flavoured vodka that someone had left in our freezer after a party, B didn't really eat" (Kleeman 18). At one point in the novel, B also explains how "Each Popsicle contained about fifteen

calories, and you could burn almost that many just by eating them with vigor. 'They erase themselves from your body'" (Kleeman 17). Baudrillard sees this modern obsession with one's figure as another form of postmodern violence, the kind where the subject turns on himself, and he also makes an interesting point in saying that, in the consumer culture, "the body is glorified precisely as its real possibilities are atrophying" (*The Consumer Society* 100). In other words, we could argue that advertising focuses on and worships the body which is, at the same time, becoming more and more harassed not just by different industries and companies trying to sell products, but by the modern lifestyle as well, be it the food we consume, the prevalence of desk jobs, obsession with appearance etc. In her essay, Dimulescu also argues that, in the consumer society, the apparent right to be beautiful becomes an obligation for women, and this reflects Baudrillard's views on the oppressive nature of consumerism which doesn't leave the individual with any choice but to participate in the consumption of dominant images, in this case those of the female beauty. In other words, he claims that for women "beauty has become an absolute, religious imperative" (*The Consumer Society* 132). Similarly, Dimulescu points out that in the context of consumer culture "engaging in the prescriptive beauty norm" is presented as "performed personal choice," and that these kinds of practices are seen as empowering on both personal and social level. However, she makes a good point when asking whether it is still possible for the consumer to differentiate between "personal choice and consumerist commitment" (Dimulescu). In other words, she echoes Baudrillard's view that the imposition of a particular model or the dominant ideology is in now hidden behind the postmodern ideas of freedom and choice, and in the context of the body he calls this a "narcissistic reinvestment orchestrated as a mystique of liberation and accomplishment." (*The Consumer Society* 131) Dimulescu also argues that "…the beauty myth isn't a capsule in which the body passively dwells, but the very action through which the latter is socially recognized as real." This way of perceiving (female) beauty could also be seen as the reason behind women's constant anxious monitoring of their bodies. This makes the body, which was once perceived in terms of its functionality, feel burdenous, and Baudrillard sees this phenomena as the "inverted aggressiveness of an affluent society" (*The Consumer Society* 142). This is precisely what we find with A, as such feelings of unease and concealed aggression can be felt throughout the novel: "I felt a smothered hunger beating out from the unseen places inside my body. I felt corseted in skin. I wanted to turn myself violently inside out. I wanted to throw myself into the outside and begin tearing off chunks of it for food" (Kleeman 104). This perceiving of the body as a burden is also reflected in the novel when A says: "Then there was sex, and a succession

of years in which I trawled my body along behind me like a drift net, hoping that I wouldn't catch anything in it by accident, like a baby or a disease…At rare and specific moments when my body was truly my own, I never knew what to do with it" (Kleeman 72). This feeling of alienation from her own body and the inability to establish a primal, genuine connection with it backs up Baudrillard's argument whereby the dominant discourse which allegedly tries to reconcile people with their bodies simply reintroduces "between the subject and the objectivized body as a threatening double, the same relations which are those of social life, the same determinations which are those of social relations: blackmail, repression, persecution syndrome, conjugal neurosis" (*The Consumer Society* 131).

6. Conclusion

In this Master's thesis we have explored some of the main aspects of consumerism, mainly with reference to the work of Jean Baudrillard, and we have argued that postmodern identities are now being constructed almost exclusively through consumption of commodities and through engaging in consumer practices. More specifically, we have exposed some of the common misconceptions regarding the ideology of consumerism, such as the idea that consumerism has to do with the consumption of objects or that its main purpose is enjoyment or fulfilling of personal needs. In fact, we have seen that one of the main characteristics of consumption today, and the primary reason behind its seemingly unlimited character, is its social logic of differentiation; a never ending need for difference or prestige. In this context, we have shown how objects are actually being exploited as signs, as differential, and we have seen how mass media and advertising play a crucial role in creating and perpetuating the mythology of the object. We have also established that the shift from the 'ideal' to the 'image' or from the signified to the signifier has blurred the boundary between reality and 'the spectacle' and has contributed to the superficial and fragile nature of postmodern identities. Other characteristics of consumer societies, such as the destruction of meaning, the disappearance of the subject and the separation of the modern worker and the product of his work, have also been argued as contributing factors to postmodern feelings of alienation and estrangement. The malleability and arbitrariness of postmodern identities, as well as the general societal shift towards the more feminine practice of consumption, have also manifested as feelings of insecurity regarding masculine identity, as portrayed in *Fight Club* and *White Noise*. Through the example of these two novels, we have argued that violence is associated with masculinity and is presented as a response of the postmodern man to the emasculating and oppressive nature of consumer culture.

In this context, we have also seen how the widespread postmodern phenomena of *fatigue*, besides being the only type of activity possible within the logic of consumption, can also be regarded as latent violence. In terms of consumerism and women, we have argued that in postmodernity women's identities are closely linked to their appearance, style and beauty, which contributes to the overwhelming consumer investment that goes into women's bodies which are in turn, as shown in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, experienced as a burden. In other words, we have seen how feelings of alienation and estrangement that affect one's identity, as well as overall human relationships in the postmodern context, are also reflected in one's relationship with the body. Finally, we have argued that the solutions to the oppressiveness of consumer culture and the burdenous nature of postmodern identity as they are proposed in the three novels, whether direct action against consumer culture in terms of violence, or giving up on participating in terms of escapism, don't work. However, as Baudrillard argues in *The Consumer Society* and as has been shown in the novels analysed, the negative effects of consumerism are multifaceted and the problems regarding the logic of consumerism and its ideology, whose impact and implications are still being revealed, are yet to be fully addressed.

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8. CONSUMERISM AND THE CRISIS OF POSTMODERN IDENTITIES IN WHITE NOISE, FIGHT CLUB AND YOU TOO CAN HAVE A BODY LIKE MINE: Summary and key words

This Master's thesis aims to present the main aspects of the ideology and the phenomenon of consumerism as discussed in the work of Jean Baudrillard, and explore the idea that postmodern identities are predominantly constructed through consumption. Thanks to the technological development and profusion of mass media, the logic of consumption now rules almost all spheres of life, from personal desires and identities to interpersonal relationships etc., and it has lead to the creation of a global 'society of the spectacle' characterized by *fatigue* and alienation, as well as feelings of insecurity and confusion regarding personal identities and one's role in society. The analysis of these issues through the example of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Cuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* has showed that the rise of consumerist values in postmodernity has significantly contributed to a general crisis of masculine identity, which resulted in a revival of more traditional notions of masculinity linked to violence. The analysis of Alexandra Kleeman's *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* showed that female identities are closely linked to image and consumption, and that the estrangement of the subject typical of the postmodern society is also reflected in the individual's relationship with the body.

Key words: consumerism, white noise, fight club, you too can have a body like mine, postmodern identities, mass media, violence, *fatigue*

9. KONZUMERIZAM I KRIZA POSTMODERNISTIČKIH IDENTITETA U ROMANIMA WHITE NOISE, FIGHT CLUB I YOU TOO CAN HAVE A BODY LIKE MINE: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Cilj ovog diplomskog rada je analizirati glavne aspekte ideologije i pojave konzumerizma na temelju rada Jeana Baudrillarda te razmotriti tezu da se postmodernistički identiteti uglavnom izgrađuju putem kozumacije. Zahvaljujući tehnološkom razvoju i sve većem utjecaju masovnih medija, logika konzumacije upravlja gotovo svim sferama života, od vlastitih želja i osobnih identiteta do međusobnih odnosa itd., te je dovela do stvaranja globalnog 'društva spektakla' obilježenog pasivnošću, otuđenjem te osjećajima nesigurnosti u pogledu osobnih identiteta i uloge pojedinca u društvu. Analizom tih problema na primjeru romana White noise autora Don DeLilla te romana Fight club autora Chucka Palahniuka, pokazalo se da je porast

konzumerističkih vrijednosti u postmodernizmu u značajnoj mjeri pridonio općoj krizi muškog identiteta, što je rezultiralo oživljavanjem tradicionalnijih pogleda na muževnost povezanih s nasiljem. Analizom romana You too can have a body like mine autorice Alexandre Kleeman pokazalo se da su ženski identiteti usko povezani s izgledom odnosno imidžem i konzumacijom, te da se otuđenost subjekta karakteristična za postmodernistička društva isto tako odražava na odnos pojedinca s vlastitim tijelom.

Ključne riječi: konzumerizam, white noise, fight club, you too can have a body like mine, identitet u postmodernizmu, masovni mediji, nasilje, *fatigue*