

DAVID AND ME:
IN ORDER TO FORM A MORE POSTMODERN FANDOM

by

DAVID LEE GREENWAY JR.

(Under the Direction of Nate Kohn)

ABSTRACT

This project is an autoethnographic examination of a young filmmaker's relationship to the films of David Fincher. Informed by the fandom work of Storey and Jenkins, and examined through the lens of postmodernism, this project is an individual journey through a singular fan culture. This paper is a companion piece to the author's video thesis.

INDEX WORDS: Postmodernism, Fandom, Fan culture,
Autoethnography, David Fincher, Film studies

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, and to the years of love and attention they've given me so that I might achieve success. This one's for you, Mom and Dad.

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This project would have been a dismal failure if not for the assistance and support of some very special people:

- To my committee, who, to a one, said to me, “Wow. That’s interesting. Risky. But interesting.”
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“I don’t want to tell you how to do your job, but somebody has to.”
- attributed to David Fincher, from the Internet Movie Database

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

I am writing this document as a companion piece to my thesis, a documentary video entitled *David and Me: In order to form a more postmodern fandom*. This paper is intended to serve as a supplement – to expand upon and enhance another text; it is primarily a verbal version of a video-document. It contains some elements of the scholarly process that are not easily included in an instantaneous medium such as video, as well as some concept of the process of creation which was followed for the creation of the video. In this role, the document now before you is both a companion piece and a “behind-the-scenes,” an examination of my autoethnographic method and my own decisions in the filmmaking process. Without this text, the video document would be incomplete; without the video, this document would certainly be of little use.

This document will cover topics of postmodernism, and from where I attained my own definition of what the term “postmodernism” means. It will contain a more in-depth literature review on the topics of fan culture and of David Fincher’s cinema than is contained in the video project. This document will address some topics that are not easily discussed in the conversational manner of documentary filmmaking, such as the aforementioned literature reviews, and will address some issues that were impossible to include in the video, due to time concerns or other issues unique to filmmaking. By

including a “process paper,” I hope to shed some light on the manner in which this two-part thesis has come together, without forcing the video into such a self-referential tangent as to render it unintelligible. I am further including a transcript of the actual video. In addition to merely adding to the page count, I hope this transcript will assist the reader in understanding the video portion of the project, and encourage deeper reading of the video text – a comparison of the “written” transcript and the “viewed” video may shed some light on the nature of my postmodernism. I hope it will also help viewers break through my sometimes-incomprehensible accent, and occasional stammer.

The main thrust of my thesis is fandom, and its relationship to postmodernism and to my appreciation of the films of Hollywood director David Fincher. More precisely, this project has been an autoethnographic journey for me, as I sought to initially develop a more articulate view of my definition of “postmodern,” then struggled through concepts of “fandom,” and then applied those concepts to my own interaction with a body of work. The questions I bore in mind through this process have been both on the surface level of questioning *my* fandom and *my* postmodernism and on the more core level of questioning the very definition of *fandom* and *postmodernism*. Questions such as:

1. What is your own conceptualization of what it means to be postmodern, and what does that mean for your scholarly work? For your everyday life?
2. What is your understanding of fandom? Is it merely the idea of enjoying a text? Is it a different level of consumption? Can there be “fandom” outside the traditional fan culture?

3. Taking your definition of “postmodernism” and your definition of “fandom,” and attempting to find the junction of these two ideas, what do you come out with?
4. Taking then this junction of postmodernism and fandom and looking at your own interaction with the Fincher films, is there a connection? Rather, is your “fandom” (if it is indeed fandom) of the Fincher movies more postmodern than traditional fan culture definitions? If so, why? If not, why not? And why should that matter in the first place?
5. Finally, how do you go about articulating these concepts?

This project has its genesis in a late-night bout with insomnia. In mid-2002, I was adrift in my scholastic endeavors, searching for some idea to which I could hang on in order to produce a document for the completion of my degree. I had read reams of paper and had failed to find so much as a single text in which I was interested enough to do any form of critical work thereon. In my sleeplessness, I perused my DVD collection, and selected *Fight Club*. At that moment in the film when Jack, the narrator, breaks the fourth wall and begins addressing the audience directly, I thought to myself, “How very postmodern of him.” Thus began a thought process that has raged unabated in my head since that night.

Initially thinking that a postmodern critique of the film *Fight Club* would suit my purposes, I proceeded to delve into sources of information (primarily, the Internet Movie Database) about the film, and its production team. On a whim, I rented the director’s other films, and viewed them all in one long session. Auteurism was a concept with

which I'd been familiar for some time, and upon viewing all five of Fincher's film back-to-back in that fashion, I realized that his style of moviemaking was so distinct as to rate him, potentially, as an auteur. Rather than attempting to do a postmodern critique merely of *Fight Club*, then, the idea of critiquing Fincher's very style from a postmodern perspective became my new focus.

It was not, however, until I found myself becoming more and more interested in reinserting myself into the world of amateur filmmaking that the idea of performing an autoethnographic look at myself and at, rather than the films themselves, at my own interaction with the films. Storyboarding a movie I was intending to work with in the spring of 2003 (*The Trouble With Zombies*), I realized that a shot I was planning had a very similar feel to the go-anywhere digital long-takes so apparent in Fincher's movies. Was I unintentionally aping David Fincher's style? Had the repeated viewings of his movies affected me so strongly as to insert their distinct style into my own work? And if they had, why should I problematize that relationship? As a postmodernist, is not pastiche one of my basic premises of artistic development? As a postmodernist, is it not equally valid for me to attempt to adopt Fincher's style as to struggle with cinematic conventions to develop a style of my own? It was during the struggle over this last question that the idea of fan culture came to mind – here was a textual consumer (namely: me) who was taking an extant text and using some element of it for his own artistic work. I was writing fan-fiction, not with the characters, settings, and places of David Fincher's work, but with his very nouns, verbs, and adjectives (or their cinematic equivalents).

It is at the completion of this journey of self-appraisal and questioning that this project finds its origin and its (temporary) termination.

CHAPTER 2.

POSTMODERNISM

It behooves me at this point to take a momentary break from the discussion of fandom and David Fincher and spend some space discussing my conceptualization of the meaning of “postmodernism.” While postmodernism, with its rejection of absolutes, is a term that defies attempts to fix it within a discursive space and define it, I think it is fruitful for an artist who claims to be working within postmodernism to make an attempt to explain his or her concept of what it means to be postmodern. Of course, with a term as ephemeral and as personal as postmodernism, attempts to define it are generally dismal failures; the effort should at least be made to construct for the reader some concept which is at least understandable, if not entirely understood.

My concept of what it means to be postmodern comes primarily from three sources, three of the pioneers in the study of postmodern society and postmodern identity. Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Jameson have all written on the subject, and it is in their writings that I find the threads of thought that I choose to bind together for my own definition of “postmodernism.”

Overarching the other concepts of postmodernism, Lyotard brings to the table the idea of the metanarrative. In his 1979 book, *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard discusses the manner in which we, as human beings and social animals, perform certain roles in society. These roles, or stories, or *narratives* are the building blocks of a social structure, and the interactions between these individual stories are what make up a

society. Lyotard identifies in his work certain ideas, certain grand-narratives that set the rules, or organize these stories. The grand-, or metanarratives, are the covertly human constructions that are primarily taken as given by humans in the performance of their daily lives. Concepts such as religion, school, Marxism, or America can all be seen as metanarratives in society. For an example of my own crafting, the metanarrative of religion is one that tells the religious person how to behave (Do unto others...), and what to believe (Do well in this life, be rewarded in the next.). The metanarrative is a human construction – it is something that constrains our daily performances and governs the manner in which we come to realize our roles as humans.

To Lyotard, postmodernism is marked by the exposure of these metanarratives by members of the society. Television shows which reverse the dialectic of good and bad by presenting a crime story from the criminal's point-of-view, movies that distort normal perceptions of time by presenting the story back-to-front (i.e., *Memento*), these are only two examples of ways in which the postmodern seeks to show that things do not necessarily have to follow the guidelines set up by these overarching metanarratives. Lyotard argues that in the condition of postmodernism, the attempt to set values on the narratives of life and evaluate them, one over the other, is a laughable enterprise, and that creators of postmodern texts seek to solicit this laughter through the exposure of the rules structure and breaking it. (Lyotard)

Following Lyotard, the second contributor to my overall concept of postmodernism is Jean Baudrillard. From *Simulations*, Baudrillard brings to my *bricolage* of ideas one of simulation. To Baudrillard, the postmodern world is marked by an absence of original entities. Each creation of the postmodern world is a copy without an original – a

simulation, or simulacra. Cinema is a wonderful example of this, as a movie is a copy of an event (the narrative of the film) that never happened in any time or place. Footage in a film is assembled into a sequence of images that are independent of the spaces and times in which they are filmed. Biltmore Plantation in North Carolina passes for Mason Verger's farm in *Hannibal*; shots from the University of Georgia's North Campus are seamlessly edited together with backlot studio shots for the teen flick *Road Trip*. To this phenomenon of simulacra passing for reality in the postmodern world, Beaudrillard ascribes the term "hyperreal." It is this quest for the hyperreal that allows the postmodern citizen to accept Disneyland's Main Street USA as a reproduction of an actual turn-of-the-century street setting. (Beaudrillard)

Completing my triumvirate of postmodernism is Fredric Jameson. Jameson brings to my collection the concept of the pastiche, or the empty parody. If parody, in modernist thinking, is the theft of a style for the intent of satire, then postmodernism gives us a theft of style with no intent. In postmodernism, the theft of a style is not intended to satirize the original, but merely to call back to the original, to refer to it. "In this situation, parody finds itself without vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place.... [I]t is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives...." (Jameson, 65) Taking this further, Jameson concedes to modernism's delight in referring to other texts – the space between postmodernism and mere modernism, he contends, is the space in which the critical distance collapses; the referent texts become so incorporated into the referring texts as to be part and parcel, with no conceit of criticism on the part of the creator of the referring text. (Jameson)

Wrapping, braiding, and tying these ideas together, one can possibly arrive at some understanding of my own definition of postmodernism. Postmodernism, to me, is that body of work and that performance in society that delights in breaking down the metanarratives that govern it, and exposing its own production. Rather, the postmodern is that which reveals itself to be a created entity – a production – and playfully breaks with the conventions of that production in order to do so.

To me, this breakage occurs in three main ways:

1. Recycling – this is a term I use to explain the intersection between Jameson’s pastiche and Beaudrillard’s simulacra. The recycled text is that which is reused to a new end. Shakespeare’s *Othello* is recycled as the film *O*. The beat and music of David Bowie’s “Under Pressure” is recycled by Miami rapper Vanilla Ice in his hit “Ice, Ice Baby.” Recycling admits the value of a prior text, but does not accept the preexisting text’s value as anything sacred or of greater import than that of the current artist’s work.
2. Intertextuality – here we find something of the hyperreal, something of the pastiche, and not a little of the metanarrative. Texts in postmodernism are constantly referring, not in style, but in substance to other texts. Characters in a Kevin Smith movie constantly debate comic books, and this allows the audience to step back from the present text and recall those prior texts. When Brodie and TS argue over the viability of Lois Lane carrying Superman’s child, we as the audience are invited to step out of the world of the film *Mallrats* and contemplate (if only briefly) what we remember of our days reading comics.

3. Self-referentiality – finally, and probably most importantly, my conception of postmodern requires a certain level of self-referentiality. This above all forces the audience out of its comfort zone within the text and into a place wherein they can question the nature of the production. This is achieved playfully – it is the violation of the fourth wall in a film, any means of breaking the diagesis, the conceit of characters in a commercial stopping mid-spiel and commenting on the fact that they are actors in a commercial.

It is with this understanding of postmodernism and with this understanding of how it is performed that I continue with this project.

CHAPTER 3.

FINCHER

David Fincher's film history is the story of a young man's success in Hollywood. At 18, Fincher began working for Korty Films in Mill Valley, California. After a year's work with John Korty, Fincher left for George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic, where he worked for three years for the visual effects wonderhouse, doing matte work on such films as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *The Neverending Story*. He also handled miniature photography on the finale of George Lucas' space epic series, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*.

After his three-year tenure at ILM, Fincher spent several years directing commercials and music videos. The new-age look and feel of Nike's famous "Instant Karma" ad campaign, and the retro-noir style of Madonna's "Vogue" video are both attributed to Fincher's presence as director on these projects. Pepsi, Budweiser, Levi Strauss & Company, and AT&T have all aired Fincher commercials, and pop/rock stars Paula Abdul, Aerosmith, Johnny Hates Jazz, and the Rolling Stones have all used Fincher's talent in their music videos. (imdb, "David Fincher")

In 1991, Fincher broke into feature films with *Alien3*, the continuation of the sci-fi/horror series started by Ridley Scott in 1979. The experience was so distressing for Fincher (he walked off of the production at the completion of principle photography) that he would not return to feature filmmaking for almost five years. (imdb, "Alien3") When he did return, however, his sophomore effort, 1995's *Se7en* was a huge success. The *noir*

feel of the detective drama, starring Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt both amazed and disturbed audiences. (imdb, “Se7en”) Two years later, *The Game* with Michael Douglas was a minor success, recovering its \$50 million budget by the end of its US run. (imdb, “The Game (1997)”)

Fincher became a household name, however, after his 1999 feature, *Fight Club*. The violent, dangerous film created such a societal reaction, both negative and positive, that the press began paying attention to anyone involved in the production of the film – particularly the intense young director. The film struck nerves with vastly different groups – conservative religious figures decried the intense images of violence and of sexual imagery in the film, liberals denounced what they considered to be fascist undertones in the teachings of character Tyler Durden, and young white males felt empowered by the film’s overt reaffirmation of violent masculinity. What I will call the violent white-boy rock movement (Limp Bizkit, Staind, Disturbed, etc.), in its infancy at the time of the film’s release, found in *Fight Club* a rallying point – the “manifesto” presented by the characters in the film meshed with the disenfranchisement perceived by these essentially privileged individuals and provided them with fodder for their violent musical expression. (*Fight Club*, commentary) As Fred Durst intones in one of Limp Bizkit’s songs, “Livin’ it Up,” “I seen the *Fight Club* / About twenty-eight times!” (So have I, Fred, but I try not to get so upset about it.)

Fincher’s fifth and most recent release is the 2002 hit, *Panic Room*. Starring Jodie Foster as an unassuming divorcee with a sarcastic, difficult adolescent daughter, *Panic Room* was a commercial, if not a critical success. (imdb, “Panic Room”)

But more important to me (and to this project) than the literal successes or failures of Fincher's films, even more important than the overt narratives presented in the films, is the style that defines Fincher's movies and makes them so very distinct in the world of cinema. This style is discussed in length (with examples from the films) in the interview section of the video, but I would like here to present a brief synopsis of Fincher's style characteristics, in a short list.

1. Brutality – the protagonists in a Fincher movie are always forced into a situation wherein they are threatened in some way and answer that threat with brutality. Rather than ably switching back into law-abiding-citizen format after answering their challenge, however, the characters are always committed, literally or figuratively to...
2. Suicide – the Fincher films always end with some blatant or subtle image of suicide.
3. Bleak world – the diagesis of a Fincher movie is poorly lit and is dirty. It is not a pleasant world in which Fincher's movies live, it is grimy and probably not a safe place to live by the thirty-second-rule. A particularly apt quote attributed to Fincher is "I don't know how much movies should entertain. To me, I'm always interested in movies that scar. The thing I love about JAWS is the fact that I've never gone swimming in the ocean again." (imdb, "David Fincher")
4. Angles – no matter how filthy the floor is in a Fincher movie, that's where you (the audience member) are sitting. The camera in a Fincher film stays low, as though the audience were of minimal import. Or, alternately, the

audience is stuck back up in a top corner of the room, out of the way, and unable to become entangled in the action. “People will say ‘There are a million ways to shoot a scene,’ but I don’t think so. I think there’re two, maybe. And the other one is wrong.” (imdb, “David Fincher”)

5. **Angles (take two)** – when not shooting from the floor or the ceiling, Fincher is taking extreme close-ups of inanimate objects, focusing on the banality (or maybe the beauty) of the simple things that surround these simple characters. These simple characters that will beat you to death with a sledgehammer.
6. **Angles (take three)** – Fincher has a distinct style of camera motion. He moves the camera with a fluidity that suggests unencumbered motion. There are no shakicams in a Fincher film. In his two most recent pictures, the standard Panther camera dolly has been almost entirely replaced by a digital technique of joining actual moving-camera shots with computer-generated images that produce amazingly long moving camera takes wherein the camera can go anywhere – including through walls and into the keyway of a standard Yale lock.
7. **Sound mix** – the sound is not traditionally mixed in a Fincher film. The dialogue, usually set at a high level is typically one of the more quiet tracks in a Fincher audio mix, while the background and ambient sounds are cranked to max volume. As a result, the viewer is forced to strain to hear the dialogue, and to take care not to damage their hearing with the extremely overloud background sounds.

All of these techniques have their geneses in Fincher's early work in the field. His early days in special effects leads him to rely on special effects to create shots that are otherwise impossible. The style of editing that goes with this never-static style of film shooting is the same rapid-fire editing that is seen in music videos and television commercials. If Fincher had never done his time working for ad agencies and pop stars, if he hadn't spent early days blowing up miniature Death Stars and filming Harrison Ford in front of a bluescreen, would his style be what it is today?

Despite his interesting style, and despite the postmodern identity found in most of his work, little work from a postmodern standpoint has been done concerning the work of David Fincher. Rather, most scholarly work that concerns his films focuses primarily on modernist concepts, the sort of SLAB (Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, Barthes) psychoanalytic film criticism that is the staple of traditional film journals. Those and classical Formalist literature dominates the landscape of the literature on David Fincher's movies.

Queer theory, Gnosticism, Existentialism, pacifism, are all conceits examined by researchers in reference to Fincher's films. And, while it would be glib (and, to my thinking, accurate) for me to simply state that all of these various and sundry -isms are merely metanarratives and worthy only to be thrown out, it would be unfair to discredit the works of these other scholars in such an out-of-hand fashion. In the interest of brevity, however, I will merely mention in passing these articles, as their development adds little to my (or to the reader's) comprehension of the project at hand. "Fight Club's Queer Representations" (applies queer theory to an alternative reading of the Jack/Tyler relationship), "'This Whole Place is a Basement': The Gnostic/Existentialist Vision of

Alien 3” (examines *Alien3* as an existentialist piece, focusing on the setting of the film as a setting for Gnostic realization), “Places of Horror: Fincher’s *Seven* and Fear of the City in Recent Hollywood Film” (critiques *Se7en* for serving to decontextualize violence and thus occlude “true” nature of social and economic problems in American cities), and “Integration and Rebirth through Confrontation: *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* as Contemporary Religious Parables” (discusses the religious significance of the two films and their claim to the efficacy of confrontational solutions to societal problems) are representative titles and general themes of research on David Fincher. While they are all interesting articles, they offer little to the space in which this project takes place.

Much more intriguing to the ideas at hand are two articles which do discuss postmodernism as it relates to David Fincher’s films. Oddly, the two articles both center around Fincher’s first film, 1991’s *Alien3*, a fact which hints at the necessity of a certain temporal space between a researcher and his or her subject before a true postmodern analysis can take place. Louise Speed offers an intriguing interpretation of the alien monster as a “postmodern construction of the abject,” a monster that is always already avoiding distinction because of its shifting nature, and due to its symbiotic, and thus intertextual, relationship with the human. Her article “*Alien3*: A Postmodern Encounter with the Abject” finds itself in a space between psychoanalytic theory and postmodernism, but her concepts of how Fincher creates a certain postmodernism in his characters and settings is unique and helpful. (Speed) More resistant to the title “postmodern” is Stephan Mulhall’s piece, “Mourning Sickness.” Mulhall, in this chapter to his book *On Film*, discusses the manner in which Fincher uses postmodern methods to subvert and destroy the conventions of not only standard sci-fi/horror films, but those of

the Alien series as well. Although Mulhall resists the term postmodern, his discussion of subversion through the means of violating schemas of production is always and already postmodern, even if not called by that name. (Mulhall)

It is David Fincher's tightly controlled, digitally enhanced look that is both so enviable and so unattainable for a young amateur filmmaker. Even the one simple camera-move I plotted out for my spring picture, *The Trouble With Zombies*, was scrapped when I practiced the camera move with a friend's small camera and realized that I could not possibly move the camera along the floor around and through the feet of my film's three protagonists and then crane up to catch the face of my hero, Tom, as he delivered the film's opening line. Without the budget for camera dollies, cranes, incredibly powerful compositing tools, and a certified Steadicam operator, the closest I could get was a simple pan up from the character's feet to his face – and even that one shot looked as though it was shot by a kid with a light tripod.

CHAPTER 4.

FANDOM

It is the cultural phenomenon of fandom I wish to place under the microscope in this thesis, or rather my own personal creation of fandom at the junction of self and text. The study of fandom comes out of the works of de Certeau (1984), and later those of Jenkins (1992) and Storey (1996). The themes with which I particularly find favor are those of Jenkins and Storey. In the conclusion of his 1992 book, *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins assembles a list of five points of fandom, five lines that compose the performance of fandom: nontraditional reception, unique critical practices, consumer activism, “...particular forms of cultural production...” (p. 321) and activity of the text as the locus of a social community. Cultural theorist John Storey grasps these ideas and those of de Certeau, and reinforces this conception of fandom. "Fandom is not just about consumption, it is also about the production of texts--songs, poems, novels, fanzines, videos, etc.--made in response to the professional media texts of fandom" (p. 127). Fandom, from Storey and Jenkins' points of view, is the unique junction between the text and the audience, the location at which a text becomes more than a consumer commodity or a cultural artifact, it becomes the springboard for the creation of a whole new culture, an entire community with its own artifacts and own history.

In this case, I must use a very liberal view of the term “fandom.” To proceed with this project, the idea of fandom as the locus of a large community of people must be abandoned – I am not thinking about my interactions with texts *and* with others, I am

thinking about my interactions only with the text. This becomes, to a point, a sensitive issue. The nature of fandom involves at a very basic level the interaction within a group, and that group's interaction with a text. Omitting the "community" aspect of fandom is to strike a large part of that which is so important to Jenkins' construction of "fan culture." Can one make an argument for fandom without the construction of a larger community? If we accept that the important aspects of fandom are consumption of the texts at a level above that of mundane consumption and the creation of new texts using the extant texts as a springboard, then I would posit that it is very possible for an individual to engage in his own fandom, without the involvement of others in the creation thereof.

The creationist aspect of fandom, that part of the fan culture that engages in the production of alternative texts, is to me the most compelling aspect of fandom. The creation of artistic texts is not an immediate, short-term project. To become involved with a text at such a level as to be able to use it as a foundation for creations of one's own is to be involved very intensely. It is a time-consuming, work intensive labor to express one's appreciation for the text in such a way. Watching a show and discussing it with friends takes perhaps two hours. Writing a fan fiction exploring a minor aspect of the episode could take a detailed writer days' worth of time.

With that in mind, I have no problem making the leap from tradition and arguing that the concept of fandom can, no matter how tenuously, be applied to an individual, if that individual's consumption of the text is involved to such a level as to spawn new texts, based on some fan's object of affection. Or, rather, in this case, I would argue that my appreciation for David Fincher's movies, because it is progressed to such a level as to

push me into different concepts of production in my own work (different camera angles, pushier editing, more interesting sound development) that my own appreciation for the works may constitute a type of fandom.

With those concepts defined, postmodernism and fandom, then, I may continue and explain the process by which this autoethnography took (takes) place.

CHAPTER 5.

PROCESS

To explore my fandom in relationship to the David Fincher movies, I chose to perform an autoethnographic study. As postmodernism calls into question the modernist concepts of objectivity and dispassionate observation, the postmodernist is left with only one valid subject for study – the self. Autoethnography, then, is the intersection of autobiography and ethnography – using one’s own experiences in some aspect of life, one’s performance of a societal role, as a sort of “case study,” to demonstrate the manner in which the subject/author performs as such-and-such a social entity. Far from trying to expand one’s social performances to some greater generality, the postmodern autoethnographer seeks only to find deeper self-knowledge and through that self-knowledge to gain some greater understanding of his or her own placement the metanarratives of social existence.

To me, autoethnography is the only possible means of studying any societal phenomenon. As a postmodernist who perhaps takes the concept of “destroying the metanarratives” to an extreme point, I fail to find a place outside of myself where I can find any truth. Rather, as I have become more immersed in a state of postmodernism, and have begun to see more and greater “truths” as mere “metanarratives,” I find myself questioning the very fabrics of existence. Rather, to quote Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” The problem that arises when carrying this point far into postmodernism, however, is that I can never prove that you (reader, teacher, scholar) think – therefore I cannot

conceive of any means of proving that you exist. Adopting this rather extreme concept eliminates any reason for seeking to know the “other,” since the “other” only exists in its interaction with me, and may well be a function of my own consciousness. Thus, I can only know my self, and can find meaning only in the manner of interaction between the other and the self.

So, in this case, the study I chose to undertake was one of my own interactions with a set of texts, and how that interaction has shaped (or failed to shape, or had perhaps no discernable effect whatsoever) on my existence. Since the texts were filmic in nature, and subject to the various benefits and detriments of that medium, I chose to perform my autoethnography within that same medium. By chaining myself to the same restrictions felt by the creator of these texts and availing myself of the same freedoms (albeit on a smaller, lower-budget, slightly out-of-focus manner) allowed the creator, I hoped to be better able to relate both to the place of interaction between myself and David Fincher, and to be better able to relate that interaction to you, the reader.

To that end, I set about performing a two-step autoethnography. The first step was to view the films while sitting with a tape recorder, and to record my reactions verbally as the films unfolded in front of me. What about a particular shot was especially stirring? What was exceptional about the films? What was mundane? Mediocre? Poor? Why was this scene more or less personally pleasing to me than others? Was one aspect of Fincher’s style more noticeable in *The Game* than in *Alien3*? Upon completing this part of my autoethnography, I was left with almost ten hours of audio recorded on minicassette, a rambling tour of my own experiences with (these) films, with (these) kinds of cinema, and with my own filmmaking experience. Comments such as...

“This is an ungodly long take. I can’t get actors to stay focused to get a reaction shot out of them, he’s got three in perfect timing, running a complex scene, and is getting it in a single take.” (from *Fight Club*, the scene in which Tyler, Jack, and Marla move through the kitchen, avoiding one another)

“Jesus, this is bloody. I mean, Clemens is coated in it; all these tools are bloody, phew. I never noticed just how damn bloody things got in these films. But, we’re into even up to the killing yet, and Fincher’s already got us drowning in blood. Of course, I’m conflicted – bloodiness in movies appeals to my masculinity. But it does my appetite no good at all.” (the autopsy sequence from *Alien3*)

“I like Morgan Freeman, I always have. He reminds me of my uncles – very soft-spoken, calm, resistant to excitement. But this is probably my least favorite role of his. He seems somehow less present here. Like my Uncle Walter after he got sick – he was still the same man, there was just a transparency there. That’s what I get out of Freeman in this role.” (*Se7en*, after Somerset throws his metronome across the room and smashes it)

“This is the kind of filmmaking I want to get into. I can do it on a computer, and not worry about my sound guy not showing up to hold the fishpole. I know it’s against everything my little Anti-George-Lucas heart holds dear, but if you can get perfect CGI, why bother with an actor who’s going to show up an hour late and demand that the water in her trailer be such-and-such a brand. I’m a geek, I know my type. Give a computer guy a two-liter Pepsi and a couple of bacon cheeseburgers, and he’ll make you pretty pictures all day long and work overtime on the weekends.” (*Panic Room*, during the unbelievably long CGI take of the camera flying through the house)

Reviewing these audio commentary tracks offered some insight into from where my appreciation for the David Fincher films was coming. I noticed that much of the commentary was focused around admiration for particular camera moves, matters of set and lighting, matters of framing and focus, and sound issues. Little attention was being paid to issues of character, of dialogue, of narrative. Very few comments centered on the actors, the action of the piece, or the story that was being told.

As a technophile and as a filmmaker, I can understand where this bias toward the production and away from the liminal text is coming from. As a youngster, I would often pay rapt attention to “Behind the Scenes” specials on television, and then watch with at best a mediocre interest the films about which the specials were created. I have always been more at ease dealing with the technological aspects of cinema – the cameras, editing tables, projectors, monitors, microphones, etc. – than with the human aspects. This may spring from only-childhood and an upbringing with a mechanically inclined father. When I, as a filmmaker, call “Roll Camera,” I understand that the actors may not be fully ready, the camera operator may be paying little attention, and the sound person may still be fiddling with the levels. But, as a self-recognized technophile, I expect that the camera will be ready. And, if it is not, I can repair the camera so that it is ready for the next time.

My focus on controlling all aspects of my creative endeavors plays into this as well. I can control the digital, I cannot control the human. They are the unrecognized aspects of directing, the choices that are forced upon the director that delight me in practice. “Directing ain’t about drawing a neat little picture and showing it to the cameraman.... The fact is, you don’t know what directing is until the sun is setting and you’ve got to get

five shots and you're only going to get two." When I first read this quote, attributed to Fincher, I felt a kinship with this man whom I've never met. He could identify with my problems – directing was controlling the production, making decisions, and living with them.

Taking then the ideas that had come out of my commentary on the five Fincher films, I set about creating the original parts of the video portion of this thesis. Key to this was the "Interview." I wanted to maintain the look of the documentary film for one part of this project, and one immediately recognizable form of documentary filmmaking is the interview – the interview subject is seated in a comfortable chair and talks at length about this-or-that subject, prompted by vague and mostly uninspired questions from the interviewer. Here, however, I ran into a point of disparity – I did not want some impostor asking questions of me. This project was intensely personal, and for another to be asking me questions was to pretend that some other person had prompted me to this thought process.

To compromise, I filmed myself asking the questions....

...And then reversed the camera angle and filmed myself answering them.

In this interview, Interviewer Lee asks Subject Lee such insipid questions as "What does fandom mean?" and "So, what exactly is David Fincher's style?" To these questions, Subject Lee supplies answers that are sometimes ironic, sometimes incomplete, and often quite rambling. It was during this interview that the final legs of the autoethnographic journey became somewhat apparent. Up to this point, I had found myself unable to answer the question as to whether or not my fandom of the David Fincher movies was an entity any more or less postmodern (knowing full well that the

concept of quantifying postmodernism is a fool's errand – yet attempting it in any case) than the fandom created between a Deadhead and a Jerry Garcia concert, or the fandom created by a cadre of young *Buffy* viewers and UPN's hit television show.

It was upon being posed this question, baldly and openly by the friend who was feeding me questions off-camera that I found my answer. It occurred to me that “traditional” fandom, while postmodern in its delight of the pastiche, in its refusal to accept that a text's creator is its sole owner, in its absolute disdain of the validity of one reading of the text over another, was still ultimately accepting of the metanarrative of production. The location of traditional fandom is on the surface, the point at which the liminal text meets the audience and the audience responds in kind to the text.

Rather than finding my fandom of the David Fincher movies in the actual texts, I found it below the texts. My fandom rejects the metanarrative of production and locates itself in the delight at exposing the production itself. My cinema-rich and technologically-fanatical history forces me to see the people on the screen not as characters, but as actors; forces me to see the framing of a particular shot not as a naturally-occurring eyeline, but as a conscious decision made by a director in coordination with a director of photography, a lighting director, and other members of a production team. So, to rephrase, my fandom of David Fincher's films finds itself in a more postmodern place, as it rejects the metanarrative of cinema and finds its delight in the style of production.

Of course, having found my answer, I realized I had also found yet another question. How was this “fandom” any different from the “appreciation” felt by any number of film students who had likely admired Fincher's style (or the style of any director, for that

matter) throughout the years? Again, I found my answer while on-camera, and that was that while a student may appreciate a style, and may even use it for his or her own, briefly, to pay homage to a beloved director, I wanted no less than to adopt David Fincher's style as my own. Rather than writing fan-fiction of David Fincher's world by crossing-over characters from *Fight Club* to the world of *Panic Room*, or writing slash stories about Jack and Tyler, I want my fan-fiction of the David Fincher world to be entirely new stories, with little or no reference to the diegetic world of the films, but rather told in that distinct style that would be immediately recognizable as pastiche of (perhaps stolen out-of-hand from) David Fincher.

I am writing this process paper even as I am in the final stages of completing the editing process on the documentary video portion of this thesis. In fact, the hard drive containing the digital version of my video is sitting at my feet in my bag at the moment. Good music is coming through my computer speakers, and I am becoming more relieved with each word as I near completion of this phase of my project. Have I completed my autoethnographic journey? No. There are still questions that remain to be answered, and I am still struggling to refine the answers that are presented in this paper. As much as I try to let the concept of originality and stylistic ownership go, I still feel a pinch of shame in admitting that my intent in filmmaking is to become so astute at the art as to "steal" the style of a fellow director. My autoethnography must continue, as it is always already both complete and incomplete, and thus may never be ended. Whether more of it will be recorded for others to read/hear/see/watch/smell/taste is unknown, but I should hope that as I progress as an amateur filmmaker, the fruits of this thought process will become apparent.

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APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPT TO THE VIDEO

This is a two-column transcript. The LEFT column describes in very general terms the video images that appear on screen. The RIGHT column is a transcript of the dialogue. For legibility and simplicity's sake, onscreen titles are not noted here, and musical cues are omitted.

LEE sits in front of the camera.	LEE Hello, and welcome to my thesis. This is what we're gonna call a video thesis. It will work like this. I'm going to talk some, and show you some movie clips, and there might be some reenactments and some dramatizations and some completely fabricated scenarios. And every once in a while, you'll see an asterisk in the top-right corner of the screen...
Asterisk appears on screen. LEE points to it.	...like that. When that happens, you'll also see a notation at the bottom of the screen. It will refer you to the text from where I took an idea or a phrase or an actual, honest-to-God quotation. We'll call this process a... video footnote. And that's about all you need to know before we get into it.
Ext. Box Office window. LEE walks up, repeatedly, in different clothes.	LEE (VO) People are always asking me... ...do I know David Fincher? LEE Yeah, I'd like one for <i>Panic Room</i> , please. One for <i>The Game</i> , please. <i>Fight Club</i> . <i>Se7en</i> . <i>Alien3</i> .
Int. Box Office window. There are many clerks	CLERK 1 That'll be five-fifty.

who appear in turn.	<p>CLERK 2 That'll be four dollars, please.</p>
	<p>CLERK 3 Three dollars.</p>
	<p>CLERK 4 Five dollars, please.</p>
	<p>CLERK 5 (LEE) That'll be seven dollars, please. Enjoy the show.</p>
LEE sits in front of the camera.	<p>LEE I've watched his films a hundred times each. I've listened to the director's commentary. I've downloaded the scripts. I've read his biographies on the Internet Movie Database. I've read every bit of information I could find about the guy in commercial and scholarly media. In short, I think it's safe to say I'm a fan. A big fan. And I think it's safe to say that I'm a postmodern fan. Wait a minute....</p>
VCR Rewind effect.	<p>See what just happened there? I threw a big word out there and didn't, you know, tell anyone what it meant. And while I love doing shit like that, I don't think it's going to win me any awards from my committee. So, let's take a couple of minutes here and talk about.... Postmodernism.</p> <p>Okay, first thing you have to understand is that postmodernism is one of those terms that gets thrown out there a lot, even by people who don't really have the discursive background to know what it is they're talking about. Second thing you need to understand is that even among those people who do have the discursive background to know what they're talking about, none of them actually DO know what they're talking about. Well, maybe that's a BIT extreme. What I mean to say, is even the postmodernists can't agree on what postmodernism is. Let's say there are half-a-million academics out there that claim to be postmodernists. That's great for our demographics, but really bad for the coherence of our approach – because that means there are half-a-million different concepts as to what postmodernism means. So, what's about to follow is my own personal construction of what it means to be “postmodern” and what I mean by “postmodernity,” and “postmodernism.” It's a collection – a bricolage – of concepts culled from the best and the worst of the history of postmodern writing. Or, for you pop culture freaks, I'm MC Hammer, Jameson and Baudrillard are Rick James, and this section on postmodernism is everybody's favorite dance hit – “U</p>

Can't Touch This.”

Postmodernism, as an idea you could throw out in polite conversation without getting laughed at, has been around since the 1960's. Susan Sontag speaks of a “new sensibility,” a rejection of the Arnoldian view of “high” culture as something that is discriminate and discrete from “popular” culture. And, whamo, Katie-bar-the-door, we were off to the races.

Fast-forward to 1979.

Jean-Francois Lyotard publishes *The Postmodern Condition*.

Important side-note, in August of that same year, I was born.

Arguably, the more important event of the two. Anyway, *The Postmodern Condition* is the point at which postmodernism picks up the concept of the meta-narrative, and smashes it to the floor like Charles Kane's snowglobe. See, Lyotard saw culture, everyday life, as a collection of stories, performative narratives that were enacted every day on the stage of the world. Overarching and containing these individual daily stories were larger stories, grand narratives. Metanarratives. Things like Marxism, liberalism, Christianity, Americana tell us huge, massive stories that set the “rules,” if you will for our daily tales. Rather, they organize the plurality of stories enacted continually in a culture. If you're rich and famous in America, your story of true love is of public interest and is by necessity much more charming than the story of boy meets girl in the lunch line at East Middleville High School in Mountainview, Kansas. Lyotard says that postmodernism is marked by the destruction of these metanarratives, the refusal of a culture to evaluate one narrative as higher in value than another; sort of an expansion of the idea Sontag expressed in the '60's, the metanarrative of the museum and the academy being destroyed so that both pop and high culture are equally valued.

On the heels of Lyotard, we find Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard introduces into postmodernism the concept of the simulacra. In a postmodern society, there exist only copies without originals, simulations. A movie, for instance, is the replication of something that never happened. In this scene, Morgan Freeman driving the car, and Brad Pitt riding in the car, were shot at different times. Why? Because when they first shot the scene, the exterior on Pitt's side of the car was fitting for the scene, the exterior on Freeman's side was not. So, the crew searched LA looking for an appropriate view out the driver's window to match the view outside the passenger's window. So, this scene, which we as movie viewers accept as completely contiguous, is constructed from parts of two events that occurred at two different times at two different places because the real (for lack of a better word) event was not sufficiently real for the

Clip from *Se7en*.
Morgan Freeman
and Brad Pitt
ride in a car.

film. This is a simulation of an event – no one copy of it is more authentic than any other. Baudrillard refers to this as hyperreal – the acceptance of the simulation as better than real, and the search for that hyperreality in all aspects of life.

Finally, to round out my pomo-trio, we come to Fredrick Jameson, who gives to us the concept of the pastiche. The empty parody. See, parody is the theft of a style, a phrase, a text for the purpose of exposing the text and satirizing it. Jameson argues that in postmodernism, we see the continuous borrowing from other texts without the intent to satirize, but only as a means of referencing other texts. Without this satirical intent, the borrowing becomes an empty parody – a pastiche.

Cobbling together my own version of postmodernity, what you'll see is a bricolage of theory – an individual collective of ideas. To me, postmodernism is that body of work that delights in exposing its own production. What do I mean by this?

What I mean is that when we watch a film, when we tune into a radio show, when we pick up a book, we are accepting a system of metanarratives – the cinema metanarrative, the book metanarrative, whatever. When a text makes some breach of the production metanarrative, or makes some breach of another grand narrative – Americana, Marxism, the Psychological Thriller – it is serving to break the audience out of its location within the grand narrative and exposing the narrative for what it is – a human construction, composed of rules and dialectics that can be inverted and broken.

Picture turns
upside down.

How do we, as artists or as scholars, break the metanarrative frame?

To me, there are three main ways in which artists do this within a structure of postmodernism.

First, we take the idea of recycling. Assembled from Jameson's concept of pastiche and Beaudrillard's *Simulacra*, recycling is the term I use to describe postmodernism's willingness to reuse the past – unapologetically. Give a postmodernist a library card, and we get *10 Things I Hate About You*, a retelling of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Give a postmodernist some old Police albums, and we get Sean "P-Diddy" Combs sampling "Every Breath You Take" for his own song, "I'll Be Missing You." Recycled stories, recycled beats, recycled characters – the postmodernist reuses the past, and does not apologize for it.

Secondly, the concept of intertextuality. A modernist may look at a

	body of work as a genre, a postmodernist realizes the root of the word “text” is the same as the root of the word “textile,” and sees each work, each text, as a thread of warp woven against a waft of society. Texts become interreferential – characters in a Kevin Smith movie talk about Star Wars, the Swingers in Doug Liman’s 1995 film discuss <i>Reservoir Dogs</i> ...
Clip from <i>Swingers</i> . The boys sit and play cards.	MIKEY (clip audio) Oh, that’s the dope. SUE (clip audio) Dude, <i>Reservoir Dogs</i> ... (GROANS) MIKEY (clip audio) Man, how can you even compare the two? Tarantino completely bites everything from Scorsese. SUE (clip audio) He’s derivative. TRENT (clip audio) Well, you gotta admit, that did look money. CHARLES (clip audio) Y’know, I heard they did that whole thing for under ten grand. ROB (clip audio) You know, I don’t see what the big deal is, I mean, everybody steals from everybody. That’s movies. MIKEY (clip audio) Yeah, well, let’s get the hell out of here if we’re gonna make this party.
The swingers walk, five abreast.	LEE (VO) ...and then, Doug Liman recycles Tarantino’s famous walking five-shot, which was, in turn, stolen out-of-hand from Marty Scorsese).
LEE sits in front of the camera.	Finally, and to me most importantly, we find self-referentiality. Far from the realist conceit of recognizing characters, settings, places, events in a film as real, and the conceit of audience as non-participant voyeurs, the postmodern conceit of self-referentiality seeks to destroy the fourth wall, to tear down the boundary between text and audience. Here, however, is a stumbling block for some – modernism proposes

to do the same, to violate the “laws” of production in order to expose the production. The difference between pomo and merely mo, is this however...

The postmodernist does it playfully. Where the modernist subtly taps you on the shoulder and says “Say, old chap, you know this is a book, right?” the postmodernist wants to...

Clip from *Se7en*.
Detective escort
John Doe.

JOHN DOE (clip audio)

...hit them with a sledgehammer, and you'll find you have their strict attention.

LEE

Modernism is Joseph Heller playing with the continuity of time in *Catch-22*. Postmodernism is Ferris Bueller talking to the camera. It's Count Basie in the desert, shattering the diagesis into a million pieces in *Blazing Saddles*, it is this sequence from *Fight Club*:

Clip from *Fight Club*. JACK walks through the living room, as catalog descriptions float onscreen.

JACK (VO on clip)

The Klipsk Personal Office Unit. The Hovetrekke Home Exerbike. Or the Johanne Czov sofa unit with the string-green stripe pattern. Even with the Rislampe wire lamps with environmentally friendly, unbleached paper. I'd flip through catalogs and wonder, “What kind of dining set defines me as a person?”

LEE

So, after almost ten minutes, we should have a fair concept of what is postmodern. It is playful. It is expository. It seeks to find, show off, and laugh at the internal stories that govern the manner in which we perform our daily lives.

So what metanarrative am I going to expose here today?

Fandom.

A special member of a text's audience is the fan. The fan, short for fanatic, is the audience member who engages the text at such a level as to carry the text beyond the “standard.” The study of fan culture stems from the early 1980's works of DeCerteau, and the mid-90's works of Storey and Jenkins.

The long, fun journey through the world of fan culture begins in 1984 with Michel DeCerteau, and his work on consumption. To de Certeau, consumption of texts by an audience is a continual process not of mere consumption, but rather an interplay between the dominant, or the desired reading of the text as defined by the

producers (we'll term this desired reading and production system simply "production") and the actual readings of these texts which are taken away by the consumers – the secondary production, or consumption. Rather, the audience does not simply watch and absorb a text, when they are utilizing a TV show, a movie, a book, they are in a continual process of reproducing the text, of recreating it through their own schemas and prejudices. Whether conscious or not, this continual reproduction of texts (which harkens back to Beaudrillard's concept of the Simulacra) ensures that no reading may ever be truly dominant.

Within no culture is this continual active consumption, this secondary production so apparent as in fan culture.

The fan is the member of the audience whose consumption of a text is centered around a certain form of overtly active secondary production. Perhaps no scholar has been so prolific on the subject of fan culture as Henry Jenkins, whose book *Textual Poachers* is an ethnographic look at fan culture from within. It is important to note that Jenkins work was pivotal in the history of fandom work because it was the first time an individual scholar had recognized himself or herself as a fan. Prior to this, fan culture had always been seen as a culture on the margins, fans were pathologized, fans are deviant, odd people who dress up like Captain Kirk and write slash fiction. Jenkins was the first to embrace this culture and call it his own. So what exactly is fan culture? Jenkins points to five particular aspects of the performance of fandom:

If I may.... Music, maestro!

Number 5: Activity of the text as the locus of a social community. Fans are not loners. *Buffy* fans do not sit alone at home on Tuesday nights glued to UPN – they get together, grouped with other fans, and spend commercial breaks discussing whether or not Xander should have ditched Anya at the altar. The Internet has only fed the fire, and the Web is now the location of huge fan cultures, spanning the whole world. A young *Enterprise* fan in Melbourne, Australia may be sharing slash fiction with an elderly fan in Nova Scotia, who then forwards it along to his friend in Long Beach, California.

Number 4: Nontraditional reception. The fan is not your average viewer. He or she is typically more educated, more informed about cultural criticism, more media-aware. Fans can intelligently discuss the writing of Aaron Sorkin versus that of Joss Whedon, from the standpoint of intelligent diction (Sorkin) vs. clever wordplay (Whedon).

Number 3: Consumer activism. Network officials know that if they dare try to cancel a show with a large fan following, that they are going to collect huge numbers of letters, e-mails, and phone messages asking in intelligent terms for the return of the show to the airwaves. When NBC's *Ed* was "on the bubble," and in danger of not being picked up by the network for its fourth season, fans organized a letter-writing campaign, not to the network, but to advertisers and affiliates. It is uncertain what effect these letters had directly, but the show has returned to NBC's Fall Lineup for the upcoming year.

Number 2: Unique critical practices. Fans tend to create (not destroy) a larger meta-text around their favorite texts. The temporal space between two episodes of *Smallville*, for instance, may be filled by a half-dozen fanfics, exploring the possibilities of what happened between the two episodes. New initiates to the culture soon learn the "preferred" means of reading the text; deep attention is paid to textual continuity.

LEE sits in a chair, watching *Buff*.

LEE

Wait a minute, wait a minute. Now, last week, Buffy was throwing Glory through a concrete wall like she wasn't even there. Tonight, she gets hit on the head with a chair leg and she goes down? C'mon, that doesn't make any sense!

LEE

The story does not begin with the opening credits and does not end with the production company logo.

And, Number 1: The fan engages in "particular forms of cultural production." The fan, by means of performing all four of the other aspects of fan culture, engages in this most important part. The fan culture is one of creation. Fan fiction, filk songs, zines, and music videos are only some of the creative avenues explored by fans in their expression of enthusiasm for a particular text. They create stories above and beyond, and often far removed from the base text. Even such noncongruous texts as NBC's *The West Wing* and UPN's *Buff*, *the Vampire Slayer* can be crossed-over, with the enormous online text *Donna, the Vampire Slayer*, featuring minor *West Wing* character Donna Moss as the one true chosen *Vampire Slayer* from the Whedon series. It is this production that above all sets fans outside of the realm of mundane commercial consumption.

Now, I've just spent about fifteen minutes on theoretical constructs and an overglossing of fan culture. If you're interested in some good readin' on the subject, let me refer you to this book, you ought to be

	able to find a copy in the UGA Library and in the Drewry Room in the Journalism Building. It's called "David and Me," and it's written by... Well, it's written by me. It has a more in-depth literature review and a little section on fan culture, plus a transcript of this whole film. Check it out.
	Okay, now that we're through all the boring stuff, all the theoretical crap that nobody really wanted to listen to anyway, we can get on with the fun stuff.....
LEE gets up and exits frame.	This project is the culmination of four years of undergrad work, two years of graduate work, and three months of sheer agony. Plus, a lifetime of watching movies.
TITLES	LEE (VO) What's to follow here is an autoethnography. Autoethnography, or autoeth for short, is the process by which a researcher uses his or her own experiences to explain some sort of cultural phenomenon. The cultural phenomenon and the question here is, "Does my interaction with the David Fincher movies constitutes a more postmodern fandom?"
INT. LEE sits on a couch.	INTERVIEWER LEE Hi, thanks for joining us.
RES. LEE sits in a chair.	RESPONDANT LEE Hi. Thanks for having me.
(sequence is S/RS)	INT. LEE Well, I guess everyone's first question is, exactly how did you get started on this project?
	RES. LEE Well, the project started a couple of years ago, I was still looking for a topic for my thesis, and one night, I took out my <i>Fight Club</i> DVD and watched it. And, about halfway through the movie, I realized that the visual style that was being used was something that was very interesting and that the commentary that the movie was making, the sort of postmodern commentary on society and consumerism...
Clip from <i>Fight Club</i> . JACK and TYLER drink and talk.	JACK (clip audio) I had it all; I had a stereo that was very decent, a wardrobe that was getting respectable. I was close to being complete. TYLER (clip audio)

Shit, man, now it's all gone.

JACK (clip audio)

All gone.

TYLER (clip audio)

Alllll gone.

TYLER (clip audio)

Do you know what a duvet is?

JACK (clip audio)

It's a, a comforter.

TYLER (clip audio)

It's a blanket. It's just a blanket. Now why would you and I know what a duvet is? Is it necessary to our survival, in the hunter-gatherer sense of the word? No. What are we, then?

RES. LEE

That narrative structure was something that was very interesting.

TYLER (clip audio)

Crime, poverty, these things don't concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines. Television with 500 channels. Some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine. Viagra. Olestra.

JACK (clip audio)

Martha Stewart.

TYLER (clip audio)

Fuck Martha Stewart! Martha's polishing the brass on the *Titanic*! It's all goin' down, man! So fuck off with your sofa units and string green stripe patterns!

RES. LEE sits in
a chair.

RES. LEE

Postmodernism was an idea that I had been informed about for some time and it was something, I was coming to maturity in my own recognition of my own conception of what postmodernism meant. So, I thought about doing a postmodern criticism of the film *Fight Club*.

Well, the first step in that was to learn a little more about the director, and that visual style that was so stunning, where had that come from? So, I went to the Internet Movie Database and looked up David Fincher and discovered that he had done four other major Hollywood

pictures. So, I went to the video store and I rented those four movies, *Alien3*, *Se7en*, *The Game*, and *Panic Room*; watched them all in one marathon weekend. And, like the postwar French, I discovered that I was possibly dealing with a modern-day auteur. So, I thought about maybe doing a postmodern criticism of all of Fincher's movies. Later on that same year, I began edging back into amateur filmmaking, something I had done in the past and something I was interested in doing in the future. And I realized that in the scenes I was creating, in the visual images I was making, that I was trying subconsciously to emulate that style I had seen in David Fincher's movies.

Naturally, that led me to a concept of fandom and fan culture. So, I went back, read Storey, read Jenkins, read a little De Certeau. And that's where I'm coming from now – a postmodern reading of fan culture as it relates to me and my appreciation of the films of David Fincher.

INT. LEE

So, tell us. What is fan culture?

RES. LEE

Well, fan culture is the study of individuals who consume the text in a manner inconsistent with the traditional consumption of the text. And this has traditionally applied to television. Television fans are those who take the characters, take the story and consume them differently. They create their own universe around the show. They use the show as a cultural locus. They take the characters and the elements of the show and they make them their own. They create items. They create artifacts of the show that would not otherwise exist. This to me is the most important aspect of fandom, this aspect of creationism, this aspect of taking the characters and writing fan fiction, writing filk songs, writing stories around these characters that they have embraced, that they have taken on as creations of their own in a manner of speaking.

Traditionally, this has leant itself more easily to television than it has to film. What I mean by that is a television character, if a television show runs for a full season, the narrative arc runs for 22 episodes, that's 22 hours of programming in an hour-long drama, and there's a lot of storytelling that can be done there. The characters exist for a longer time. There are implicit questions of what came before and what came after. There is a temporal gap – there's a space between one episode and another, traditionally. What fan culture does is it bridges that gap, it creates a narrative arc above and over the storytelling that is done by the television show. They fill in these spatial differences. They organize stories around what comes before

and what comes after. The space between episode 1 and episode 2? They tell us what happens there. And, there are many different alternate versions of what could happen in that place.

This is a little bit less adaptable to film. For one thing, film has a shorter narrative arc. It's two hours. The characters do not extend beyond the narrative. It is implicit in the text as to what happens before and what happens after. The characters imply, they tell us what came before. There's only two hours, there's not much time for character development, so you've got to do it in a nutshell, tell us where these characters came from and what made them what they are. To find out what happens after, either you don't care, or there's a clever little intertitle sequence at the end, wherein "John Smith lived to the age of 38 and grew prosperous in his short time on Earth." Something to that effect. Characters... Our concern for the characters starts at the beginning of the movie and ends at the end credit. And movies are usually temporally compressed. There's very little time between act one of a movie and act two.

But to me, the important element of fandom is that element of production. This idea of taking an aspect of a text and adopting it as your own and using it in your own work. And that can still apply to film, although in a different way.

INT. LEE

So, how does that apply in this case?

RES. LEE

Well, in this case, simply and honestly, I am so enamored of this style, this thing called the David Fincher movie, that I want to take this style for my own for use in my own movies. This is a little different from television fandom.

What do I mean by that style? Well, there are certain elements, a handful of things that makes a movie a David Fincher Movie.

Clip from *Fight Club*. JACK and TYLER fight.

First, and most obvious is probably a thematic element, the brutality of the story. In no David Fincher movie is there an absence of brutality. *Fight Club*, *Se7en*, *Panic Room*, *The Game*, *Alien3*, they all feature characters who would normally be normal, non-violent, humanist characters. These characters are forced into a situation where they have to make a choice.

And, that choice is the second element of the David Fincher movie. Do I continue to continue to live my humanist life and allow whatever injustice to continue, or do I become this brutalizing,

	vicious character?
Clip from <i>The Game</i> . Nick holds a gun shakily.	Here, in what I call the “psychedelic sequence” from <i>The Game</i> , we can see how this normality vs. brutality can border on absurdism. Here’s Nicholas Van Orten, wealthy financier, and he’s supposed to be a tough guy? He doesn’t even know how to hold a gun properly.
Clip from <i>Panic Room</i> . MEG and RAOUL fight.	And, it’s important to note that the characters always choose brutality in the David Fincher world, usually because the alternative is unattractive. A loss of society, a loss of humanism, it’s almost always a self-defense mechanism, this brutality. And the important thing to note that makes a David Fincher movie different from a standard action flick or a traditional thriller is that this brutality changes the character to such a point that Fincher’s movies always end with a suicide imagery. In <i>Alien3</i> for instance, Ripley jumps off the ledge into the molten metal to kill that alien within her. In <i>Panic Room</i> , Burnham goes back into the house, knowing he’s almost certainly going to get captured by the police, in order to kill Raoul and save Meg and her family. In <i>Fight Club</i> , probably the most blatant suicide imagery, and the most artistically rendered is Jack putting the gun in his mouth and firing it in order to kill Tyler, the psychotic character inside him.
Clip from <i>Alien3</i> . Ripley jumps, falls into molten lead.	
Clip from <i>Fight Club</i> . Jack shoots himself in the mouth.	<p>TYLER (clip audio) Where you going with this, IKEA boy?</p> <p>Hey, it’s you and me. Friends?</p> <p>JACK (clip audio) Tyler, I want you to really listen to me.</p> <p>TYLER (clip audio) Okay.</p> <p>JACK (clip audio) My eyes are open.</p> <p>(GUNSHOT)</p> <p>TYLER (clip audio) (Whispered) What’s that smell?</p> <p>RES. LEE So, the character makes a choice to accept brutality as a major part of their lives, and because of that choice they are unable to return to their normal standard of life; they are forced to kill themselves, either</p>

literally or figuratively to return to any sort of life. And that life is always changed by this brutality.

Clip from *Se7en*.
Fingerprint
machine screen
is blurry.

The next aspect of the David Fincher movie is the bleak world. The diagesis in a Fincher movie is never clean. It is filthy. It is grimy it is dusty, it is dark, gray, it is every film noir movie ever made – without as much lighting. Things do not work right. If you look at the technology in a David Fincher movie, even the most advanced computers, the most advanced technological devices, they don't work right. Look at the scenes from *Se7en* where the officer boots up the police fingerprint computer, it takes a few minutes for that computer image to come up cleanly. The CAT scanner in the *Alien* movie, that doesn't produce a crystal-clear image, the technology doesn't work right.

Clip from *Alien3*.
CAT scanner
produces hashy
image.

AARON (clip audio)
It's still fuzzy.

RIPLEY (clip audio)
Hit enhancement.

RES. LEE

There is something glitchy about every piece of technology in a David Fincher movie.

Low-angle shot
from *Alien3*.

The low angles are another element. David Fincher relegates the audience to a position of powerlessness; we cannot change this situation these characters are in, we are forced to watch from the point of view of a mouse or a roach on the floor. Combine this with a few high-angle shots, which give us basic layouts, give us a spatial organization to the room, we look on with a God's-eye view. We still can't interfere with the action, we're too far away for that, but we can see what's going on.

Wastebasket ride
sequence from
Fight Club.

Another element is the close-up of the inanimate object. Fincher loves the mise-en-scene of a close-up shot of inanimate objects. Watch any of the movies and you will see that from time to time the action will be cut into with a shot of a glass, a cup, a mirror. Some element of life is being focused on. What Fincher may be doing here is focusing on the reality of the situation, bringing an element of banality into it. Here is this extraordinary situation, here is this character who has made this extraordinary choice to become this brutal, destructive character, and yet here he is with a Starbucks coffee cup. His life is just like yours. This could easily be you in this situation.

Sound mix issues is another element of the Fincher movie. The background sound, the music, the sound effects, are miked to an incredibly high level, so much so that if you watch these movies in a theatre with an excellent sound system, you will probably have a mild buzz in your ears by the time you finish watching the movie. A truck cranking up sounds like a whole platoon of Army tanks firing off. At the same time, the dialogue is miked as low as possible. If you watch *Alien3* on the DVD and do not have excellent speakers, you will not hear many of the exchanges between Clemens and Ripley; they are completely inaudible. The background sound is miked so high and the dialogue is miked so low that you can't hear them.

This is an attempt, I think, at reality on Fincher's part. I say this because the human voice registers at 60 to 70 decibels and a truck cranking up registers at 105. If you're talking to your friend and a bus drive past, you cease to be able to hear your friend; you hear the bus, the bus is louder. Mechanical sounds are louder than human sounds. This may be an attempt at realism, it may be an artistic statement by Fincher – it doesn't matter what these characters say, watch what they do. Tyler in *Fight Club* may be talking about a New World Order, he may be talking about freeing people...

Fight Club.
TYLER
addresses the
audience
directly.

TYLER (clip audio)

You are not your job. You are not how much money you have in the bank. You are not the car you drive. You are not the contents of your wallet. You are not your fucking khakis. You are the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the universe.

RES. LEE

...what he's actually doing is blowing up buildings. Now what's more important to you? That he's freeing people? Or that he's doing so by an incredibly destructive means?

Another aspect of the Fincher style is the "digital flyby." In this sequence from *Panic Room* we see how Fincher combines actual footage with CGI to create a virtual camera that can go anywhere – even through the floors and into the keyway of a lock.

Finally, and to me the most telling aspect of the Fincher movies is the postmodern identity. Characters live in the world. There are commercial references. There are intertextual references...

Se7en. MILLS
reads book titles.

MILLS (clip audio)

The Marquis de Sadé...

SOMERSET (clip audio)

	That's the Marquis de Sade.
	MILLS (clip audio) Whatever.
<i>Panic Room.</i> SARAH uses a flashlight to flash SOS.	MEG (clip audio) That Morse code? SARAH (clip audio) SOS.
	MEG (clip audio) Pretty good. Where'd you learn that?
	SARAH (clip audio) <i>Titanic.</i>
<i>Alien3.</i> GOLIC scrapes the vent tunnel walls and sings.	GOLIC (clip audio) (singing) In the year 7510 / If God's a-comin', he ought to make it by then...
<i>Fight Club.</i> JACK's hand burns.	JACK (VO) (clip audio) I tried not to think of the words <i>searing</i> or <i>flesh</i> .
<i>Se7en.</i> MILLS kisses TRACY goodbye.	MILLS (clip audio) Serpico's gotta go.
<i>Panic Room.</i> BURNHAM points at RAOUL.	BURNHAM (clip audio) And I don't want any help from Joe Pesci over here.
<i>The Game.</i> NICK hides in the back of FEINGOLD's car, breaking into CRS headquarters.	FEINGOLD (clip audio) What're you gonna do, anyway? You're not gonna get your money back. NICHOLAS (clip audio) I don't care about money. I'm pulling back the curtain. I want to meet the Wizard.
	RES. LEE

	...and, more playfully, later on when we get to <i>Fight Club</i> , we find that certain aspects of the movie are self-referential.
<i>Fight Club</i> . TYLER holds a gun in JACK's mouth.	JACK (VO) (clip audio) People are always asking me if I know Tyler Durden.
	TYLER (clip audio) This is it. Ground Zero. Would you like to say a few words to mark the occasion?
	JACK (clip audio) (Mumbles)
	JACK (VO) (clip audio) With a gun barrel in your teeth, you speak only in vowels.
	JACK (clip audio) I can't think of anything.
JACK and TYLER are in a cinema projection booth.	JACK (clip audio) See, a movie doesn't come all on one big reel, it comes on a few, so someone has to be there to quickly switch the projectors at the exact moment that one reel ends and the next begins. If you look for it, you can see these little dots come into the upper right-hand corner of the screen.
A burn appears on screen.	TYLER (clip audio) In the industry, we call them "cigarette burns."
JACK addresses the audience	JACK (clip audio) Tyler also worked sometimes as a banquet waiter at the luxurious Pressman Hotel.
TYLER holds a gun in JACK's mouth.	TYLER (clip audio) Three minutes. This is it. The beginning. Ground Zero.
	JACK (VO) (clip audio) I think this is about where we came in.
	TYLER (clip audio) Would you like to say a few words to mark the occasion?
	JACK (clip audio) (Mumbles)

TYLER (clip audio)
I'm sorry?

JACK (clip audio)
I still can't think of anything.

TYLER (clip audio)
Ahh... Flashback humor.

RES. LEE
...for example, the "Flashback Humor" sequence, which is most easily pointed to. The voiceover narration, which occurs throughout *Fight Club*. The carrying over of the idea of the organs speaking – I am Jack's liver, I am Jack's raging bile duct, I am Jack's complete lack of surprise. Those concepts.

David Fincher's postmodern identity stands out very loudly, very plainly, and very clearly in his movies.

Montage of various scenes from all five movies.

Looking at this style, you can see some clue as to why I like it so much. It relies on technology, on humor, on postmodern images. It's a very current look that David Fincher brings us in his movies, and it's that look which I hope to be able to incorporate into my own films at some point.

INT. LEE
Well, I guess what I'm really asking is, is this really fandom?

RES. LEE
Well, I would argue that yes, this is very much a fandom, just in a different form. Because I'm consuming beyond the text, because I'm consuming within the text, I would say that I am not the typical consumer of a David Fincher movie, I would say that I am consuming at a different level. Therefore, I am a fan.

The difference between me and a so-called traditional fan, a *Star Trek* fan, a *West Wing* fan, a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan is that I am little concerned with the actual narrative; the covert scripted dialogue-and-character text. I am more concerned with the production. I am not concerned with the characters. The characters are fun, they're intriguing, but I could really care less. These stories can be told with these characters, they're not particularly that compelling. They're just here to tell a story.

I'm not even that interested in the story, the diagesis. What I am interesting in are the aspects of production: the camera, the sound, the

editing. Those are the aspects of the David Fincher movies that I find compelling. More so than any other movies I watch.

INT. LEE

Okay, so what does this mean, exactly?

RES. LEE

Well, it means that my fandom, which is focused through the narrative down to the actual means of production, is potentially a more postmodern fandom as I understand the word postmodern. To me, the postmodern is that which delights in exposing its means of production by the means of violating the fourth wall, by the means of self-referentiality, of intertextuality. That is what defines the postmodern to me. Ergo, my fandom of the David Fincher movies, my appreciation of the David Fincher movies, because it comes from the system of production itself and not from that which is produced strikes me as a more postmodern entity than a fan who appreciates the characters of a television show, who watches the show with the intention of consuming the story at such a level as to be able to continue the story beyond the overt narrative.

I think this is, arguably, the most important aspect of my fandom of David Fincher.

INT. LEE

Okay, well, thank you very much and good luck.

RES. LEE

Thank you.

BLACK,
TITLES

CREDITS

David and Me: In order to form a more postmodern fandom

Submitted by Lee Greenway
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“U Can’t Touch This”
performed by
MC Hammer

“Linus and Lucy”
performed by
The Vince Guaraldi Trio

“Cover of the Rolling Stone”
performed by
Dr. Hook

Fanfare from “Abblason”
performed by

Doc Severinson

“20th Century Fox Fanfare”
performed by
The London Philharmonic Orchestra
Under the direction of
John Williams

“Sheep go to Heaven”
performed by
Cake

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This film is dedicated to
Mom
and
Dad

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