

Editorial — The Fractured Self:

Postmodernism and Depersonalization Disorder

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Abstract

This paper will examine the introspective infernos of fractured identity in several late postmodernist texts dating from mid- to late nineties America. Tim O'Brien's 1994 novel *In the Lake of the Woods* and its companion essay "The Vietnam in Me," Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club* and David Fincher's 1999 film of the same name and Darren Aronofsky's 2010 *Black Swan*, all demonstrate the intersection between the postmodern and the depersonalized subject. Through a diagnostic reading of these texts, I intend to demonstrate the close relationship between elements of postmodern cultural and critical theory with the psychiatric disorder depersonalization disorder. Specifically, this will entail a reconsideration of elements of both Fredric Jameson's and Jean Baudrillard's respective cultural theories. Following these explorations, attention will be given towards the poetics of depersonalization. This will entail an examination of the Gothic-postmodernist motifs — as outlined by Maria Beville's recent monograph *Gothic-postmodernism* (2009) — of the mirror and the doppelgänger, common to each text's eerie expressions of alterity. These texts are structurally mimetic of, and metaphorically attached to, both postmodernism and depersonalization disorder. Interpreting these texts as points of intersection between the psychiatric disorder depersonalization disorder and the postmodern condition can aid an understanding of this hellish sense of a split self and the texts themselves. In these texts, the postmodern condition induces a depersonalized identity leaving the protagonists in a state of existential insecurity and disconnection from their sense of self.

The mind is its own place and in itself Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

— *Paradise Lost* (Milton 1667, i. 254-5)

Introduction: Of Wars and Wastelands.

T.S. Eliot's oft-quoted doctrine of poetic impersonality states that artists must detach themselves from experience and undergo a "process of depersonalization" in order to infuse "significant emotion" into the life of an artwork (1920). Eliot prescribes periods of voluntary artistic detachment to grasp a fuller realisation of personal experience. Thus, Eliot's modernist inferno, the "unreal city" of *The Waste Land*, is haunted by a plethora of dissociated voices (1922). These fragmented voices combine to explore a disillusioned poet's disconnection with a landscape shattered by the world's first technological war. On the

other side of the post-war psychological fallout, Weimar Germany began its own questioning of urbanity and identity with the sinister aesthetic regime of expressionism. F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) exemplifies this eerie disconnection from war-torn Germany through the vampiric invasion of the town of Wisborg. The "black death" accompanies Count Orlok (Max Schreck) and infects the urban space of Murnau's post-war nightmare, *Nosferatu*. The city is unanimously depicted as a mass graveyard, the nexus of modernist disconnection.

The modernist dissociation from the "metropolis of death" (Beville 2009, p.31) began to give way to an increased emphasis on the psychological aspects of individual identity in art following World War II. Postmodernists began to reject identity as a psychologically whole entity, heightening Eliot's "process of depersonalization" to morbid extremes. Early strands of postmodernism, such as the absurdist experiments of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Eugene Ionesco, explored stagnant realms of isolation, indifference and inaction. Ionesco's *La Cantatrice Chauve* (1950) depicts a dissociated cycle of characters in a motionless and meaningless world. In this single act pseudo-play, the depersonalized couples — the Smiths and the Martins — perform interchangeable roles, resulting in a requiem for individual identity. The postmodern psyche began to suffer a disconnection not only from the exterior world, but also from itself.

The Vietnam War "helped create and define [...] 'the postmodern condition'" (Carpenter 2003, p.35) and its resulting literature gave rise to an increased interest in investigating identity. Carpenter notes, "[o]ne of the many ironies of the Vietnam War is that the one war America lost gave rise to more and better literature — collectively — than any of America's other twentieth century wars" (2003, p.30). War veterans such as Tim O'Brien — discussed in greater detail below — and Michael Herr, helped forge a distinctly American postmodern signature in their prose. Herr's *Dispatches* (1968) presents us with a subject "just as fragmented as his narrative," an innovative blend of journalism and fiction detailing his overwhelming war experience (p.39), while O'Brien continually explores a fragmentation of subjectivity that resulted from his participation in the "world's first terrible postmodernist war" (Jameson quoted in Carpenter, p.35). The mind itself becomes the late twentieth century's wasteland.

This paper will examine the introspective infernos of fractured identity in several late postmodernist texts dating from mid- to late nineties America. Tim O'Brien's 1994 novel *In the Lake of the Woods* and its companion essay "The Vietnam in Me," Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club* and David Fincher's 1999 film of the same name all demonstrate the intersection between the postmodern and the depersonalized. Conceived within a "liminal space in terms of history and modern identity" (Beville, p.100) — approaching the death of a millennium, anxiously anticipating the birth of a new one — these texts demonstrate a heightened trepidation regarding identity, depicting, with clinical precision, subjects suffering from the hell of depersonalization disorder. Darren Aronofsky's 2010

Black Swan retains specific elements of the depersonalization process and demonstrates that these anxieties regarding identity persist in our new millennium. I have chosen these texts as, despite their diversity of subjects, they all exhibit symptoms of this increasingly common psychiatric disorder through their mimetic structure, metaphoric constructs and imagery.

O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* presents us with a metafictional mystery in which an anonymous researcher investigates the disappearance of John Wade (a recovering Vietnam veteran) and his wife, Kathy. O'Brien's "The Vietnam in Me" explores O'Brien's own experience in Vietnam and outlines the depression and Post-Traumatic Stress that haunt him decades after his time in Vietnam. Both Palahniuk's and Fincher's *Fight Club* relate the story of an anonymous insomniac (referred to as 'Jack' by critics and fans alike) who suffers from a shattered sense of identity when confronted with his anarchistic alter-ego Tyler Durden. *Black Swan* documents the psychological rupture of Nina (Natalie Portman) who, when faced with the task of performing the split role of the white swan/ black swan in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (1876), suffers a fractured identity. These texts present the potential hell lurking within the psyche and reveal what happens when the human subject becomes depersonalized, or estranged from its sense of self. For the depersonalized subject suffering the inner anguish of an unstable identity, the words of Milton's *Paradise Lost* "ring true with profound insight" (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.5).

Defining Depersonalization Disorder.

"Am I asleep? Had I slept? Is Tyler my bad dream or am I Tyler's? I was living in a state of perpetual *Déjà vu* [...] everywhere I went, I felt I had already been there. It was like following an invisible man." Jack, *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999).

Daphne Simeon's paper "Depersonalisation Disorder: A Contemporary Overview" (2004) offers a comprehensive compilation of psychiatric research and analysis regarding depersonalization disorder. According to Simeon:

Dissociation is defined as a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, and perception, leading to a fragmentation of the coherence, unity and continuity of the sense of self. Depersonalisation is a particular type of dissociation involving a disrupted integration of self-perceptions with the sense of self, so that individuals experiencing depersonalisation are in a subjective state of feeling estranged, detached or disconnected with their own being. (p.344)

Descriptions of the disorder are characterised by patients recollecting "out-of-body experiences [or] feeling like [they] are in a dream or fog" (p.344). A sense of meaningless, nauseating and futile repetition dominates the subjects' lives. Edward Norton's Jack of *Fight Club* describes this struggle while pursuing his depersonalized self, his *doppelgänger*, Tyler (Brad Pitt) and, in doing so, illustrates how sufferers of depersonalization disorder endure a disorientating sense of "perpetual *Déjà vu*."

Simeon and Abugel note that, “[i]n Western culture, we seem to be witnessing a rise in the number of reported cases of depersonalization” (2006, p.63). Thus, “the question [arises] whether or not modern society is, in itself, a cause of depersonalization” (p.63). Perhaps “the terrors of war, genocide and existence in the great metropolis [...] in the disillusioning context of the postmodern United States of America” (Beville 2009, p.98) accelerates the splintering of identity associated with depersonalization disorder.

Beville asserts that “literary postmodernism expands to examine the self as alienated from the community and also itself” (p.46). Postmodern investigations of psychological identity thus approach the depersonalized self. *In the Lake of the Woods*, “The Vietnam in Me,” *Fight Club* (in both novel and filmic form), and *Black Swan* all examine individuals experiencing the isolating effects of depersonalization disorder in a postmodern context.

Postmodern Pessimism and Perpetual *Déjà vu*.

“It seems to me that I have become a statue on the banks of the river of time . . .”The Journal In time of Henri-Frederic Amiel (Amiel, 1885).

For those afflicted with depersonalization disorder “time often does not unfold in the normal manner; past, present and future can seem indistinguishable, as if they were all happening at once” (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.62). Postmodernist principles of temporality are thus relatable to the sensation of depersonalization. Constable notes in “Postmodernism and Film,” that Frederic Jameson’s seminal essay, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, regards the “sense of being condemned to the perpetual present [as being] emblematic of the postmodern condition” (2004, p.49). In this regard, Jameson links postmodernity to schizophrenia, as “the schizophrenic does not have a chronological sense of past, present, and future, and consequently lacks any sense of the self as a coherent identity that persists across time” (p.49). However, Jameson’s Lacanian diagnosis — intriguing as it may be — is lacking in psychiatric precision. Simeon and Abugel explain that, “[d]istortion of time perception is a frequent complaint of depersonalized individuals” (p.61), while recent developments in the clinical understanding of schizophrenia suggest that “time sense and ability to perceive subjective duration is unaffected in schizophrenics” (Eisler, et al., 2008, p.100). The flow of chronological time is perhaps not as bound to language as Jameson argues and there seems to be an extralinguistic dimension to the postmodern disintegration of linear temporality. Therefore, the paradigm of the depersonalized self is perhaps more appropriate than Jameson’s notion of the schizophrenic, with regard to O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods* and his essay “The Vietnam in Me,” and Palahniuk’s and Fincher’s *Fight Club*. In each text, “[t]hrough the projection of an inner world, the represented world is psychologically motivated and reordered” (Bernaerts 2009, p.380) by the dissociative effects of depersonalization.

The episodic quality and chronological instability of *In the Lake of the Woods* seems reflec-

tive of depersonalization disorder. The “dizzy disconnected feeling” (O’Brien 1995, p.42) of depersonalization is often an episodic experience, with episodes “lasting hours, days, weeks or months at a time” (Simeon 2004, p.345). The structure of *In the Lake of the Woods* mimics this disorientating experience, focussing on the psychological shifts in time that our narrator supposes Wade underwent. During moments of isolation in Vietnam, Wade’s “internal terrain [becomes] blurry” as he feels “increasingly cut off from the men [of Charlie Unit], cut off from Kathy and his own future” (O’Brien, p.39). Wade drifts toward an isolated island of internal dissociation in moments of seclusion. During moments of increased mental stress and fatigue — instances ranging from his political humiliation to the suffering he endures whilst searching for Kathy — Wade’s detachment from his own identity intensifies. Upon attempting to conjure up a “neat chronology of events,” he glides “above ordinary time” (p.133), though he ultimately fails to remember the events of that night just as our authors fail to arrive at any decisive conclusion. Numb to time, Wade is unable to heal.

O’Brien fictionalised the struggle he underwent in 1994 when writing *In the Lake of the Woods*. This struggle is documented in his essay “The Vietnam in Me,” which experiments with a distorted narrative on a formal level. Like Wade, and the narrator of *In the Lake of the Woods*, O’Brien finds himself unable to write up a “neat chronology of events” in his personal essay describing his torturous depression (1994). Like *In the Lake of the Woods*, the essay suffers from disorientating temporal blurring, mimetic of O’Brien’s own mental state upon composition of the essay. The essay fluctuates between recollections of his original Vietnam experience of 1969, his return “home” to Viet Nam in February 1994 and sleepless nights with “suicide on [his] mind” in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the summer of 1994. The document is — among other things — a record of the creative struggle he underwent in his writing, the difficulty of “wrap[ping] words around a few horrid truths.” Again, his creative struggle seems symptomatic of depersonalization. Simeon notes depersonalization is linked with “a decline in ability to focus on tasks, especially complex ones” (2004, p.345). The writing process for our narrator and O’Brien is a struggle, neither can “remember much,” but in constructing John Wade — their depersonalized self — both recover elements of their own “vanished life” (1995, p.301), though healing is hindered without a linear sense of time for both the anonymous researcher of *In the Lake of the Woods* and O’Brien.

Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* similarly distorts narrative chronology in its depiction of the depersonalized Jack. Bernaerts notes that “[i]n *Fight Club*, the products of the protagonist’s sick mind are constitutive to the narrative” (2009, p.374). From the beginning of the novel our anonymous narrator is aware that his alter-ego Tyler Durden is “a dissociative personality disorder” (Palahniuk, p.165), “but in the first part of the text he does not enlighten the reader on this matter” (Bernaerts, p.374). Jack’s split identity “is cleverly obfuscated by a telling alternation of present and past tense” (p.375). Jack’s story opens with the image of Tyler “pushing a gun in [Jack’s] mouth” (Palahniuk, p.11) which is distorted by

constant references to the past, present and future: “Tyler and I were best friends. People are always asking, did I know about Tyler Durden [...] The building we’re standing on won’t be here in ten minutes” (pp.11-12). Jack’s narrative strategy is thus mimetic of the disorientating experience of depersonalization disorder, as time does not follow a linear structure. In *Fight Club*, “past, present and future [are] indistinguishable, as if they were all happening at once” (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.62).

In Fincher’s *Fight Club*, Jack similarly fluctuates between episodes of security, confusion, and panic until he comes to the painful realisation that he is suffering from a serious identity crisis. Jack views himself from a detached third-person perspective symptomatic of depersonalization disorder during moments of heightened emotional states, with such instances including, but not limited to, underground boxing matches and sexual intercourse. In these moments, Jack is convinced that he is merely watching Tyler, rather than taking part in the actions he describes. The sensation of depersonalization for Jack during intercourse is captured in a dream sequence with a hyperbolised blurring of the *mis-en-scène* objectifying the subjective daze-like “perpetual *Déjà vu*” — or the “perpetual present [...] of the postmodern condition” (Constable, p.49) — Jack is experiencing. Jack awakes convinced his encounter with Marla Singer (played by Helena Bonham Carter) was nothing more than a dream. Jack’s inability to distinguish between dream and reality seems symptomatic of depersonalization disorder: “descriptions of depersonalization experiences [include] feeling like you are in a dream” (Simeon 2004, p.344). Jack is a mere spectator in his own life. Fincher translates Jack’s pivotal realisation in a montage sequence placing Norton in a series of familiar scenarios originally shot with Pitt acting as protagonist. Approaching the borders of mental collapse, Jack reflects: “Is Tyler my bad dream or am I Tyler’s?” Jack aptly iterates the depersonalized person’s inability to infer identity and to distinguish between competing realities.

Fincher’s *Fight Club* experiments with subtle use of filmic editing techniques in order to distort a linear narrative. *Fight Club* employs a conventional framing device: Jack’s tale — as in the novel — begins at the end of the story with Jack and Tyler “shar[ing] a conversation which digresses into a depiction of the events that culminate in that conversation” (Isaacs 2005, p.133). Isaacs notes that “[t]he Tyler persona intrudes into Norton’s narration in fleeting still-shots, mirroring Tyler’s splicing of frames into a master narrative” (p.133). This “bold and remarkably subtle intrusion into linear, cause-effect narrative” (p.133) seems symptomatic of the “fragmentation of the coherence, unity and continuity of the sense of self” (Simeon 2004, p.344) associated with depersonalization disorder on the formal level of film editing. The depersonalized *doppelgänger* Durden subtly disrupts narrative continuity.

The Journal Intime of Henri-Frederic Amiel, the meticulous diary of an obscure Swiss philosopher, “consistently and eloquently expresses the experience of chronic, lifelong depersonalization” (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.130). Amiel describes a disconnection

from time — frozen in an infinite present, “a statue on the banks of the river of time” (p.145) — akin to the postmodernist perception of a perennial present found in Jameson’s aforementioned writing. Cast adrift from the flow of time, postmodernity is similarly depersonalized. O’Brien, Palahniuk and Fincher all employ “narrative delirium” (Bernaerts 2009, p.374) from the depersonalized person’s perspective mimicking an anachronistic meandering of time. Numb to time, Wade is lost in a labyrinth of uncertainty in O’Brien’s metafictional mystery; Jack of Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* is condemned to an insane asylum, imprisoned in a state of perpetual *Déjà vu*; while Fincher’s Jack attempts suicide. Unable to feel time, “there is no past, no future” for the sufferers of depersonalization disorder (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.10).

Postmodern Metaphor and Cinematic Detachment.

“I imagine myself seeing life as if it were played like a film.”Feeling Unreal: Depersonalization and the Loss of the Self (in Simeon and Abugel, 2006).

Simeon and Abugel note that “[o]ne of the many intriguing metaphors used by depersonalized people is that they feel as if they are viewing themselves, as if watching a movie” (2006, p.63). Constable observes that Jean Baudrillard’s *America* (1988) associates post-modern America’s national derealization with film. Baudrillard states that “it is not the least of America’s charms that even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic. The desert you pass is like the set of a Western, the city a screen of signs and formulas” (quoted in Constable 2004, p.44). Constable summarises: “it is this sense of a reality that has been completely pervaded by cinema, resulting in the apprehension of reality as film, which is one of the key metaphors of the postmodern” (p.44). Thus, post-modern ideology can be seen as being symptomatic of depersonalization disorder. *In the Lake of the Woods*, *Fight Club* (in both novel and filmic format), and *Black Swan* all engage with the postmodern “blurring of fiction and reality” and each text investigates “the subsequent problem of self in a hyperreal world” in a nation that has been constructed by cinema (Beville 2009, p.68).

O’Brien’s *In the Lake of the Woods* captures a cinematic sensation of detachment and extends it to America’s own self-detachment. Heberle notes that “[t]he name John Wade sounds like a pinched, adenoidal echo of the American cultural icon ‘John Wayne’ ” (2001, p.217). O’Brien crosses traditional media boundaries in alluding to John Wayne. Our narrator is so completely detached from reality, that he envisions his fragmented other self as John Wade, a confused version of John Wayne. The allusion is appropriate for O’Brien’s extension of depersonalization to America within *In the Lake of the Woods*, as Wayne’s early onscreen personas were integral in erasing the “evil” from America’s “national mythology” (O’Brien, 1994). Wayne’s pre-revisionist Westerns and his Vietnam directorial excursion in *The Green Berets* (1968), embodied the naive notion that “the most important effect of the frontier ha[d] been the promotion of democracy” (Turner, 1921). Typically,

Wayne's westerns evoked deluded mythologies of American settlement and stand as a testament to America's ability to dissociate itself from its violent past through fabrication and myth. America has experienced serious disruptions in collective consciousness, memory and identity akin to the detachment within *In the Lake of the Woods*. America's history has been thoroughly depersonalized through Hollywood. O'Brien thus links not only "individual and collective trauma" (Melley 2003, p.115), but individual and national depersonalization.

Palahniuk's novel equates dissociative personality disorders, such as depersonalization disorder, with the cinematic practice of projection, as Tyler is both a "movie projectionist" (*Fight Club* p.25), and is described as a "projection" of Jack's psyche (p.168). Narrating Tyler's first encounter with Marla, a moment of severe detachment for Jack, Jack recalls Tyler's experience of a reality invaded by Hollywood. Jack's depersonalized self strolls toward Marla's apartment, "down a noisy hallway with canned television laughter coming through the doors" and "[e]very couple of seconds an actress screams or actors die screaming in a rattle of bullets" (p.60). Recalling his first fist fight with Tyler, Jack compares his act of self destructive violence to "every cowboy movie we'd ever seen" (pp.52-53), recalling O'Brien's allusion to John Wayne. Jack's detachment is described in terms typical of depersonalization disorder, as his reality and sense of self are violently pervaded by Hollywood. Jack aptly summarises his condition, stating: "Tyler is a projection. He is a dissociative personality disorder" (p.168), thus equating his experience of depersonalization with film, a comparison typical of sufferers of depersonalization and a metaphor central to postmodernism.

Fincher's *Fight Club* locates depersonalization within the movie theatre, adding a metafictional depth to Palahniuk's novel. Jack explains — addressing his audience directly in a metafictional aside — that as a hobby Tyler enjoys "splicing single frames of pornography into family films" (Fincher, 1999). Fincher "plays with movie making conventions, in particular the relation of the film to the audience" and the fourth wall is completely demolished by Durden's presence (Browning 2010, p.138). Juhasz notes in "*Fight Club*'s most egregiously reflexive scene," which comes during this aside, "we observe our doubles — the viewers of the movie [Tyler] is projecting within our movie — appearing understandably shaken, but uncertain as to why, as the nasty frame [a single frame of pornography] is subliminally cut into their movie" (2001, p.214). The scene extends the dissociative crisis of its protagonist to the audience, who, for a brief moment, view a depersonalised image of themselves onscreen. Through metafictional reflexivity, Fincher's *Fight Club* extends diegetic depersonalization to its audience, whilst demonstrating a postmodern permeable border between reality and fiction.

Fincher's *Fight Club* blurs the boundary between reality and film further, extending the motif of Durden's subliminal sabotage to the closing segments of the film. During the film's final frames which depict a seriously wounded, yet relieved, Jack, united with his love

interest Marla, there is an insertion of several frames of pornography. Tyler's persona — Fincher suggests in a subtle manner — has transcended the restraints of the diegetic world, thus blurring the boundary between diegetic and non-diegetic worlds. In terms of the depersonalization disorder subtext within *Fight Club*, the significance of this cinematic subtlety is twofold: Fincher blurs the border between reality and film, thus reproducing a symptom of depersonalization disorder, whilst acknowledging that “persons [such as Jack/Tyler] not only exist in our society, but indeed must exist” (Dostoevsky 1864, p.90).

Black Swan focuses on Nina's psychological descent into a reality distorted by fiction. In *Black Swan*, “Nina develops a dual, distorted state of mind in which the borders between reality and fiction slowly fade away” (Cross Media Storytelling, 2011). Nina is eventually unable to distinguish between the reality of her performance and the fictitious world of *Swan Lake*. Aronofsky seeks to extend this unreality to his audience through focalising *Black Swan* through Nina's detached and distorted perspective. The night of the production premiere of *Swan Lake* demonstrates this. Playing the black swan, Nina actually envisions her own metamorphosis into a swan-human hybrid. Though only Nina imagines this distortion, we view the transformation from a detached perspective. The conflation of a distorted reality presented through an omniscient shot is suggestive of depersonalization disorder. We view Nina's distorted reality through a detached third-person perspective, akin to sufferers' descriptions of depersonalization disorder.

For the postmodern subject life may seem unreal. Submersed in a cinematic world, unreality may hold more truth than life itself. The depersonalized subject may endure a similar existence. *In the Lake of the Woods*, *Fight Club*, and *Black Swan* all depict protagonists in a state of existential disconnection. Far removed from self, identity, and reality, life has become like watching a film, blurring “the borders that exist between the real and the fictional” (Beville 2009, p.15).

The Poetics of Depersonalization: Mirror Imagery and the *Doppelgänger*.

“[W]hen I looked in a mirror I gave a cry and my heart shook; for it was not myself I saw but the grimacing face of a demon . . .”Also Sprach Zarathustra (Nietzsche, quoted in Eisner).

People suffering from depersonalization can experience “an altered sense of selfhood that dominates their mental lives” (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.6). This sensation of “depersonalization is intensely isolating and fear provoking by nature” (p.154). Simeon notes that “looking in the mirror and feeling detached from one's image” is a common sensation experienced during one's depersonalization and is perhaps the most terrifying symptom of the disorder (2004, p.344). This lurid dissociative disorder began to emerge as a recognised psychiatric phenomenon throughout Europe “in the mid- to late nineteenth century,

when dramatic social changes gave rise to intellectual and philosophical explorations the world had not yet seen” (Simeon and Abugel 2006, p.50). Intriguingly, the *doppelgänger* of Gothic literature began to surface contemporaneously in texts such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Edgar Allan Poe’s “William Wilson” (1839). In her monograph outlining the genre Gothic-postmodernism, Beville asserts the importance of the *doppelgänger* in expressing alterity: “the fragmentation of the human subject can be seen in the exploitation and exploration of the *doppelgänger*” (2009, p.64). Frankenstein’s monster can signify a disowned son, disgusting abjection or dissociated self. In relation to the *doppelgänger*, Beville regards “the mirror as a Gothic-postmodernist motif [which] emerges as central to preoccupations with self as the origin of terror” (p.119). *In the Lake of the Woods*, *Fight Club* (both novel and film), and *Black Swan* all employ mirror imagery in spawning the *doppelgänger*. In each text, the protagonist is met with a *doppelgänger* in the mirror. These motifs combine to evoke trepidations regarding an altered, depersonalized sense of selfhood in a postmodern world.

In the Lake of the Woods presents us with eerie imagery symptomatic of the process of depersonalization. This imagery operates on two distinct levels. O’Brien attempts to reflect a traumatic detachment in his description of Wade. Wade’s unhealthy preoccupation with mirrors is rooted in his troubled childhood. Following his father’s suicide and, years later, his return from Vietnam in the November of 1969, the mirror becomes the surface for Wade’s growing depersonalization. Wade stares into the mirror whilst talking to one form of his splintered self, Sorcerer, his childhood *doppelgänger*: “Hey Sorcerer [...] [h]ow’s tricks?” (p.41) Wade murmurs to the mirror. This literal detachment from the self is later covertly extended through the use of reflective imagery from the author’s “fabricated self” (Heberle, p.248) to O’Brien.

O’Brien’s narrator opens his report with a description of the lake which envelops his imaginative reconstruction, thus extending the reflective motif of the novel. He announces that “the wilderness was [...] like one great big curving mirror” (1995, p.1). The reflective quality of the lake is sustained throughout *In the Lake of the Woods*, until our narrator describes how Wade found himself “adrift on a sea of glass” surrounded by “reflections everywhere” (p.280). The internalised “box of mirrors” (p.159) of Wade’s troubled psyche is ultimately externalised by authorial speculation. In creating the environment of *In the Lake of the Woods*, O’Brien extends his mirror motif, gesturing towards his own sensation of depersonalization. In staring at the lake, O’Brien is haunted by his *doppelgängers*, in the blurred forms of John Wade and the anonymous narrator — the unhealed psychological scars of O’Brien’s war experience. The reflective sentiment within the use of the mirror motif thus demonstrates its potential for dissociation and the power of O’Brien’s prose.

O’Brien seems to hint at the aetiology of his own identity crisis in his essay “The Vietnam in Me.” O’Brien observes a schism in Saigon and declares the duality of “Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City” to be “[a] massive identity crisis,” a *doppelgänger*-like split rooted in violence.

O'Brien's title, which stresses the internalisation of his war experience with the preposition "in" ("The Vietnam *in* Me"), seems to suggest that O'Brien has felt a dissociative divide in his own identity, and the split is rooted in his war experience in Vietnam.

Beville argues, "the basic idea that identity is a fragmented and multiple 'thing' explodes when we realise that in our modern cities of glass, the mirror is everywhere" (2009, p.104). Palahniuk's prose captures this impression as Jack's world, prior to the arrival of his *doppelgänger*, is a metropolis of glass: "All the outside walls are floor-to-ceiling glass. Everything where I work is floor-to-ceiling glass" (1996, p.137). Tyler's emergence marks the fracturing of these reflective surfaces. Jack's *doppelgänger* not only invades Jack's mirror: "Tyler's upstairs in my bedroom, looking at his teeth in *my* mirror" (p.65 emphasis added), but later shatters it: "I can see the floor-to-ceiling windows on the third floor of my office building are blown out [by Tyler]" (p.184). This signifies Jack's depersonalized state with a combination of the *doppelgänger* and mirror motifs. In Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, "[n]othing is static" (p.108), especially identity.

Fincher's *Fight Club* achieves a subtle mirror effect through the rigid symmetry of its framing. Prior to the revelation that Durden is the depersonalised *doppelgänger* of Jack, the compulsive symmetry suggests that Jack is gazing deeply into a mirror during his encounters with Durden. Outside the grim, chiaroscuro-ridden bar of their first physical confrontation, the internal framing poses both figures silhouetted facing each other in such a symmetrical fashion that, at a glance, the figures appear as if they are gazing at a reflective surface. The internal framing of the barroom door serves to complement the reflective sentiment of the scene. The instance is brief, yet suggestive of the crisis at hand. During their final confrontation, this visual motif is heightened. A menacing Durden appears at one side of a pane of glass outside the financial district that he hopes to bring crashing down, jeering at a hectic and bewildered Jack. Jack shoots the glass and Durden disappears, just as a reflection in a shattered mirror would. Despite Jack's attempt to escape his dark depersonalized self, Durden returns moments later for their final confrontation. Jack fails to outrun his reflection and the disorientating sensation of depersonalization dominates *Fight Club*. For Jack, "Tyler is a projection: "He's a dissociative personality disorder" (Palahniuk 1996, p.168). Fincher translates this disruption of identity through a subtle mirror motif in *Fight Club*.

Like O'Brien's Wade, Natalie Portman's Nina becomes surrounded by "reflections everywhere" (O'Brien 1995, p.280) in *Black Swan*. Reflective surfaces dominate Aronofsky's *mis-en-scène* from the earliest sequences of the movie. These mirrors objectify Nina's fractured identity and, as the pressures of balletic perfection take a huge emotional strain on Nina, her crisis culminates in the mirror. Aronofsky's hallucinatory vision of the dark side of high art achieves its nightmarish depiction of detachment within the mirror world of Nina's tortured psyche. During her fitting for *Swan Lake*, Nina's reflection assumes a consciousness of its own and in a moment of lurid detachment, Aronofsky, through a claustro-

phobic over-shoulder close-up shot, depicts Nina's reflection turning to meet her. Moments later she is greeted by her metaphorical double Lily, her understudy, played by Mila Kunis. The confusion of literal and figurative reflections distresses Nina and ultimately consumes her. In a moment of depersonalized delusion, Nina attacks the backstage mirror wounding only herself, yet Nina is convinced she has killed Lily. During the ensuing state of depersonalized delirium, Nina thoroughly detaches herself from her own consciousness. She imagines dragging Lily to a vacated toilet cubicle to conceal the body, though in reality the only real casualties of this lurid scene have been the mirror and Nina. We later find Lily quite unharmed. Nina is submersed in a nightmare underworld of the *doppelgänger* from which she never escapes. Aronofsky's bleak meditation on America's dissociated daughter offers viewers a disturbing glimpse into the distressing world of depersonalization through the fractured psyche of Nina. Ultimately, Nina, like countless other postmodern protagonists before her, becomes "lost in the cubist collage that results from a fractured identity" (Beville 2009, p.185).

In each text, the world of the mirror, in Gothic-postmodern fashion, is a poeticised location of loss and traumatic detachment. Glancing within unleashes a dark world of dissociative terror haunted by the *doppelgänger*. For O'Brien and his anonymous researcher, for Jack of *Fight Club*, and Nina of *Black Swan*, the mirror reveals the monstrous instability of identity lurking within, an idea captured by Nietzsche in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*: "when I looked into a mirror I gave a cry and my heart shook; for it was not myself I saw but the grimacing face of a demon" (Nietzsche quoted in Eisner, p.129). Interpreted in light of psychiatric theory regarding depersonalization, each text can contribute to our understanding of this increasingly common psychiatric disorder and can perhaps combat the underrecognition and underdiagnosis which contribute to the fear lurking in the reflection of a fractured identity.

Conclusion.

"l'enfer, c'est les autres" Huis Clos (Sartre 1944, p.95).

Sartre's famous declaration that "hell is other people" is applicable to depersonalization disorder. "The mind is its own place" (Milton i, line 254) and hell can manifest itself in what can seem like another person, a depersonalized identity. The postmodern aspects of *In the Lake of the Woods*, "The Vietnam in Me," *Fight Club* and *Black Swan* are closely linked to the hell of a fractured, depersonalized identity. These texts are structurally mimetic of, and metaphorically attached to, both postmodernism and depersonalization. The *doppelgängers* lurking in the fractured reflections of the protagonists voice the psychological terrors of our age: a separation from self, the hell of a stranger invading the psyche. Interpreting these texts as points of intersection between depersonalization disorder and the postmodern condition can aid an understanding of both this hellish sense of a split

self and of the texts themselves. Beville notes that for postmodernism, “identity becomes recognisable as the unsolved and impenetrable mystery of our time” (2009, p.102). Understanding the potential otherness of the psyche, its instability, and innate capability for estrangement can perhaps provide some answers to this mystery.

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