

CSMC

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Critical Studies III Media Communication

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 19 NUMBER 1

MARCH 2002

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Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The *Fight Club* DVD as Digital Closet

Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus

□—*The DVD format has emerged as the dominant digital means of repackaging films for home consumption. In this essay, we theorize this new viewing experience and identify some of the challenges it poses for the media critic. We argue that the additional material DVDs typically offer, coupled with the format's interactivity, constitute a rhetorically powerful means of directing the consumer's viewing experience and protecting the commercial viability of the product. To illustrate, we offer a critical analysis of the DVD release of the controversial film Fight Club. Our analysis suggests that Fight Club's DVD "extra-text" dissuades the viewer from acknowledging the film's homoerotic elements as representing homosexual experience.*

DURING an interview at Yale University, Edward Norton had this to say about his recent film, *Fight Club*:

I hope it rattles people. I hope it dunks it very squarely in your lap because I think one of the things we strove very specifically to do with this was on some levels retain a kind of a moral ambivalence or a moral ambiguity—not to deliver a neatly wrapped package of meaning into your lap. Or in any way that let you walk away from the film like this, comfortable in having been told what you should make of it. (Norton, 2000)

As explained by Norton, *Fight Club* was deliberately designed to activate the audience, to force them to draw

their own moral conclusions, to antagonize them. The film's goal, according to Norton, is summed up in words he attributes to its director, David Fincher: "If it doesn't piss off a healthy number of people then we've done something wrong."

Norton's comments were available to a much larger audience than the one he addressed at Yale when his interview was included on the *Fight Club* DVD. The DVD format has gained popularity in part because it can offer this type of supplemental material to the consumer. In the first half of 2000, approximately 2.7 million DVD players were shipped (DVD video, 2000). For the year 2001, it is projected that 28 million players will be shipped worldwide, making the DVD "the fastest-growing consumer electronics product in history" (Abraham, 2001, p. 12). A casual glance around the local video store reveals that more and more shelf space has been given over to DVD products. In short, the DVD has emerged as an increasingly popular

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method for delivering cinematic products, one that may soon replace VHS videotape as the preferred medium for viewing at-home movies.

The rising popularity of DVDs is understandable, given the advantages the format has over standard VHS videotape. The overall quality of the digital image and sound is superior to that of analog videotape. The DVD format holds substantially more information than the VHS format, and is thus able to offer consumers features previously unavailable. Many DVDs include interviews, like the interview with Norton on the *Fight Club* DVD. These interviews are often with those involved in making the film: actors, directors, screenwriters, and so on. Some DVDs include running commentaries, in which such people discuss the film while it is playing. Additionally, DVDs often include "behind the scenes" clips, production notes, and storyboards. DVD technology makes all this material available interactively, allowing viewers to decide what they want to view, when, and in what order. Thus, the DVD offers more material for the viewer to consume than either the theatrical release of a film or the standard VHS version, and it does so in a way that affords the viewer greater control over the viewing experience.

To illustrate our point, we offer a critical analysis of the DVD for the film *Fight Club*. We argue that the supplemental material included on the DVD is used to make the product more marketable to mainstream audiences by framing the homoerotic elements of the film as homosocial behavior. In the following section, we explain our theory of the DVD. We then go on to identify and discuss issues relevant to our analysis of the *Fight Club* DVD, and then we offer the analysis itself.

Although Norton suggests that *Fight Club* is a film open to interpretation, we conclude that the DVD version may actually limit interpretation.

Extra Text and Auteuristic Residue

As we have noted, the DVD version of a film typically offers consumers additional material not included in the film's theatrical release or video version. The *Fight Club* DVD is no exception. These materials are similar to the "secondary texts" that John Fiske (1987) describes in his book *Television Culture*. In addition to "primary texts" (actual television programs), Fiske argues that there exist "secondary texts" (criticism, interviews, promotional articles, and other materials) that function intertextually to favor selected readings of primary texts. Fiske notes that while his use of these concepts is specific to television, they are informed by theories of intertextuality that have been applied to film. For example, such intertextual relationships have helped the producers of the James Bond films change preferred readings to accommodate cultural and political shifts and thus maintain the economic viability of the franchise (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987).

Like traditional secondary texts, the additional material included on DVDs also can be used to increase a film's profitability. We suggest, however, that they do so in a way that blurs the distinction between primary and secondary texts as they have been conceived and made use of in the past. For example, many DVDs offer running commentaries that provide the viewer with the option of listening to the film's director, actors, and even screenwriters voice opinions about the film as it is

playing. Given this blurred distinction, we have decided to call the additional material available on the DVD "extra text." We use the word "extra" because the material resides outside of, and in addition to, the cinematic text as traditionally defined by film criticism—i.e., the parameters of the theatrical release. Although extra-text materials function in a way similar to secondary texts, we do not believe the term "secondary" fully conveys the signifying relationship they have with the primary-cinematic text. Primary and secondary texts are usually physically distinct from one another and are often read at different times, creating an intertextual relationship that is marked by both temporal and spatial distance. However, by including such distinct but interrelated texts in a self-contained package, the DVD turns this intertextual relationship into an intratextual relationship. Thus, the DVD is perhaps the ultimate example of media-industry synergy, in which the promotion of a media product is collapsed into the product itself. Judicious use of DVD-extra text can exploit this intratextual advantage as a means of promoting the film.

Although citing negative reviews is not a traditional method of promoting a film, the packaging of the *Fight Club* DVD prominently displays excerpts from negative reviews and does so in a way that simultaneously celebrates the reviews and mocks the reviewers. Included with the DVD is a pamphlet entitled "How to Start a Fight," which contains several negative quotes from reviews of the film interspersed with positive quotes from people involved in the film's production that serve as rebuttals. This juxtaposition works to undermine the credibility of the negative reviews. For example, Alexander

Walker of the *London Evening Standard* is quoted as attacking *Fight Club* as: "an inadmissible assault on personal decency. And on society itself" (How to Start a Fight, 2000, p. 14). This quote is juxtaposed with one from Kevin McCormick, identified as "Former Executive Vice President of Production, Fox 2000 Pictures," the studio that produced the film:

I was really surprised by the intensity of the reaction, but for me it only made it more clear what an extraordinary movie it was, and made me certain that it will be well remembered. Remember that the witch in *Snow White* was controversial in its day. Anything new is going to be controversial. (How to Start a Fight, 2000, p. 14)

In contrasting the two quotes thus, McCormick's observation provides a rebuttal that suggests Walker's negative comments are, at best, shortsighted.

This is but one example that illustrates how DVD-extra text can function rhetorically in attempting to shape viewer interpretation. Individuals involved in the film's production are presented in the extra text as having privileged insights regarding a film's meaning and purpose and, as such, they are used to articulate a "proper" (i.e., sanctioned) interpretation. This privileged positioning may be best understood as a return to "auteurism." As Lapsley and Westlake (1988) explain, auteurism was an approach to film criticism that "grounded itself in the commonplaces of the romantic notion of the artist, thereby gaining film entry to the hallowed canon of Art" (p. 105). According to "auteurism" theory, a film is an expression of a unique artistic vision, usually that of its director. In the past, this notion was rendered problematic by the structure of the traditional studio industry that valued profit before art. This problem has been fur-

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INTERPRETATION

ther exacerbated in recent years by the emergence of media conglomerates that produce films which reflect a variety of commercial as well as aesthetic decisions reached by corporate committees (Bart, 2000). Therefore, it is difficult to view such films as expressions of some auteur's unique artistic vision. Lapsley and Westlake (1988) note that the auteur was pretty much abandoned as a theoretical construct for scholarly film criticism back in the late sixties. They go on to point out, however, that auteurism remains in the mainstream discussion of film like an ideological residue. In contemporary popular discourse on film, the concept of the auteur has expanded to include actors and screenwriters in addition to directors who, because of their involvement in the making of a film, are also thought to possess privileged knowledge about it.

Media conglomerates have a vested interest in maintaining the ideology of the auteur because it facilitates the promotion of their products. For example, when Warner Brothers releases a film, it has those involved in the making of the film appear in magazines and on television programs owned by AOL/Time Warner; the director might be interviewed in *Time* and the actors in *Entertainment Weekly* (a publication owned by AOL/Time Warner). In this way, media conglomerates exercise partial control over the publicity for their products. However, they can never be sure that those who view the film are the same people who read the magazine articles or see the television shows.

In contrast, DVD-extra text offers those marketing a film an intratextual advantage that significantly increases the chances that promotional tactics will reach their target audience. By

collapsing promotion into the product, DVD-extra text can more effectively exploit the ideology of the auteur than is possible through the use of traditional secondary texts. The extra text offers consumers access to commentary by those involved with making the film, and it positions this commentary as authoritative. Such extra-text features can direct the viewer toward preferred interpretations of the primary text while undermining unfavorable interpretations, especially those that might hurt the product's commercial success. The DVD format increases the likelihood that viewers will be exposed to these promotional tactics, thereby lending such tactics greater rhetorical force. In the past, the comments of a screenwriter—for example, in the context of a magazine or newspaper interview—enjoyed very little rhetorical force because they were far removed from the cinematic experience of viewing the film in a theater. The DVD format, however, collapses exposure to promotional material into the experience of viewing the film by bringing the film and its makers' commentary about it into close proximity, temporally and spatially; hence, DVD-extra text's intratextual advantage over traditional forms of secondary texts.

Another rhetorical advantage of DVD intertextuality is the fact that it is experienced interactively, investing the viewer with a greater (perceived) sense of agency. The extra text of the *Fight Club* DVD, and the preferred interpretation that it seeks to promote, are not forced upon the viewer.¹ Instead, the viewer must actively explore the DVD in order to discern how the film's makers believe it should be interpreted. In this way, the viewers are positioned as active agents who do not passively subject themselves to the privileged opin-

ions of the film's auteurs, but instead uncover them through acts of digital discovery—or so it would seem. In theorizing about the “interactivity” of digital media, Greg Smith (1999) argues that a “fantasy” is perpetuated in which such interactivity is perceived as providing the viewer choice about and control over media consumption. Smith notes that this fantasy of interactivity presupposes that other older forms of media (TV and film) are consumed passively, though it has been established that people actively engage these. Smith argues critics should expose the “hype” of digital interactivity, and the contradiction of the DVD reveals the hype surrounding its own interactivity. DVD technology seems to empower the consumer by making available a wider range of viewing choices than were previously available on other formats. These choices, however, have been carefully selected by those involved in making and marketing the product, and may include material that points to a preferred interpretation of the film. These limited “choices,” and the way they are strategically arranged for access, can serve to circumvent alternative interpretations.

The participation of the DVD viewer, however, does not begin and end with the interactivity that we have described. The terrain of media technology is littered with embarrassing failures: the eight-track tape player, quadraphonic sound, Beta-Max, and even earlier versions of videodisk technology. Therefore, the consumers of a new and emerging media technology have a financial and personal investment in the technology they purchase: no one wants to believe they have just bought the next eight-track. Not only does purchasing a DVD player involve a financial investment, but the rental

and purchase cost of DVDs can also be higher than that of the VHS format. DVD consumers have an economic incentive to access and view DVD-extra text (it justifies the additional expenditure) and to regard it as a valuable addition to their viewing experience. Indeed, if they felt that the extra text added nothing to their viewing experience, they might well conclude that they are not realizing the full value of their investment. We suggest, then, that DVD viewers are “invested viewers,” who have an incentive to allow their viewing experience to be directed—at least in part—by the DVD-extra text, and to believe that the interpretation that text offers is worth their time and money.

In summary, we contend that DVD-extra text operates as a complex rhetorical object. It collapses the functions of the secondary texts into the product of the primary text, and gives the signifying force of intertextual relationships an intratextual advantage. It can evoke the ideological residue of the “auteur,” and do so in a way that directs the viewers' experiences of the film. Finally, because it is a new, interactive, technology, the DVD may actually invest the viewers in the interpretation that it offers. Simply put, the DVD is not just a new way of repackaging a film for distribution; it is a synergistic package comprised of product and promotion. Perhaps the best evidence of this rhetorical use of extra text can be found in reviews of the *Fight Club* DVD.

When it was first released in theaters, *Fight Club* received mixed reviews and earned box office receipts that dropped precipitously after the first weekend. This drop might have been due to scathing reviews given the film by several high profile critics. For example, Kenneth Turan (1999) of the

Los Angeles Times wrote, "What's most troubling about this witless mishmash of whiny, infantile philosophizing and bone-crunching violence is the increasing realization that it actually thinks it's saying something of significance. That is a scary notion indeed" (p. 1). David Thomson (1999), writing for *The New York Times*, had such a low opinion of *Fight Club* that he spent most of his review discussing Fincher's other films. The extent of Thomson's contempt is brought home when, in the conclusion of his review, he gives away the film's ending. Finally, Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* (1999) joined his fellow critics in denouncing the film's violence: "*Fight Club* is the most frankly and cheerfully fascist big-star movie since *Death Wish*, a celebration of violence in which the heroes write themselves a license to drink, smoke, screw and beat one another up" (p. 1).

When *Fight Club* was released on DVD, however, some critics suggested that the extra text it included offered fresh and valuable insights about the film. Some of these critics used Ebert's review as a point of contrast. For example, in a review for *Daily Radar.com*, Tom Chick (2000) mentions how Norton, in the running commentary, explains the Buddhist principle "[t]hat is the arc of the movie" (p. 5). Accordingly, Chick suggests the film is not a celebration, but a rejection of fascism. As he notes, "The fact that this last step is lost on Ebert is a fine example of not only how lazy a critic he is but also how widely the movie was misinterpreted" (Chick, 2000, p. 5). In a review for the *WCBE Public Arts* web page, Mikel Ellis (2001) also cites Ebert's negative review, but argues that the *Fight Club* DVD provides an understanding of the film's violence:

Perhaps *Fight Club's* paradox is that it consciously provokes response and is still able to sidestep the pedantic overkill that usually accompanies mainstream filmmaking. Your appreciation of *Fight Club* becomes a Rorschach for your willingness to tolerate the existential stick in the eye. The DVD doesn't ameliorate the stick, but it does a brilliant job of showing you who is holding the other end. (p. 2)

The reviews by Ellis and Chick illustrate the point we have made about the rhetorical force of the DVD.

The popular press treated the DVD as a new and different product, and many publications devoted separate sections to DVD criticism. Critical reviews of the *Fight Club* DVD provide an interesting comparison and contrast to the reviews of the film. As a point of comparison, both the film and DVD critics operate under the ideology of the auteur, and make frequent references to Fincher and other people involved in the film. As a point of contrast, reviewers of the DVD suggest that the extra material it includes provided them with deeper and better insights than they otherwise would have had. For example, in *American Cinematographer*, Chris Pizzello (2000) offers this observation about the running commentaries on the *Fight Club* DVD: "[a]ll of the commentaries are worthy and interesting, but the writers deliver the most illuminating observations. *Fight Club* is a movie of provocative ideas, and who better to explain them than [Chuck] Palahniuk" (p. 23). Gary Crowds (2000), in his review for *Cineaste*, is even more direct in his assessment of the value of the *Fight Club* DVD. After noting that many of the film's "critics became morally exercised over the film's mano-a-mano violence," and were "apoplectic about what they perceived to be its 'fascist' politics" (p. 47), he goes on to argue

that those critics "seemed almost willfully oblivious to the fact that the filmmakers provided a comic or dramatic context for every fight" (p. 47). Crowds argues that the DVD version goes "a long way toward clarifying the filmmaker's intentions," and he expresses the hope that "at least one of the major critics who trashed the film on its theatrical release will screen the DVD, reconsider their critical stance, and . . . publicly and remorsefully confess the obtuseness of their initial pronouncement in a *Variety* cover story" (pp. 46 & 48).

That the critics claim to have divined the proper interpretation of *Fight Club* from the DVD illustrates that text's rhetorical function. This text challenges the film critic because it can be used to delegitimize unfavorable critiques—both by addressing those that have already been voiced and by attempting to preempt those that might be expressed. In order to meet this challenge, the critics of the DVD must not only critique the text of the film, but also analyze how their interpretation is addressed by the extra text. Our analysis of the *Fight Club* DVD illustrates how this type of critical approach might proceed. We do not offer this analysis as the definitive critical approach to this emerging technology, but as a starting point for future theorizing and criticism. Before proceeding with our analysis, we point out why we believe our interpretation is one that the producers and promoters of *Fight Club* might want to dismiss.

The Queer Take

Fight Club's violence was not the only aspect of the film to attract attention. Some critics found the film implicitly homoerotic. Andrew O'Hehir (1999)

of *Salon.com* writes: "You certainly can't say that Fincher or screenwriter Jim Uhls. . . hold back on the film's psychological subtext—*Fight Club* opens with our nameless narrator [Norton] tied to a chair with Tyler's, uh, gun in his mouth" (1999, p. 1).² In an interview in the *Village Voice*, director Fincher discounts the homoerotic subtext. After the interviewer, Amy Taubin (1999) mentions what she describes as the "strong homoerotic undercurrent," Fincher remarks, "I think it's beyond sexuality. The way the narrator looks up to Tyler and wants to please him and get all of his attention doesn't seem to me to have anything to do with sex" (p. 2). Although we do not offer Fincher's denial of homoerotic subtext in the film as evidence of collusion with the producers of *Fight Club*, his comments were economically judicious considering that *Fight Club* was marketed to a young male audience, the type of audience to which overt male homosexual representation seldom appeals (Nilles, 2001).

Although the representation of queer experience has increased dramatically over the last few years, this increase has not necessarily coincided with mainstream commercial success. As R. Ruby Rich (2000) notes, in spite of the crossover success of such films as *Boys Don't Cry* and *Gods and Monsters*, Queer cinema has remained, for the most part, a niche market targeted to a specific and limited audience. In addition, mainstream media depicting queer experience have been very careful to avoid sexual representation (Brookey, 1996; Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2001; Dow, 2001). In spite of the qualified successes of Queer cinema, homoerotic representation in general, and male homosexual representation in par-

to change perspective of male-male relationship in film

ticular, do not deliver big box office receipts.

In a more general sense, the mass media are driven by a meta-ideology that Sender (1999) calls the ethic of consumption. Success is measured in profits, and the greatest profits are earned by appealing to the largest possible demographic market, the so-called mainstream, which as a group has proven to be heterosexist and homophobic in its consuming habits. The exclusion of gay characters—and consequently gay culture, relationships, and sexuality—has been one simple and effective method used to appeal to this profitable market (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992; Russo, 1987).³ There are, however, compelling commercial reasons for including depictions of gays in the mass media. A segment of the gay community—affluent, urban, well educated, and predominantly white males—now comprise a very appealing and profitable niche market (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). In addition, inclusion of certain sanctioned types of gay characters—though not overt gay sexuality—has proven capable of attracting mainstream audiences and thus generating large profits.

Advertisers, filmmakers, television programmers, and others employ several rhetorical strategies to market media offerings that include gay themes and gay characters to mainstream audiences. One strategy that comforts mainstream audiences depicts gays in ways that support rather than threaten the heterosexist order. This taming is done by having gay characters serve as comedic foils to heterosexual leads, by portraying them as asexual and apolitical, and by depicting them as self-policing and impossibly perfect protectors of the heterosexist socio-sexual order (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2001; Dow,

2001; Fejes, 2000; Russo, 1987). A second strategy portrays gays in negative terms—as depressed and disturbed, as pathetic victims, or as dangerous predators—and thus reaffirms homophobic biases held by many mainstream audience members (Fejes and Petrich, 1993; Russo, 1987). A third strategy hides the presence of gays—and any gay sexuality—through the inclusion of subtextual cues that are easily read by gay audiences but are virtually invisible to unsympathetic and unknowledgeable mainstream audiences (Bronski, 1984; Russo, 1987; Sender, 1999).⁴ Such hiding rarely is complete, however, nor is it intended to be. According to Bronski (1984), though “blatant homosexuality does not have mass appeal...the exotic implications of hidden homosexuality have huge sales potential” (p. 186; see also Clover, 1992).

Sedgwick's (1985) concept of the “homosocial desire” continuum provides a useful way to theorize the practice of revealing and hiding homosexuality. She defines the homosocial as “social bonds between people of the same sex” (p. 1) and suggests that homosocial practices such as male bonding can be mapped onto the same continuum of desire as homosexuality, even when those practices are homophobic or aggressively heterosexual. She argues that cultural representation, however, often tries to rupture this continuum in order to establish the homosocial as distinct from, and dichotomous to, homosexuality. In this way, homosocial practices, especially those that can signify homoeroticism, are prevented from sliding onto the homosexual side of the continuum. A common form of cultural representation that achieves this purpose is the use of violence as a socially sanctioned means of relieving homoerotic tension that results in “re-

confirming heterosexual masculinity” (Nakayama, 1994, p. 171). In this way, homoeroticism in a homosocial context can be evoked and then beaten back, quite literally in the case of *Fight Club*, before it slides into homosexuality.

The homoeroticism that permeates *Fight Club* is complex and multilayered. At one level, the film includes numerous subtextual signifiers that appeal to, and are thus suggestive of, gay erotic sensibility. An example of such is the fuss that Jack and Tyler make about a Gucci ad, which depicts a male model, whose build and pose echo those found in gay pornography. The inclusion of such subtextual signifiers iconically ties *Fight Club* to other media expressions of contemporary American homoeroticism. At another level, homoeroticism is evident in the fighting from which the film derives its name. *Fight Club's* ritualistic fights foster male bonding and render acceptable intimate and prolonged physical contact between the contestants. In this way, when *Fight Club* signifies homoeroticism—as for example when the camera lingers over bare-chested, sweaty men with their muscles flexed and bodies pressed together—it does so in a way that passes it off as homosocial. The DVD, however, provides another line of defense against an interpretation that attempts to render this homoeroticism as homosexual experience.

Earlier we argued that DVD-extra text could be used to direct the viewer's interpretation of a film. In the next section, we argue that *Fight Club's* extra text is employed to discourage the viewer from interpreting the homosocial practices represented as signifying homosexual experience. More specifically, we contend that the extra text

is used to deny the presence of homoeroticism, to dismiss homoerotic elements, and to divert attention away from these elements. In our analysis of *Fight Club* and the DVD-extra text that accompanies it, we point out how these tactics of denial, dismissal, and diversion are used by the product's makers and marketers to maintain at least a veneer of heterosexuality, and thus uphold the socio-sexual status quo. This is yet another example of what Gross (1991) notes is the media's tendency to preserve the mainstream's false façade of heteronormity.⁵

The *Fight Club* DVD consists of two disks. The first contains the theatrical release, foreign language versions, and running commentaries by the director (David Fincher), the actors (Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, and Helena Bonham Carter), the author of the original book and the screenwriter (Chuck Palahniuk and Jim Uhls), and others involved in the production. The second disk contains scenes deleted from the theatrical release, promotional materials, storyboards, location scouting, and principle photography. All inclusive, the *Fight Club* DVD contains over eight hours of viewable material, not counting material repeated in different versions (Spanish subtitles, Dolby surround sound). As noted earlier, even the physical packaging of the DVD contains a pamphlet that could be counted as extra text.

Examples of homoeroticism can be found in many of elements of the DVD, including the pamphlet entitled “How to Start a Fight,” which features a picture of Brad Pitt on the cover, flexing his muscles in a way reminiscent of gay erotica/porn. The press kit featured on disk two takes the form of a mail-order catalogue, offering a “Hard Core Tank” shirt depicting porn stars, and avail-

able in a "Boys at the Backdoor" style. In one of the location shots included in disk two, a crewmember refers to a substance made to resemble liposuctioned fat as his "jizz." Clearly these are signifiers of the male sexual body, male-on-male sex, and the sexual "product" of the male. It could be argued that these extra-text elements reveal seepage of homosexual experience, but it is a seepage that is easily contained. If the authority of the auteurs is established by the extra text, and this authority in turn asserts an interpretative grammar that views the homoerotic elements of the film as homosocial and not homosexual, then these extra-text elements could also be viewed as homosocial.

Indeed, different materials included in the *Fight Club* DVD-extra text work to establish the authority of the auteurs and assert their opinions. For example, the extra text includes features about location scouting, principle photography, and special effects elements that reinforce, and are anchored in, the auteur ideology. In the location scouting shoots, Fincher is the center of attention as other crewmembers listen to him articulate his vision of the scenes. In the principal photography, the focus is on the actors as they interact with the crew, rehearse their blocking, and give their input as to how a scene should play. The special effects scenes include commentary by the crewmembers that often refer to Fincher as the final judge of how a scene should look, or discuss how an actor influenced decisions about an effect. For a specific special effect included in a sex scene, the final determination for a computer-generated image was that it had to make Helene Bonham Carter look pretty. Although these aspects of the DVD show how the film crew contrib-

uted to the film, they also clearly indicate that Fincher or the actors held the opinions that mattered most. If theirs are the opinions that matter, then their running commentaries are the most important elements of the extra text in that they provide an ongoing forum for these opinions. We should note that the DVD reviewers discussed previously also point out the importance of the director's, actors', and writers' running commentaries in influencing their response to, and interpretation of, *Fight Club*. Therefore, we focus our critical attention on these specific running commentaries in our analysis of the extra text.⁶

We will begin our analysis with a description of the film in order to illustrate how the narrative supports a homoerotic interpretation. We then isolate four segments where we believe homoeroticism is most pronounced, and where the erasure of homosexual experience as an assurance of mainstream acceptance is most necessary. We interpret the homoerotic elements in these segments, and then show how the running commentaries offered by the director, actors, and writers use denial, dismissal, and distraction to undermine the validity of a homosexual interpretation. In this way the ideology of the homosexual erasure dovetails with the ideology of the auteur.

Narrative

Fight Club opens with the image of a man's brain and closes with the image of a penis. In between, the film explores the psychic and sexual crisis of contemporary white, middle-class American masculinity—or one version of it—through the experiences and observations of "Jack," *Fight Club's* protagonist, who is played by Norton.

When we first meet Jack, he is a slave to materialism who attempts to find emotional connections in the support groups he compulsively cruises. It is at one of these, a group for men with testicular cancer, that Jack meets Marla Singer, the film's main female character. When Jack challenges Marla's right to be there, she states that she has a greater right to attend the group than does Jack (the implied argument: like many of the men attending, she has no testicles, while Jack's are intact and cancer free). This conflict illustrates that Jack's relationship with Marla, initially, is hardly romantic. In fact, he goes so far as to blame her for his problems.

Jack is much more interested, however, in a man that he meets on one of the countless business flights he takes, Tyler Durden, a charismatic soap salesman whose passion for life is a sharp contrast to Jack's general ennui. The two strike up a conversation, during which Tyler makes seductive reference to pursuing the kind of active, exciting, subversive life of which Jack has only dreamed. After the flight, Jack arrives at his condo to find it has been blown-up in a mysterious explosion. Jack then contacts Tyler and the two men agree to meet at a bar. After a night of drinking, Jack mentions the need to find himself a hotel. Jack agrees to go home with Tyler, but before they leave Tyler requests an unusual favor: "Hit me as hard as you can." They begin a sparring match during which they bond.

So much so, in fact, that the two men set up house in a manner Jack describes as "Ozzie-and-Harriet." During one scene that highlights their domestic familiarity, Tyler bathes while he and Jack discuss whom they would most like to fight. Tyler mentions he

would fight his dad, who he says was indifferent. Jack claims he does not know his dad because "he left when I about six years old." Tyler observes, "We're a generation of men raised by women. I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer we need." This sense of abandonment by and anger toward male-father figures, and their suspicion directed toward maternal substitutes, are important shaping influences in the relationship of Tyler and Jack and the unfolding of the film's plot.

The routine of their domestic arrangement is punctuated by periodic fights in the bar's parking lot, which attract a growing crowd of men who function first as voyeurs and then as enthusiastic participants in the ritualistic pugilism. Tyler and Jack find themselves at the center of a growing phenomenon. The fights are more than mere physical recreation: they are a means for men to explore themselves and their masculinity while connecting with other men. As the fights absorb more of Jack's time and energy, he no longer regularly attends support groups. Instead, he and Tyler fashion a support group of their own in the bar's basement, where the fighting has now moved. The club's members form a clandestine bond that extends beyond the confines of the club. They exchange secret, knowing glances at work, while dining, and in other public places. Through what they come to call Fight Club, they are able to distinguish themselves in ways denied them by the demeaning and emasculating jobs of the contemporary service economy.

Not surprisingly, Jack's absence from the support groups is noticed by Marla, who calls and asks where he has been. In a desperate bid for attention, she claims she has swallowed a whole bottle

of tranquilizers. Jack sets down the receiver and walks away as the film fades to a sex scene that morphs several images of Marla. The next morning, as Jack eats breakfast he hears someone enter the room, and imagining that he is speaking to Tyler, he says, "You won't believe this dream I had last night." To his surprise, Marla enters. Marla then begins an ongoing sexual relationship with Tyler, who it seems had picked up the receiver Jack had dropped and had come to her rescue. Jack is annoyed and threatened by Marla's presence because she seems to compete with Jack for Tyler's attention. In other words, Jack sees Marla as a threat to his relationship with Tyler.

Marla, however, is not Jack's only threat. Tyler begins a new form of Fight Club called Project Mayhem, in which members engage in petty acts of vandalism. Over time, the number and severity of these acts increase as does the number of club members. Jack and Tyler's home becomes filled with young men who make claims upon Tyler's attention and strain his relationship with Jack. In one scene, Jack takes out his growing frustration upon a club member, whom Tyler had affectionately embraced, by brutally pummeling him during a fight. Jack finally confronts Tyler, and Tyler states that Jack does not understand the full implications of their relationship.

At this point in the film, Tyler disappears. Jack searches for him in the Fight Club underground that has emerged in major cities throughout the United States. He always arrives in Tyler's wake, and to his puzzlement is recognized and referred to as "Mr. Durden." Seeking to address newly aroused suspicions, Jack calls Marla to ask if they have had sex. Marla replies, "You fuck me, then snub me. You love

me, and then hate me. You show me your sensitive side, and then you turn into a total asshole. Is that a pretty accurate description of our relationship, Tyler?" Jack asks, "What did you call me? Say my name." Marla replies, "Tyler Durden."

Jack now realizes that he and Tyler are the same person and that he is the author of Project Mayhem's increasingly violent agenda. To protect Marla, who has been targeted as a threat to the project, Jack sends her away on a bus. In an attempt to stop the project's next act of terrorism, Jack tries to disconnect one of the bombs Project Mayhem has set to explode in an office-building parking garage. Tyler stops him and the two men engage in a fight that is filmed by security cameras, which capture images of Jack throwing himself around the garage. This fight is continued from the garage to an office at the top of the building, and the film returns to the opening scene: Tyler holding a gun in Jack's mouth. From his vantage point, Jack looks down to see Fight Club members carry Marla off a bus. Jack reasons that he can resolve the situation: if Tyler is not real but the gun is, then the gun is not in Tyler's hand but in his own. Jack puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. It is Tyler, however, who dies. When the Fight Club arrives with Marla, Jack takes Marla's hand and says, "You met me at a very strange time in my life."

This narrative depicts a homosocial relationship in a homoerotic manner that easily could be interpreted as representing homosexual experience. We have a man undergoing a masculinity crisis attributed to an unresolved relationship with his father. He responds to this crisis by forming a relationship with another man that proves to be

both narcissistic and self-destructive. Once the relationship is dissolved (literally destroyed) the man can then pursue a relationship with a woman. In fact, the narrative seems to have taken a page from Freud (1949) in its depiction of the conflict and resolution of a proper sexual object choice. The narrative includes violence as a means of simultaneously relieving the homoerotic tension in a way deemed acceptable to mainstream sensibilities (Nakayama, 1994). We believe that the film's homoeroticism is made even more acceptable by its erasure in the extra text. Now that the larger narrative of the film has been considered, we turn our attention to specific segments in which we feel the homoerotic elements of the film are the most pronounced. We will provide a close analysis of these segments and their treatment in the running commentaries.

Segment One

After discovering his condo has been destroyed, Jack contacts Tyler and the two agree to meet at a bar. Over beer Tyler tells Jack that he is lucky, that things could be worse: "A woman could cut off your penis while you're sleeping and toss it out the window of a speeding car." That is, Tyler suggests, Jack could have lost his manhood—literally as well as symbolically. Though seemingly out-of-place, Tyler's sexual non sequitur makes sense within the larger context of the film's narrative, which compares the enervating effect of material possessions with emasculation. Tyler's comment, however, is more than a metaphoric indictment of contemporary consumerism, as becomes clear as the scene unfolds. Outside the bar, the now homeless Jack mentions the need to find himself a hotel. Tyler

responds, "Just ask." Jack: "What are you talking about?" Tyler: "After three pitchers of beer, you still can't ask... Cut the foreplay and just ask." Jack then asks if he can come home with Tyler, and Tyler agrees. The scene plays out as a coy, homoerotic flirtation. After a night of drinking, one man wants to ask if he can go home with another, but he cannot bring himself to raise the question directly. Perhaps Jack is reluctant because he senses the sexual significance of two men going home together after last call. Tyler too seems to understand the sexual significance of Jack's unstated request when he tells Jack to "cut the foreplay." Before they leave Tyler asks Jack to "hit me as hard as you can."

At this point, the film makes one of its many scenic shifts that disrupt the chronological progression of the narrative. The camera focuses upon a slide of a penis, while in a voice-over Jack says, "Let me tell you something about Tyler Durden." Jack informs the audience that, in addition to selling soap, Tyler has several other low-paying, service-oriented jobs. We are told that Tyler works as a projectionist who splices single frames of pornographic images (e.g., "A nice, big cock") into family films. Jack also tells us that Tyler is also a banquet waiter who functions as a food-industry guerilla terrorist. Indeed, in another act of penile subversion we see Tyler insert his own where its presence is neither expected nor welcome: he is shown peeing into a soup tureen. Tyler's sexual subversion, however, is also sexual aggression. His phallic insertions position him as the film's dominant—and dominating—sexual force, as well as the object of Jack's sexual desire. After this digression, the film returns to the bar's parking lot where tentatively at first, and

then with great enthusiasm, Jack and Tyler slug it out. Afterwards, they share a beer as Tyler smokes in a way suggestive of post-coital relaxation. Jack casually proposes, "We should do this again sometime."

In this segment the film begins to conflate homoeroticism with sadomasochism, a point addressed by Fincher in his commentary. Although Fincher begins his comments immediately following Tyler's severed penis comparison, his remarks are not about this sexual reference. Instead, he talks about the difficulty in conceptualizing this "thesis" scene, and his final decision to shoot it with two cameras. It is certainly proper for a director to discuss camera work, but given that the movie is about the crisis of contemporary masculinity, the dryly technical focus of his comments seem a bit odd directly following a reference to castration. These comments, however, can be understood as a means of distracting the viewer from the sexual implications of the reference.

This distraction is quickly followed by a denial when Fincher describes the fight between Jack and Tyler. He avers that the scene may have "undercurrents of sadomasochism," but claims that Jack and Tyler's interactions come from an "innocent place," implying that the scene is not about sex per se. The use of the word "innocent" is also important because sex serves as a signifier for the loss of innocence; therefore, innocence signifies the absence of sex. Immediately after Fincher refers to the scene as innocent, the slide of the "nice big dick" appears on the screen. Fincher explains that Tyler's phallic insertions were inspired by a man he once knew who clipped scenes from films Fincher claims were not really "pornographic," and although the clips

that Fincher describes are sexually suggestive (female breasts, a woman's panties), he describes the man's actions as "innocent." Through this comparison, Fincher's comments invite the viewer to see that Tyler's insertions are equally "innocent" and void of any serious sexual import.

In another running commentary track with Fincher and the actors, the "innocence" of these scenes is supplemented by joking banter between Fincher and Pitt. During the bar scene, Fincher compliments Pitt on the reference to "Viagra," and Pitt compliments Fincher on the reference to "Olestra," which Fincher then describes as a reference to "anal leakage." The obvious and unseemly connection between a sexual stimulate and the act of sodomy is humorously dismissed, as is the sexual subtext of the scene after Jack and Tyler's fight. In the running commentary with Palahniuk and Uhls, Palahniuk—author of the book on which the film is based—comments that he thought the scene was "weird" because it was "shorthand" for a love relationship. Screenwriter Uhls, however, seems to chuckle knowingly at Palahniuk's confusion. Fincher jokingly remarks that he loves the "post-coital smoking scene," and Pitt says that he finds it "touching." The two seem to suggest that the scene operates as a joke, and the homoerotic subtext should not be taken seriously. Perhaps that is why Uhls chuckles at Palahniuk's confusion; because he actually worked with Fincher, Uhls understands the joke. Earlier comments by Norton suggest that the viewer will get the joke, too. He claims that those who watch the film and the DVD are probably fans, or as he puts it, "anyone listening in here is cool." In other words, Norton positions the viewer in

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the role of an accomplice who is privy to Fincher and Pitt's jokes and understands that what might appear to be overtly homosexual is really only an expression of "innocence." As for the slide of the "nice big dick," Norton jokingly observes that Fincher appears in all of his movies. This joking serves to parody critical practices of homoerotic interpretation, thereby dismissing such practices as comical.

Segment Two

As more men flock to the fights, they move from the bar's parking lot to its basement. It is into this basement that Tyler descends and lays out the rules of what comes to be called "Fight Club." As Tyler promulgates the rules, men remove their belts, shoes, and shirts. Soon, two shirtless men fight as others cheer. Jack comments in voice over: "This kid from work, Ricky, he couldn't remember if he orders pens with blue ink or black. But Ricky was a god for ten minutes when he trounced the maitre d' at a local food court." In close-up, Jack observes the fight with a hint of lust on his face. The fight concludes with the loser lying on the floor in a passive sexual position, a look of ecstasy on his face. It would seem that these fights carry a sexual tension that makes them more than mere brawls; they signify a relationship that dares not speak its name: "The first rule of Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club."

Jack later encounters "Ricky" while at work and the maitre d'—whose face is bruised and bandaged—at the food court. They exchange knowing glances that resemble the type of homoerotic cruising gay activist Harry Hay once described as "the eye lock" (Timmons, 1990). Jack describes the men's connec-

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sunglasses in the food court scene. Bonham Carter is a bit more engaged. Her comments, however, ignore the film's sexual elements and focus instead upon the violence and how its depiction offered her insight into why men fight: it gives them the sensation of being alive. Norton suggests the film is the contemporary equivalent of *The Graduate*, because it deals with "youthful dislocation" and how it feels to be out-of-sync with society's accepted values. Palahniuk comes closest to addressing the sexual aspects of these scenes. He does so indirectly, however, in suggesting that the use of alcohol in some scenes was important because, just as some people have to consume alcohol to have sex, it "seemed natural that people would have to have alcohol to fight for the first time." With this possible exception, these running commentaries illustrate how the extra text distracts the viewer from the presence of homoerotic elements. Within this segment a man's "ass" is mentioned and two men's naked bodies are visually represented with a reference to masturbation. However, Norton's statement that *Fight Club* is an ambiguous film along the lines of *The Graduate* directs viewer attention away from the film's homoerotic elements by comparing it to a film known for its heterosexual elements.

Segment Three

As the personal violence of *Fight Club* evolves into the public violence of Project Mayhem, Tyler inducts new recruits and turns the house into a crowded barracks. The presence of so many men packed into the house heightens the club's homoerotic tension. This tension is visually expressed in a scene in which Jack gazes upon a

shirtless young recruit while he shaves; the recruit's body is framed in the doorway of the bathroom, and Tyler stands by the doorway as though he were presenting the young man for Jack's erotic enjoyment. An implication of this heightened homoeroticism is depicted later when Tyler affectionately embraces a young, blond recruit after a successful Project Mayhem adventure. Jack gazes enviously upon the recruit and expresses his sense of rejection as Tyler's attention turns to another. Later in the *Fight Club* basement, Jack takes on the recruit, knocks him to the floor, and pummels his face into a bloody pulp. When Tyler asks, "Why did you go psycho, boy?" Jack replies, "I wanted to destroy something beautiful." More to the point, Jack wanted to destroy a masculine object of beauty that was occupying Tyler's attention.

This heightened homoerotic tension has caused a rift in Jack and Tyler's relationship. While driving, Tyler raises this issue: "Is something on your mind, dear?" Jack wonders why he was not told about Project Mayhem, especially given that he and Tyler started *Fight Club* together. Tyler replies that Project Mayhem goes beyond the two of them, and that Jack should forget what he thinks he knows "about life, about friendship, and especially about you and me." Project Mayhem thus signals the beginning of the end of Jack and Tyler's relationship.

In commenting on this segment, Fincher notes he is often asked in interviews about the homoerotic elements of *Fight Club*. He suggests that if the story line of the film is followed, it is clear that *Fight Club* is more of a "self-love story" than a homosexual love story. Apart from its direct denial of homosexual love, Fincher's distinction ignores how homosexuality has fre-

quently been associated with narcissism. In the running commentary with the actors, Fincher also disparages critic Amy Taubin, who raised the issue of homoeroticism in an interview she conducted. Fincher mentions that Taubin may have accused him of violating the "cardinal rule" against having a character played by two different actors. The actors laugh at the absurdity of the rule, and offer examples of films that defy its application. The fact that Fincher's comments deny the issue of homosexuality in one running commentary, and then dismiss a critic that has raised the issue in another, may be coincidental. Nevertheless, the two running commentaries suggest to the viewer that *Fight Club* is not to be interpreted as representing homosexual experience.

It is also interesting to note how Jack's jealousy is treated. Norton ignores the emotion entirely and focuses instead upon the technical aspects of the scene: how the shot of his jealous gaze was "undercranked" (filmed at 40 frames, according to Fincher). Pitt, on the other hand, suggests that the scene depicts a "brotherly" jealousy, motivated by fraternal rather than sexual interests. Screenwriter Uhls suggests that Jack's jealousy can be understood from a "hetero point of view," as a person resenting their best friend paying attention to another. He then goes on to observe that the scene "obviously has homosexual connotations." Palahniuk, however, laughs at this suggestion. The extra text comments make it clear that, from the perspective of those involved in making the film, a heteronormative reading of the scene has greater legitimacy than does a homoerotic one. In turns, Norton's comments distract the viewer from the homoeroticism, Pitt's and Uhls' comments

deny it, and Palahniuk's comments dismiss it.

Segment Four

After Jack discovers that Tyler is a projection of his own psyche, he no longer sees Marla as a threat but rather as threatened. Before he can pursue a relationship with Marla, however, Jack must first finish off Tyler. Jack confronts Tyler in the parking garage of one of the buildings targeted to be blown-up as part of Project Mayhem. The two struggle, Tyler subdues Jack, and the film returns to the same scene with which it began: Tyler holding a gun in Jack's mouth. When Jack wonders why he cannot rid himself of Tyler, Tyler claims he was created from Jack by Jack to satisfy Jack's unmet needs. Jack then realizes what he must do: he puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. With smoke coming out of his mouth, Tyler turns and falls to the ground with the back of his head blown out. In this way, Jack both consummates and ends his relationship with Tyler, and thus rids himself of his homoerotic projection. As noted earlier, other critics have also recognized the homoerotic significance of this scene. We should add, however, that the discovery that Tyler is Jack's narcissistic projection also serves to code their relationship as homosexual.

Now that Jack has killed off Tyler, he turns to Marla. *Fight Club* members then arrive with Marla in custody (Tyler had instructed them to "take care of her" because she "knows too much"). Jack directs them to leave him and Marla alone. Marla asks Jack what "sick game" he is playing, but stops mid-sentence when she sees his face. He informs her he shot himself, but that he is now okay. He adds that she can trust

him that "everything is going to be fine." At that very moment, in a strange mockery of clichéd sexual fireworks, the buildings targeted by Project Mayhem implode in the distance as Jack takes Marla's hand and says, "You met me at a very strange time in my life." Indeed, but now that he is with Marla, it seems that Jack's masculinity crisis may finally have a heterosexual resolution. Or, maybe not: the film concludes with the image of a penis (the same one inserted in a previous scene) flashing briefly on the screen. The visual reappearance of an object of homoerotic desire seems to raise the question: "The End?"

Norton and Fincher's comments provide perhaps the best example of dismissal. He claims Jack resists the escalation of *Fight Club's* violence only when Marla's safety is overtly threatened, and argues that this threat is the film's pivotal point because it precipitates Jack's break from his alter ego (Tyler). Norton also observes that, though Jack was looking to Tyler for "some kind of intimacy," in the end Jack transfers his "desire for connection to Marla, where it should have been in the first place, maybe." Allowing for the equivocal "maybe," Norton provides the definitive heteronormative reading to this segment, and to the film's conclusion. This reading, however, infers that Jack's desire for "intimacy" with Tyler was homosexual and thus inappropriate; otherwise it makes little sense to suggest that Jack's "desire for connection" should have been directed to Marla "in the first place." This inference, however, is easily dismissed when Fincher jokes as the film flickers to a close: "Did you know there is a six-frame splice of a penis at the end?" Norton: "You're kidding." At a point when homosexuality is almost

acknowledged, albeit inferentially, it is ultimately laughed off and dismissed.

Conclusion

We have argued that *Fight Club's* narrative, coupled with the interpretation of it offered in the running commentaries, protects the film's commercial appeal through dual forms of homosexual erasure. The narrative, while depicting a relationship that can easily be interpreted as homosexual, incorporates violence and a heteronormative ending to render the homoeroticism merely homosocial. The running commentaries provide a second line of defense, with the film's auteurs providing an interpretation that either denies that the homoeroticism represents homosexuality, or dismisses the possibility of homosexuality, or distracts the viewer from the issue. In this way, the *Fight Club* DVD constructs a digital closet that provides pleasures associated with such eroticism while at the same time assuaging any guilt that might potentially accompany such pleasure on the part of homophobic and/or heterosexist consumers. Although *Fight Club* was not a blockbuster by any definition, it has attracted a large and loyal—and predominantly young male—cult following inspiring websites, conferences, and even actual fight clubs where young men meet and beat one another (Nilles, 2001). While this cult following among young, presumably heterosexual males may merely be an effect of the erasure included in the film's narrative, the DVD-extra text adds an additional layer of plausible deniability for those who need it. Norton may be correct when he quotes Fincher; perhaps *Fight Club* was designed to "piss off a healthy number of people";

but if the DVD is any indication, *Fight Club* does not achieve this by forcibly challenging the male heterosexual viewer's sexual identity.

We have also argued that the DVD, with its interactive mix of media product and promotion, not only offers consumers a new way to view films, but also presents critics with new challenges in analyzing and critiquing them. In particular, we have pointed out through our analysis of the *Fight Club* DVD how the extra text can be employed to discourage and discount some interpretations while encouraging others. In the case of the *Fight Club* DVD, the running commentaries included in the extra text serve to delegitimize a homoerotic interpretation of the film. We suggest that the effectiveness of this privileging of the director's, actors', and writers' commentary—what we have referred to as a return to the ideology of the auteur—is made possible by the blurring of the traditional distinction between primary and secondary texts. As an integral part of the DVD, and not something apart from it, these opinions are now included in the viewing experience of many consumers as well as critics. This provides the DVD with an intratextual advantage not enjoyed by other means of packaging and distributing films. Furthermore, we suggest that this new technology may have created an invested consumer who, by buying the DVD, is also predisposed to buy the interpretation that the DVD offers.

The DVD is an important media product that is gaining in popularity, and likely is to claim a prominent place in the digital-media marketplace. Given the DVD's potential as a media product, it deserves theoretical consideration, and this is what we have attempted to provide. The concepts that

we have included in our analysis do not exhaust the critical potential of DVD analysis, but we hope that we have established some groundwork from which additional theorizing might proceed. DVD-extra text is very fertile terrain. Although we believe it is used to evoke the auteur in the case of *Fight Club*, we can see other ways that extra text can be used to promote a film. In the case of *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, the DVD-extra text includes several humorous devices that draw on the persona of Austin Powers, but do not actually introduce Mike Myers as an auteur. In the case of a classical film, the cast and crew may no longer be around to offer interviews and running commentaries to accompany the DVD release. For example, the DVD for *All About Eve* is very thin on extra text, including only promotional photos of the cast in character, and a promotional trailer. It may well be that older films may carry enough of a reputation that people will purchase the DVD without the addition of extra text as an enticement. Simply put, different films, and different genres of film, require different promotional strategies; extra text can be employed in ways that accommodate these differences. Additional critical work is needed to chronicle these various accommodations.

We believe that the concept of intratextuality, on the other hand, may find applications outside the DVD. Although the Internet has usually been regarded as the embodiment of intertextuality, as media become more web-based, media conglomerates have a vested interest in reining in the web surfer. Robert McChesney (1999) has argued that the media have become more centralized and more concerned about cross-promotion and product re-

packaging, and that these practices are designed to keep the consumer focused on product options offered by a single corporate interest. If the intratextuality of the DVD signifies intertextual relations with predetermined restraints and boundaries, then these same restraints can be put in place as more media access is introduced on the Internet. In other words, web pages for a media conglomerate may offer links that only connect to other products and companies related to the conglomerate. The Fox Network web page may some day allow viewers to watch reruns of *Ally McBeal*, and also to buy a CD of music from the show, but it will not link them to another network. The intratextual advantages of convenience and proximity enjoyed on the DVD can also be enjoyed on the web; and similar to the DVD, intertextuality on the web may become intratextuality that is carefully crafted to serve corporate interests.

The invested viewer, however, may be a concept with a short shelf life for the DVD. After all, as we have argued, the viewer is invested because DVD technology is so new; it will not be as new next year. As the DVD player becomes more common, those purchasing the technology will no longer be ahead of the curve. These consumers will be purchasing a tested technology, and may be less likely to worry about the value of their purchase. Will these consumers believe the extra text to be an important part of their investment? That may depend on how the early consumers set the trend for the technology's use. If the DVD reviews

we noted earlier are any indication, DVD-extra text is considered a highly desirable attribute of this new technology. Perhaps the trend is already set and future consumers of DVDs will be as interested in the extra text as contemporary consumers, and will come to expect it. Furthermore, although the viewer's investment in the DVD may dissipate, the concept of the invested viewer may be useful in explaining how other emerging media technologies are received. In other words, those pioneers who first purchase a technology may be motivated to believe the technology has value, even when that value primarily serves corporate interests.

Finally, we wonder about the politics of representation in light of our analysis of the *Fight Club* DVD. Queer experience is not the only type of experience that has been erased in mainstream media. In fact, an important critical project in the field of media studies has advocated readings that challenge the representation, or lack thereof, of numerous marginalized groups. The *Fight Club* DVD illustrates how digital technology can be used to delegitimize resistant and politically activated readings. We do not believe that digital technology can be used to eradicate politically activated readings, but it does present new challenges to media critics who believe that the practices of media representation are often classist, racist, sexist, and homophobic. Perhaps the important questions are not about the existence of a digital closet, but how many and what kinds of people can it hold?

Notes

¹Our use of the term "viewer" is informed by John Fiske's (1987) definition. He claims the term is specifically applicable to television, and that it suggests an active agent who contributes meaning to the media text. Although we are dealing with a film text, DVDs are mainly consumed at home via television sets. We also feel that it is important to imagine the viewer of the DVD as active

though the extra text appears to be designed to constrain the active viewer. *XK*

²The theatrical release only referred to this character as "the narrator." In the DVD, however, the character is referred to as "Jack."

³Borrowing from Gerbner and Gross (1976), Kielwasser and Wolf (1992) argue that the invisibility engendered by such absence with respect to gays (and gay youth in particular) results in a form of symbolic annihilation.

⁴From a queer perspective, this strategy poses two problems: first, it helps render gays invisible to much of the mainstream, contributing to their symbolic annihilation; and second, it privileges the gay experience of affluent, urban, white gays and lesbians to the exclusion of other gays and their experiences (Gluckman & Reed, 1993).

⁵Our use of the term "homoeroticism" refers to erotic experience between two people of the same biological sex. We do not suggest that the characters in *Fight Club* actually participate in sexual acts, a distinction clarified by Bataille, who views eroticism as a uniquely human attribute. Bataille (1989) argues: "Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction" (p. 11). Moreover, he states that pain, whether seen or experienced, is a primary means of undertaking this quest because it mediates between life and death. The fact that the homoeroticism in *Fight Club* is often framed by physical pain illustrates Bataille's point.

⁶A fourth running commentary includes the opinions of the director of photography, costume designer, and special effects artists. As expected, these technicians talk mostly about aspects of their craft as represented in scenes, but seldom comment on the narrative or visual elements as these relate to homoeroticism. We could have argued that their comments distract from the homoeroticism, because they do. However, we felt that such an argument would be too easy and a little disingenuous. Furthermore, the residue of the auteur does not seem to encompass these individuals, as evidenced in the reviews of the DVD, and the materials included on the DVD. In fact, these individuals in their commentaries often refer and defer to Fincher and the actors. Therefore, we have decided not to include this running commentary in our analysis.

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Handwritten note:
 / on-line agreement, most not call it a club, it's
 show' go it v present del. want, if want to see it
 must have the pot