

The Loss of the Real

Hyper-reality in *A Scanner Darkly* by Philip K Dick and *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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1. Introduction

“The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.” Ecclesiastes¹

In our contemporary culture, the pervasive influence of images from film, television, and advertising has led to a loss of distinction between real and imagined. There has been a change in the register of representation, and reality is no longer contrasted by the imaginary. The universal understanding of what is real and what is unreal has ceased to exist, and has been replaced by a general indifference to any such distinction.² Jean Baudrillard has termed this condition “the loss of the real.”³ With the loss of the real we are left with a culture of hyper-reality, which is defined as a culture filled with models of a real that never existed.⁴ There must necessarily be consequences of losing the distinction between the real and the imagined, and one of those consequences is that we risk that the real no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer has to measure itself against either an ideal or a negative instance. When that happens, we are left with a reality that is no longer anything but operational.⁵

A Scanner Darkly by Philip K. Dick and *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk are both novels that lend themselves well to a discussion of the possible consequences of living in a hyper-real world. The protagonists of *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* are unable to distinguish between the real and the imaginary and are therefore in a condition of hyper-reality. The issues concerning their hyper-real existences are investigated in the two novels with the assistance of a selection of theoretical works. In the analysis of the novels the main focus is on how the protagonists experience the hyper-real world, as well as the effect the hyper-real condition has on the development of their individual identities. By comparing and contrasting the two novels we will also examine the nature of the hyper-real, and establish whether there

¹ The quote is actually not by Ecclesiastes, but by Baudrillard. He states that “[e]ven an entirely made-up quote from Ecclesiastes receives official corroboration by the fact of its being published.” Presumably, he made up the quote to illustrate his arguments about a world filled with simulations. Jean Baudrillard. *Fragments. Cool Memories III, 1991-95* Verso (1997), p 1

² Daniel J. Boorstin *The Image. A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. Atheneum (1961), p 36

³ Peter Barry. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester University Press (2009), 84

⁴ Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*. The University of Michigan (1994), p1

⁵ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 2

has been a change in its character and manifestation. In addition the analysis investigates which strategies the protagonists employ in order to resist or cope with a hyper-real society.

Different theorists have varied views on why the hyper-real has come to surround us everywhere. Baudrillard argues that reality is no longer what it once was, and that the decisive turning point was the transition from signs that covered up something, to signs that cover up that there is nothing. In his view the world went from a theology of truth and secrecy to an era of simulacra and simulation. He claims that the reason for this change was the disappearance of God, and the lack of a new authority with enough power to separate the false from the true.⁶ As a consequence, truth, reference and objective cause all ceased to exist.⁷ The hyper-reality that follows allows for all possible interpretations, even the most contradictory, and they are all equally true.⁸ This presents a few problems, one of them being that the logic of simulation has got nothing to do with the logic of facts and the order of reason.⁹ The possibility is therefore left open that even law and order are nothing but simulations. As a consequence we could be facing the end of power, since the law can only control what is real and rational. Baudrillard argues that we are already in this situation, and that power has for a long time produced nothing but the signs of its resemblance. The simulation of power remanufactures artificial social, economic and political stakes in order to hide the fact that real power is no longer present. As a result of this condition there is a collective demand for signs of power, and it is claimed that the president of the United States of America is as an example of such a sign.¹⁰ Baudrillard argues that no one would give consent and devotion to a real person, and so the power and quality to govern is given to the president through his resemblance to previous heads of state.¹¹

In a hyper-real world nothing separates the poles of space and time, which causes an implosion of meaning. The hyper-real is present wherever this distinction can no longer be maintained, be it the political, biological, psychological or mediatized sphere.¹² The result is a superficial transparency of everything, where all original cultural forms and all determined languages are absorbed into the mode of advertising. This does not necessarily mean

⁶ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 6

⁷ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 3

⁸ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 17

⁹ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 16

¹⁰ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 20-23

¹¹ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 26

¹² Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 31

advertising itself, but the form of advertising, which is a form without depth. According to Baudrillard this is the lowest form of energy of the sign.¹³ The nostalgia for authenticity that arises from this condition leads to a panic-stricken production of the real, which only serve to bring us further into the hyper-real.¹⁴ Every society that faces this problem will try to compensate by producing and overproducing reality in order to restore the real that escapes it.¹⁵

Baudrillard bases a lot of his theory on the “three orders of simulacra.”¹⁶ The three orders of simulacra reflect the changes in the history of signs that leads up to a hyper-real society, and are connected to three historical periods. In the pre-industrial period the simulacra were founded on imitations of the real. There was always a distance between the simulated and the real, and the simulated tended to oppose or contrast the real. In the utopian genre, the typical literary genre of the period, there was room for the imaginary, with a great distance between the real and ideal world. This distance made it possible to offer an alternative universe. In the industrial period the simulacra were based on production and globalization. While the pre-industrial simulations contrasted reality, the simulations of the industrial period added new possibilities outside of reality, often in the form of science fiction. The science fiction genre offers worlds that are not qualitatively different from the real world. It presents the same schema and scenarios, but includes added possibilities. The distance between the real and ideal is according to Baudrillard already reduced by the time we reach the industrial period. Classical science fiction explores an expanding universe, but when the real and the imaginary cover the same territory, there is nothing left to explore. When the real is saturated with signs and models, it leaves no room for exploration and imagination. For Baudrillard this marks the end of science fiction and the beginning of the hyper-real.¹⁷

In the last period, the period of models, the simulacra are founded on simulations and information. The signs no longer contrast the imaginary with the real, as the signs of the real are substituted for the real.¹⁸ The distance between the two has disappeared, which in effect means that there is no way to distinguish between them. It is at this stage that we have truly entered the hyper-real. In this hyper-real era of models, Baudrillard claims that there can be

¹³ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 87

¹⁴ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 6-7

¹⁵ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 23

¹⁶ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 121

¹⁷ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 122-124

¹⁸ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 2

no fiction, because the distance between real and ideal is gone. There can be no imaginary because everything is already a model of the real.¹⁹ Science fiction can perhaps survive in the hyper-real era by resurrecting “historical” worlds with desperate hallucinations of the past. In order to succeed, “new” science fiction would have to attempt to revitalize fragments of the universal simulation we call the real world.²⁰ It would not be able to create a double or parallel universe, but a hyper-real one, since we are always already in the other world.²¹

This thesis is not going to attempt to define reality, as that would be a topic better fitting for a much longer discussion. It will however investigate the nature of the hyper-real that threatens to cover reality. In doing so it will take the same approach as Daniel J. Boorstin when he states that “I do not know what reality is, but somehow I do know an illusion when I see one.”²² By investigating the nature of a simulated reality it could be that we end up with a better understanding of authentic reality as well. Boorstin’s discussion on pseudo-events offers a demonstration of how hyper-reality manifests itself in our society, and a slightly different explanation of how it originated. According to Boorstin, there are certain specific events that can explain our present condition. In the 19th century, the introduction of new technology, such as the telegraph and the rotary press, led to an increased demand for news from people.²³ In order to meet this demand, “pseudo-events” were created, because the real world could not possibly offer enough events to excite and interest the public. With pseudo-events Boorstin is referring to events that are planned rather than spontaneous. An earthquake is an example of a spontaneous and natural event, while an interview is categorized as a planned pseudo-event. The main purpose for the pseudo-event is to be reported or reproduced, and its success is measured by how widely it is copied and distributed. One of the reasons why pseudo-events blur the edges of reality, and lead us into a state of hyper-reality, is that they provide an artificial complication of experience by providing more information than what was originally available. Another reason is that whenever a pseudo-event has to compete with a spontaneous event, the pseudo-event tends to dominate. This is because they are planned by human beings, and therefore are more intelligible and reassuring to people. They

¹⁹ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 121-122

²⁰ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 123-124

²¹ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 125

²² Boorstin. *The Image*, p ix

²³ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 12-13

can be served when people are most susceptible to them and can be repeated at will to reinforce the impression.²⁴

Boorstin makes the connection between the hyper-real and the advanced society we live in. He argues that our problems are a result of our strengths rather than our weaknesses, as our wealth, literacy, technology, and progress have given us the opportunity and resources to create a state of national self-hypnosis.²⁵ Each of us individually provides the market and the demand for the illusions that surrounds us, and we have in fact become so accustomed to them that we mistake them for reality.²⁶ Boorstin claims that although we have never been more the masters of our environment, we have never felt more deceived and disappointed. This is because we are ruled by such extravagant expectations of what the world holds, and of our power to shape it through fabricated purposes and invented standards.²⁷

Albert Borgmann is also concerned with issues related to the presence and importance of modern technology in our society. He argues that technology and information are aspects of our society that enable the hyper-real. Borgmann illustrates how hyper-reality has its roots in ancient human culture and claims that the developments within the area of information and technology are part of a historical decline of meaning.²⁸ He traces the beginning of this connection back to the birth of the written language, when the nature of signs changed from being objects to becoming representations of those objects.²⁹ Borgmann claims that this change led to a shift in cultural energy, from the presence of things to the reference of signs, and from meaning to information.³⁰ This again led to the possibility of an endless accumulation of information, where unchecked accumulations no longer constitute precision—which is the signal benefit of natural information—but confusion.³¹ As a result we live in a society where we generate and possess more information than ever.³²

The hyper-real is enabled by a combination of information and technology, as information through the power of technology steps forward as a rival of reality. According to Borgmann,

²⁴ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 39-40

²⁵ Boorstin. *The Image*, p ix, 3

²⁶ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 5-6

²⁷ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 4-5

²⁸ Albert Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*. The University of Chicago Press (1999), p 15

²⁹ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 43

³⁰ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 114

³¹ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 49

³² Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 218

we are now at a point where an irreversible change in the nature of reality has occurred, as we are moving away from information *about reality* to information *as reality*.³³ The lightness of information is like a layer that covers up moral gravity and material density, and slowly alters the definition and character of human beings.³⁴

There are theorists that deal with hyper-reality and simulations that are not included in this discussion. Umberto Eco views hyper-reality in a similar way to Baudrillard as he argues that a hyper-real world offers absolute unreality as real presence. This unreality creates a network of references and influences that finally spread to the products of high culture and to the entertainment industry. Since Baudrillard and Eco share many of the same arguments, Eco will not be part of the theoretical framework of this thesis. Baudrillard is preferred mainly because he offers a more extensive discussion on the nature of the hyper-real. It is still interesting to have a quick look at some of Eco's main arguments. He claims that America is so obsessed with realism that all reconstructions must be perfect copies of the reality presented. This is the result of an American imagination that demands the real thing, but must fabricate the absolute fake in order to achieve this.³⁵ What is especially interesting to note is that Eco argues a difference between the societies of the Atlantic and Pacific coast. He claims that compulsive imitation is most visibly present where wealth has no history, with reference to the post-urban civilization of the late colonized West. Eco claims that this is an artificial region, with artificial cities like Los Angeles devoted to entertainment.³⁶ The "Absolute Fake" is seen as an offspring of the unhappy awareness of living in a present without depth.³⁷

Boorstin and Borgmann are not the only theorists who have considered how technology can affect reality. The power of technology and its continued development has changed people's view on reality to the degree where some even doubt its existence. Nick Bostrom claims that it is possible that our world has been constructed by future post-humans. His main argument is that if we believe that there will be computer-simulated humans in the future, then we must consider the possibility that we are in a simulation now. Bostrom proposes the possibility of using a computer to simulate human brain activity, and suggests that a vast majority of our minds do not belong to the human race but to people simulated by the advanced descendants

³³ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, (emphasis in original) p 2, 220

³⁴ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 232

³⁵ Umberto Eco. *Travels in Hyperreality*, Harvest Book (1986), p 7-8

³⁶ Eco. *Travels in Hyperreality*, p 26

³⁷ Eco. *Travels in Hyperreality*, p 31

of an original race. He further argues that if this is the case then it is likely that we are among the simulated minds rather than the original biological ones.³⁸

Barry Dainton also deals with computer simulations, and is hugely influenced by Bostrom. He argues that those who believe that suitably programmed computers could enjoy conscious experience the same way we do, must accept the possibility that their own experience is generated as part of a computerized simulation.³⁹ He proposes several ways in which these simulations could have been done. Human beings in the future could have computers integrated in their brains which would make it possible to be fully immersed in a virtual reality.⁴⁰ He also suggests that a safe and reliable drug could be created that enable people to experience non-computer simulations where they can control the general direction of the hallucination.⁴¹ Finally, he proposes that the simulations could be created by extra-terrestrial civilizations. We broadcast to the stars on a daily basis, which means that aliens would not even have to visit Earth to gather information about human experiences.⁴² If we consider Baudrillard's argument that future science fiction would contain a desperate hallucination of the past, we might be willing to agree that it is not entirely impossible that some kind of simulated world will be created in the future. We should therefore not completely rule out the possibilities proposed by Bostrom or Dainton, but will nevertheless stick to the assumption that the hyper-real covers up a reality that still exists out there. Even though the possibility that our reality is a simulation from the future is interesting, and may even hold some insight into a selection of Philip K. Dick texts not discussed here, it is not relevant enough for further discussion in this thesis.

Baudrillard is supported by both Borgmann and Boorstin in his claim that we have entered an era of simulation, where we are substituting the signs of the real for the real.⁴³ Although they all have different explanations for when and how the hyper-real society originated, they seem to agree on its basic characteristics. Borgmann talks about information as reality and how it threatens genuine reality, in the same way that Boorstin's pseudo-events threaten the importance of real events. Baudrillard raises the question of what we are left with if a sign is

³⁸ Nick Bostrom. Are You Living In a Computer Simulation? in *Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 53, No. 211 (2003), p 1

³⁹ Barry Dainton. *Innocence Lost. Simulation Scenarios: Prospects and Consequences*. The University of Liverpool (2002), p1

⁴⁰ Dainton. *Innocence Lost*, p 6

⁴¹ Dainton. *Innocence Lost*, p 11

⁴² Dainton. *Innocence Lost*, p 13

⁴³ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 2

no longer an index of an underlying reality, but merely of other signs. The answer seems to be that we end up with a system of simulation where the signs no longer represent anything but themselves.⁴⁴ The main issue for all of them is that human-made realities are able to offer so much more than natural reality. It is reasonable to assume that such an existence is going to affect the way we live our lives.

A Scanner Darkly and *Fight Club* portray societies where the real has been replaced by the hyper-real, and where the protagonists are losing contact with reality. In addition to exploring the consequences of living in such a society, this thesis will try to conclude whether it will be possible to retrieve the reality that has been lost. Any similarities found in *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* are treated as evidence of a hyper-real that is persistent in our society, while the differences simultaneously suggests that there has been some kind of change. Such a change could be due to an alteration in the quality of the hyper-real, or in the way people have come to feel about it. By comparing and contrasting the two different examples that the novels offer, we can discover whether the position of the individual in a hyper-real society has changed too. We might be able to ascertain what it is that motivates the individuals to stand up against the hyper-real, or alternatively, what it is that discourages them from doing so.

The analysis of *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* explores the different aspects of society that according to the theorists enable the hyper-real. It discusses the importance of technology, signs, information and media, and establishes in what way they contribute to create a hyper-real society. The discussion on *A Scanner Darkly* demonstrates how the theoretical and fictional works relate to each other, and the framework created is applied to the discussion on *Fight Club* as well. In addition to exploring aspects found in the theory, the analysis also opens up for an examination of aspects that have not been a major focus for any of the theorists, such as the consumer ideology and the artificial culture it generates. This link between consumerism and hyper-reality is visible in both novels, but will become far more apparent when we reach the society presented in *Fight Club*.

⁴⁴ Barry. *Beginning Theory*, p 84

2. *A Scanner Darkly*

A Scanner Darkly was published in 1977, four years before the original French publication of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. It is unlikely that Philip K. Dick was acquainted with any of Baudrillard's earlier publications on the subject, such as *Symbolic Exchange and Death* published in 1976. What we do know is that Baudrillard was familiar with some of the works by Dick. He is mentioned several times in *Simulacra and Simulation* with comments on his interpretation and treatment of the hyper-real condition. For example, Baudrillard uses him to support his argument that our society is dealing with simulations that belong to the third order of simulacra. He claims that Dick experiments with different processes of representation in his novels, and also portrays a culture of simulation and fascination rather than production and meaning.⁴⁵

This thesis investigates the hyper-real condition in two fictional works but within a theoretical framework. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner argue that for a discussion on such a topic it is appropriate to include both theory and fiction, as the two approaches provide useful information about social experience from different viewpoints. Best and Kellner do not focus on *A Scanner Darkly* specifically but rather on Dick's work in general. Their main argument is that our post-modern society calls for a new definition of natural, social and human reality and that the reasons for this are increasingly surreal scientific and technological developments.⁴⁶ They edge closer to the subject of hyper-reality when they state that Dick was one of the first science fiction writers to explore a culture in which the distinction between reality and illusion implodes.⁴⁷ The novels written by Dick offer "...fantastic technological worlds with strange forms of media culture and art, simulacra, and a collapse of the boundaries of modernity that anticipate conceptions of hyper-reality, implosion, simulation and the virtual..." Best and Kellner also offer some reasons why science fiction lends itself especially well to a discussion of changes in reality. According to them, the genre has a unique ability to dramatize present and future conditions of social life. It is known to portray radical otherness and discontinuity, which are modes of representation that seem appropriate for a postmodern condition characterized by "turmoil and unpredictability." With

⁴⁵ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 65

⁴⁶ Examples of these scientific and technological developments range from frozen embryos and transgenic species to cloned animals and space travel. Steven Best, Douglas Kellner. "The Apocalyptic Vision of Philip K. Dick" in *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies*. Volume 3, Number 2 (2003), p188

⁴⁷ Best, Kellner. "The Apocalyptic Vision of Philip K. Dick", p 190

scientific and technological progress making it possible to clone animals and travel into space they argue that it seems even more fitting, as the distance between science fiction and science fact is rapidly collapsing. Dick illustrates this by portraying tendencies in the present that might lead to a future where society and reality will dissolve into unrecognizable forms. The danger presented is that ordinary categories of space, time, and reality will be torn apart.⁴⁸

Although a lot of criticism is available on Philip K. Dick, there are surprisingly few that focus on *A Scanner Darkly*. Most of the critics either examine Dick's work in general, like Best and Kellner, or they focus on other parts of his works. David Golumbia, too, has chosen to review a collection of Dick's work. He takes a turn into the realm of metaphysics that this short thesis will not be able to follow. What it is important to note from his article is that there are alternative ways to try to solve the hyper-real problem. While one alternative is to focus on a "practical solution...where the problem of reality is resolved pragmatically...through action" it is also possible to search for an answer from a metaphysical point of view.⁴⁹

A Scanner Darkly is set in what was then the future of 1994, and in addition to the futuristic setting and the fictional drug it includes a few other science fiction elements. The effect of this kind of estranged representation is that the reader recognizes the subject, but at the same time it is made to seem unfamiliar.⁵⁰ Even though the world Dick created in *A Scanner Darkly* was very similar to his contemporary society, the "novums" presented enabled Dick to make the problems concerning the hyper-real more evident, especially those concerning individual and collective identity.⁵¹ While these problems were already present in society, they were made more extreme by being interrogated within a work of science fiction.

In *A Scanner Darkly* we meet undercover narcotics agent Bob Arctor. His assignment involves infiltrating the drug culture, where he uses a fake identity. What is more interesting is that to avoid corruption, his colleagues at the Orange County Sheriff's Office does not have access to his true identity either. This has become necessary because they are working on a case to catch the manufacturers and distributors of a dangerous drug called Substance D:

⁴⁸ Best, Kellner. "The Apocalyptic Vision of Philip K. Dick", p 187-188

⁴⁹ David Golumbia. "Resisting "The World": Philip K. Dick, Cultural Studies, and Metaphysical Realism" in *Science Fiction Studies*. Volume 23, Number 1 (1996), p 87

⁵⁰ Darko Suvin. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre" in *College English*, Vol. 34, No. 3 December (1972), p 374

⁵¹ A novum is defined as a strange newness. Suvin. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre", p 373.

...the implication was, both publicly and no doubt under official wraps, that the S.D. Agency – as the authorities arbitrarily termed it – had penetrated so far up into law-enforcement groups, both local and national, that those who found out anything usable about its operations soon either didn't care or didn't exist.⁵²

Due to this situation Arctor is first introduced to us as agent Fred, which is his name whenever he is at work. The first time we meet Arctor he appears as Fred to the outside world, as he is about to give a speech on his fight against narcotics to a group of Lions Club members. To protect his identity he wears what is referred to as a “scramble suit.” In the year 1994 this suit has become standard equipment for undercover agents. It is made out of a thin membrane that makes the person wearing it impossible to recognize, because it projects a random combination of every thinkable facial feature. The host of the Lions Club event informs the crowd that “...once within the scramble suit, [he] cannot be identified by voice, or even by technological voiceprint, or by appearance. He looks, does he not, like a vague blur and nothing more? Am I right?”⁵³ A scramble suit ensures instant anonymity for the user and therefore offers valuable protection for the undercover agents.

The scramble suit and the “holo-scanner” are important elements of science fiction in the novel. As his superior officers have become aware of increasing drug activity centred on Arctor, they assign Fred to investigate him, unaware that he will be investigating himself. The suspicion against Bob Arctor's household grows and a holo-scanner system is put up in his house to monitor all activity. The system consists of cameras and microphones that record sound and image, and a scanner that processes this information and turns it into three dimensional images. The scramble suit and the holo-scanner are in a way two sides of a broader “novum.” They are both information technology devices that manipulate reality, and as the devices gather more information, they create a distance between the user and reality. Arctor is assigned the task of going through all the scanner material and reporting back on any suspicious behavior, essentially spying on himself.

A central concern in this thesis is how individual identity is treated in the hyper-real society. As with many of Dick's previous works, *A Scanner Darkly* deals with ontological questions of reality and existence. We are not going to enter a discussion on the nature of being but will rather explore the cognitive problems related to hyper-reality. Arctor perceives and gathers

⁵² Philip K. Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*. First Vintage Books Edition (1991), p 23-24

⁵³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 15-16

information about his reality, but is unable to process this information correctly. Arctor's cognitive abilities are gradually weakened, and the scramble suit and holo-scanners will play a major role in this. They will also demonstrate how new technology made it possible for the collective to control the individual, and thereby create a tension between individual and collective identity. There are instances where this tension is problematized without the interference of technology as well. After the Lions Club speech, Arctor reflects upon the difference in people's attitude if you are dressed as an addict versus as a straight person. In his career as an undercover agent he has experienced how your appearance plays a role in deciding how society will judge and treat you. It is a fact that if someone is represented in a certain way, we are usually ready to believe them, as Arctor then exemplifies:

You put on a bishop's robe and miter, he pondered, and walk around in that, and people bow and genuflect and like that, and try to kiss your ring, if not your ass, and pretty soon you're a bishop. So to speak. What is identity? he asked himself. Where does the act end? Nobody knows.⁵⁴

In a world where reality has become nothing but operational, representation is everything. If the difference between real and fake has disappeared, then there is nothing left to distinguish between a real bishop and one that dresses and acts like one. In fact it becomes irrelevant, because without a real there cannot be a fake. This example is important in understanding the later confusion concerning Arctor's identity. With him it becomes difficult to decide when the act ends, because by the time we meet him he is heading in a direction where he identifies more with his addict identity than his undercover agent identity. The problem for Arctor is that when he is surrounded by his addict friends, he is one of them. He talks like them, thinks like them, and acts like them. By changing his appearance he successfully switches between two identities, and it is therefore hard for Arctor to understand what it is that decides his true identity.

In addition to having these two identities, he is also part of two collectives, but it is clear from the start that he only really identifies with one of them. While he used to be a conforming member of society before he received his second identity, as a part of the drug scene he is an outcast in the eyes of the "straight" people. Only when he wears his scramble suit can he participate in "straight" activities, such as the speech he held for the Lion Club members. There is an increasing conflict inside Arctor as he becomes more and more alienated from his

⁵⁴ Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, p 20-21

“straight” identity, and the collective he used to be a part of. This is not so strange considering the fact that he knows that they would not have accepted him if they met him as his addict identity. Although he ended up excluded from one community, he was welcomed into another one. Arctor and his addict room-mates make up their own collective and together they belong to the larger community of the drug sub-culture. In this community he is able to relate to the people around him. It is in the addict environment that he feels at home and as he falls deeper and deeper into this lifestyle, it becomes his reality.

By Arctor asking where the act ends, the problem of false representation is not limited to individual identity. Just like Arctor slipping into his fake identity, we find examples where society is replacing its originals with copies in a similar way. This is shown early in the novel when Barris and Charles Freck are out for lunch. Barris’ patty melt consists of melted imitation cheese and fake ground beef on special organic bread.⁵⁵ The ingredients of the sandwich are designed by humans to look and taste like something different than what they actually are. Barris does not react to any of the artificial parts of his lunch, but asks Freck what kind of bread he has been served. Although organic bread may sound natural to us, it has been argued that this is yet another example of how the hyper-real surrounds us everywhere.⁵⁶

We should consider the setting of this novel when we discuss the problem of false representation. Arctor works for the police department in Orange County and lives in the city of Anaheim. Both Orange County and Anaheim are for several reasons associated with false representation and simulations. Orange County is for example home to several amusement parks, among them Disneyland, which is located in Anaheim. Baudrillard argues that these amusement parks are only presented as imaginary to maintain the illusion that the surrounding world is real and not just a hyper-real simulation.⁵⁷ Dick shared this fascination with Disneyland and was even interviewed there once by Paris TV. He also supports the argument that society is filled with pseudo-realities and fake humans and suggests that it is just a larger version of Disneyland.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 27

⁵⁶ The introduction of natural food and health food is only an attempt to reinvent reality, just like jogging is a recycled and updated version of walking. Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 13

⁵⁷ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 12

⁵⁸ Philip K. Dick. “How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later” (1978)
http://deoxy.org/pkd_how2build.htm 22.03.12

Arctor as well describes Orange County as an artificial place before he becomes too disoriented to know what is going on around him. He explains that “[i]n Southern California it didn’t make any difference anyhow where you went; there was always the same McDonaldburger place over and over, like a circular strip that turned past you as you pretended to go somewhere.”⁵⁹ There is no natural variation to be found, only repetitions of identical man-made copies. If one has ever driven through California, one recognizes this description. Along the highway you pass one strip of shops, restaurants and motels after the other, and they all look the same.⁶⁰ Arctor’s view is that “[l]ife in Anaheim, California, was a commercial for itself, endlessly replayed. Nothing changed; it just spread out farther and farther in the form of neon ooze.”⁶¹ With signs that inform you that the same original burger has been copied fifty billion times, it is fair to say that we are dealing with a society where the copies have taken over for the originals. Arctor believes that this is the very reason why the country became what he calls “plastic,” and concludes that it was as if “[w]hat there was always more of had been congealed into permanence long ago, as if the automatic factory that cranked out these objects had jammed in the *on* position.”⁶² This artificial environment made it possible for the police department to impose a reality upon Arctor that he easily accepted. In Baudrillard’s third order of simulacra the world is already without depth and nothing is left to distinguish simulated situations from real ones.⁶³

In the beginning of the novel it is apparent that although he is unable to decide which one of them he identifies with, Arctor is aware that he has two identities. As the plot unfolds there are instances that show that this awareness is disappearing. While working undercover he has developed a drug habit and he is now losing control of this habit. We observe the gradual slip into the identity that he was faking and notice how the distinction between his two identities becomes blurry. Housemates Luckman and Barris wonder how many people share Arctor’s name, which makes Arctor think:

How many Bob Arctors are there? A weird and fucked-up thought. Two that I can think of, he thought. The one called Fred, who will be watching the other one, called Bob. The same person. Or is it? Is Fred actually the same as Bob?

⁵⁹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 22

⁶⁰ The strip mall is such an essential characteristic of the California suburbia that its original floor plan, the basic Main Street/sidewalk layout, is known as the “California” design.
<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/01.24.02/cover/stripmalls-0204.html> 20.03.12

⁶¹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 22

⁶² Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, (emphasis in the original) p 22

⁶³ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulations*, p 122, 126

Does anybody know? I would know, if anyone did, because I'm the only person in the world that knows that Fred is Bob Arctor. *But*, he thought, *who am I? Which of them is me?*⁶⁴

At this point he is still able to understand that the two identities of Bob and Fred share the same body, but he is struggling to define their relationship to one another. As his drug abuse escalates, it becomes progressively more difficult for Arctor to keep track of his double identity. One of the reasons why he struggles to separate fantasy from reality is that he lacks a fixed reference point. Without a clear distinction between reality and illusion, Arctor and the other characters in *A Scanner Darkly* constantly risk falling into a paranoid fantasy world. We are close to a description of how the hyper-real is perceived when Arctor reflects that "...the same murk that covers them covers me; the murk of this dreary dream world we float around in."⁶⁵ This "murk" could be compared to layers of information, simulations, or pseudo-events, anything that separates the individual from reality. For Albert Borgmann, too much information creates a distance between people and reality, while Baudrillard's third order of simulacra is made up of simulations that hide the fact that there is no real. Daniel J. Boorstin argues a "thicket of unreality" stands between us and the facts of life.⁶⁶ The "murk" that Arctor talks about is just another way to describe how the hyper-real obscures reality. The characters constantly experience an inability to distinguish real from imagined. Luckman comments on this when they try to establish whether someone broke into their house or not, as he says "...[w]e'll never know. For sure. It's that gray area again."⁶⁷ They seem to often find themselves in this "gray area" between reality and illusion, which is a consequence of living in a world where the hyper-real has replaced the real and the distinction between the two is lost. In their daily experiences they struggle with the same problem that Boorstin deals with in his discussion on pseudo-events, as their relation to the underlying reality is ambiguous.⁶⁸

The only point of reference available to Arctor is Donna, a girl that is as messed up as he is. Donna is one of the dealers Arctor uses in an attempt to get higher up in the drug system. Although it is never confirmed that they are a couple, the other characters refer to her as Bob's girl.⁶⁹ When Arctor and his friends freak out and want to sell the house because they

⁶⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, (emphasis in the original) p 74-75

⁶⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 79

⁶⁶ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 3

⁶⁷ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 70

⁶⁸ One of the main characteristics of the pseudo-event is that the relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. The interest of the pseudo-event arises largely from this ambiguity. Boorstin. *The Image*, p 11

⁶⁹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 29

are convinced that drugs have been planted there, Donna is the one that guides them back to reality by asking a simple, sensible question. She looks past the paranoid rambling and only wants to know whether Arctor actually intends to sell the house. As Arctor explains, “Donna, always, was a pivot point of reality for him; for her this was the basic, natural question. He wished he could answer.”⁷⁰ When reality and fantasy are mixed up it is with Donna’s help that Arctor is able to separate them again. The problem is that if she is his only reference point, his link to reality is a rather weak one. Just like Arctor, she shifts between two identities, and is equally unable to conform to the “straight” lifestyle. When, after hitting a Coca Cola truck with her car in protest of capitalist monopolies, she reflects to herself that “[w]ell, it was bound to happen sooner or later, her war, her taking on a symbol and a reality that outweighed her.”⁷¹ One should think that as an undercover agent, the office should be Arctor’s anchor and link to reality. In his daily life he is surrounded by addicts with no better grasp on reality than himself, but with the hours he spends at the office he should be able to separate real from imagined. The problem is that he is unable to relate to anyone at the office. In their scramble suits they all appear as vague blurs without any warmth or feeling. Whenever he interacts with Hank, his superior officer, it was common procedure that “[t]hey became neutral; they spoke in a neutral fashion, they looked neutral.”⁷²

There are incidents that show that Arctor is forgetting that he has two identities and that he is becoming unable to take responsibility for his own actions. One of these is when he cannot remember that he paid a locksmith with an invalid check, and therefore believes that Barris must have forged his signature. He decides to visit the locksmith in question and immediately sees that the handwriting is his own. This makes him wonder whether it is possible that he could have written the check himself. As a member of a literate culture he has been conditioned to view handwriting as a proof of identity, and therefore trusts the signature to tell him the truth. These primitive signs produced by an individual have traditionally been full of meaning, because in addition to establish someone’s identity they have also been the legal index of consent, agency, and will.⁷³ The incident becomes more complicated when we consider the conflict between Arctor’s subjective identity and his legal identity recognized by

⁷⁰ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 79

⁷¹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 189

⁷² Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 43

⁷³ Timothy Melley. *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Cornell University Press (2000), p 52

the state. The Arctor persona does not exist in reality, and by signing that name to a check it is not Barris but Arctor who has committed an act of forgery.

In addition to individual identity and representation, *A Scanner Darkly* deals with several other aspects of the hyper-real condition, such as the importance of signs, information and technology, and the replacement of originals by models. Albert Borgmann explains that information technology is based on collecting and storing vast amounts of information that are put at our disposal through powerful processing and display devices.⁷⁴ This is why Arctor's superior officer Hank is uninterested in hearing about his human conclusions, because they can never be anything but limited. Hank puts his trust in technology as he says "[t]his is not a put-down of you, but we have information, lots of it, not available to you. The broad picture. The computerized picture."⁷⁵ Information has become reality when his colleagues are able to gather more information about him than he has access to himself, and thereby possess the authority to decide what is real and what is not in his life. The individual in this case simply becomes inferior to all the information. According to Borgmann not all information is bad, however. We do need some forms of information in our society, because if the world consisted of "things only" we would be confined to our immediacy. There would be no way for us to refer to the wider world and to the world as a whole. On the other side of the scale, if the world consisted of signs only, nothing would be present and address us in its own right. In a world exclusively of sign one promise would proclaim another, but nothing is ever fulfilled.⁷⁶ It is not possible nor is it desirable to get rid of signs entirely, and it is therefore clear that we must try to find some sort of balance, unless we want to end up with a reality where the hyper-real has replaced all original meaning.

The handwriting incident does not just illustrate the confusion between Arctor's identities, but also offers an important point about technology. It is obvious that the advanced technology of the holo-scanners has not been able to bring Arctor any closer to finding a clear distinction between what is real and what is imagined. He explains that just like you do not recognize your own voice on a tape, you will not recognize yourself visually when you see yourself as a

⁷⁴ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 170-71

⁷⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 83

⁷⁶ Borgmann distinguishes between knowing something and knowing *of* something, and terms the different types direct and indirect knowledge respectively. The levelling of this distinction between direct and indirect knowledge is argued to be a reflection of a historic decline of meaning. Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 14-15, 17-18

3-D hologram either.⁷⁷ However, while he is struggling to recognize himself on the scanners, something as simple as his own handwriting helps him realize that he must have gotten things wrong. This illustrates that the answer to retrieving reality when the hyper-real has taken over does not lie in more technology but rather in a return to a simpler and more natural existence. The difference between nature and our artificial society is that in the natural economy of information, signs and things keep a fine balance. Natural signs do not get in the way of things, but “emerge, refer, and disappear.”⁷⁸ When Arctor is admitted at New-Path he can no longer use the technology of the holo-scanners to perceive the world. Once he arrives everything is taken away from him, and he is forced to rely on his own senses again. This is shown during one of his first days at the centre. While all the others around him are involved in a conversation, “[h]e gazed down at the steam of his coffee, only that. The steam rose; he liked the smell.”⁷⁹ The smell of coffee is an example of a natural sign, because once the coffee disappears so does the sign. Arctor’s withdrawal is not just a struggle to get rid of the drugs that have taken control of him. It is also a fight against all the layers of information, in order to find a way back to reality. Borgmann claims that contemporary society is blinded by excessive and confusing information, and the solution proposed is to right the balance between information and reality, by restoring the importance of natural information.⁸⁰ It could be that by taking everything away from Arctor, Dick is suggesting that we will have to go through a similar period of withdrawal if we want to find our way back to reality.

The culturally constructed relationship between the signifier and the signified is illustrated in a funny conversation between Arctor and Luckman. Arctor is telling Luckman about the Maylar Microdot Corporation building, and estimates that it is about an inch high and weighing about ten pounds, including the employees. Luckman asks “[w]ell, how can you tell, then, when you pass by it, if it’s only an inch high and only weighs then pounds?” and Arctor answers “[t]hey have a big sign.”⁸¹ This is of course meant as a joke, playing on the fact that microdots are about 1 millimetre in diameter and therefore in theory would not need a bigger storage building. What is interesting to note however is that the sign shows where the building can be found. The signifier has become bigger, more important and more visible than the signified.

⁷⁷ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 106

⁷⁸ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 49

⁷⁹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 193

⁸⁰ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 231, 221

⁸¹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 153

In another example, the hyper-real tendency to replace originals with models, or even models of models, is illustrated. Arctor and Luckman are discussing a guy they have heard of who posed as an impostor, because that was easier than actually posing as different famous figures. They go on to talk about how they have impostors in their lives too, referring to undercover narcotics agents. They try to imagine what these might look like. Barris suggests that they look just like them, and Arctor's answer is "[m]ore so."⁸² Again it should be noted that the copy is better than the original. Arctor suddenly asks "[h]ow could a guy do that? ... Pose as a nark?"⁸³ The different layers of information and reality have made him lose track of which persona he used to identify with. Prior to this conversation, we are shown again that Arctor is getting confused about his two identities. Watching the scanner tapes as Fred, he is unable to tell whether Arctor is acting for the camera or not, because he can no longer remember what is real and what is simulated. At the same time he decides that "[i]n the script being filmed, he would at all times have to be the star actor. Actor, Arctor, he thought. Bob the Actor who is being hunted; he who is the El Primo hunttee."⁸⁴ If Arctor is acting for the camera too, this means that he is adding an act on top of the act that he is already performing as an undercover agent. He describes this situation as "[s]hucks on top of shucks. Layers and layers."⁸⁵

The constant presence of information is a characteristic of the hyper-real society. In *A Scanner Darkly* this is illustrated when Arctor explains how the police can easily communicate through radio channels available to other people as "[t]hese other people did not even recognize the static as information-bearing."⁸⁶ The reason for this is that they are surrounded by so much information on a daily basis that they end up perceiving most of it as white noise. We have learned to deal with information in this way because we are very rarely surrounded by absolute silence, and therefore need to filter out what is not particularly important to us. As was stated in the introduction to this thesis, when information about the real has replaced the real you are in a state of hyper-reality. It covers everything, and there is no way to escape it or separate it from the real. *A Scanner Darkly* provides instances where the characters demonstrate that they prefer information about reality to the real. One example is the incident previously mentioned where Barris wants to know what kind of bread he is

⁸² Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 157

⁸³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 157

⁸⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 106

⁸⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 152

⁸⁶ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, 107

about to eat and Freck answers “Look on the menu...It explains.”⁸⁷ Rather than retrieving the information he wants from the object itself, Barris is asked to look at the menu, a representation of the object in question.

Arctor has not always socialized with drug addicts. He used to lead a quiet family life with wife and kids, where every new day could be expected to hold the same as the previous day. In the end Arctor ended up leaving this safe suburban family life. The decision was made in the kitchen one day, when he bumped his head on the kitchen cabinet. His reaction is anger, as it would have been for most people. It is at this moment that he has a life changing realization:

It flashed on him instantly that he didn't hate the kitchen cabinet: he hated his wife, his two daughters, his whole house, the backyard with its power mower, the garage, the radiant heating system, the front yard, the fence, the whole fucking place and everyone in it.⁸⁸

He finally decided that his lifestyle was not what he had wanted for himself and that he was tired of playing the role of happy and content family man, without any sense of purpose. The decision to leave everything safe and familiar is Arctor's attempt at resisting the hyper-real and to find something with more meaning. Some of the problems concerning the hyper-real are actually tied up to a consumerist culture, which is defined by Baudrillard as a culture based on consumption objects with no other purpose than to keep you in a state of mass integration.⁸⁹ This is connected with the hyper-real because the only cultural practice left is one based on products and signs that do not distinguish between real and imaginary. Without this distinction the culture no longer holds any meaning and becomes both manipulative and aleatory in nature.⁹⁰ Arctor breaks loose from his consumer lifestyle with wife and kids and joins a sub-culture of drug addicts, because they lead a life where their cultural practices keep them closer to reality. The obvious practice that separates them from the “straight” lifestyle is their addiction to drugs. Connected to their addiction are several side effects that make their lifestyle different. The people he now surrounds himself with are reminded every day of how fragile their existence is, and they seldom know what the next day will bring. Arctor views his previous lifestyle with contempt:

⁸⁷ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 27

⁸⁸ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 48

⁸⁹ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 67

⁹⁰ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 65

What, really, do they know or care? The straights, he thought, live in their fortified huge apartment complexes guarded by their guards, ready to open fire on any and every doper who scales the walls with an empty pillow-case to rip off their piano and electric clock and razor and stereo that they haven't paid for anyhow, so he can get his fix, get the shit that if he doesn't, he maybe dies, outright flat-out dies, of the pain and shock of withdrawal. But, he thought, when you're living inside looking safely out, and your wall is electrified and your guard is armed, why think about that?⁹¹

This takes us back to Boorstin's argument that wealth and success is what created the distance between people and reality.⁹² Addicts usually do not experience wealth and success to the same extent as "straight" people, and are therefore more closely connected to reality. This does not mean that addicts do not suffer from illusions and in fact you could argue that they take drugs to get more of them. The point is that they are more often forced to experience the brutal truth of reality. They have to deal with more uncertainties in their lives and are therefore more often forced outside of the comforts of society's illusions. Arctor appreciates this closeness to the real and does not miss what he used to have. He assures us that he had never regretted his decision because "[t]hat life had been without excitement, with no adventure."⁹³ His addict friend Charles Freck, on the other hand, would not have minded a life with a little less meaning as he says to his friend Barris that "... I wish I was living over at New-Path, where I wouldn't have to go through this meaningful shit I don't dig day after day..."⁹⁴ He considers admitting himself to the New-Path rehabilitating centre because he cannot stand the uncertainty of being low on drug supplies all the time. Barris' answer to this is that "[w]ell, we can't even be sure we'll see another sunrise."⁹⁵ To them it is not a given that they will get through the next day. They also have to deal with certain risky activities, in addition to their drug habits, that could potentially be dangerous for them. Barris, for example, does not seem to be worried that he might harm his friends when "[i]n the night darkness of Bob Arctor's back yard, among the heaps of weeds and rubbish, he was preparing to fire his pistol with the homemade silencer on it."⁹⁶

⁹¹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 19

⁹² Boorstin. *The Image*, p 3

⁹³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 48-49

⁹⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 33

⁹⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 29

⁹⁶ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 46

Some of the reason for the distance between people and reality is that death is to a large degree hidden and ignored. The use of drugs such as Substance D is an attempt to escape a reality that does not live up to their expectations. While promising a richer experience of life, these drugs actually reduce the user to something like a recording, playing the same tape indefinitely.⁹⁷ John Hickman categorizes *A Scanner Darkly* as a drug dystopia and argues that the introduction of a fictional drug reinforces what is dystopian in society.⁹⁸ His analysis is useful because it provides a link between the role of technology and drugs in relation to the hyper-real. He argues that one of the scientific and technological advances of the century was a pharmaceutical revolution that produced a vast amount of new drugs designed to enhance health and control behavior. These included commonly used drugs such as vitamins for nutrition and antibiotics to cure bacterial infections, as well as mood stabilizers and anti-psychotics to reduce stress. It also introduced recreational drugs such as hallucinogens that were meant to raise consciousness, entertain, or even disorient.⁹⁹ Hickman further claims that whether they are used for medicine or recreation, drugs produce both hope and deep anxiety about their effect on human health and behaviour.¹⁰⁰ If we view drugs as another example of new technology, it becomes easier to see why they are included in a discussion of the hyper-real.

The result of introducing technologies that allow us to ignore reality is that for many, death has become an abstract thing. Borgmann explains that this distance from reality is due to a lack of distinction between life and death. He argues that celebration and happiness lost its context and contrast because information technology has silenced the voices of misery, disease, poverty and violence.¹⁰¹ People in industrialized societies are rarely forced to feel discomfort or pain anymore, thanks to technology. Donna's attitude to life is an example of the effect this lack of distinction has on the individual. When Arctor warns her about the effects of the opium-saturated hash she is addicted to, she answers that "I don't expect to live long. So what? I don't *want* to be around long... What's in this world? ... What's there really in this world, Bob?"¹⁰² It is clear that the world is without meaning to her and that she is unable to see the point of her existence.

⁹⁷ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 124

⁹⁸ John Hickman. "When Science Fiction Writers Used Fictional Drugs: Rise and Fall of the Twentieth-Century Drug Dystopia" in *Utopian Studies* 20.1 (2009), p 156

⁹⁹ Hickman. "When Science Fiction Writers Used Fictional Drugs," p 159

¹⁰⁰ Hickman. "When Science Fiction Writers Used Fictional Drugs," p 162

¹⁰¹ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 232

¹⁰² Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 121

In relation to the discussion on the loss of contrast between life and death it is interesting to see how Barris, one of Arctor's roommates, reacts when he discovers that his friend is choking. Rather than assist Luckman or call for help, he calmly observes the whole incident. When it turns out that Luckman will be okay, Barris exclaims that "[i]t's amazing...the limitation of the human anatomy, the fact that food and air must share a common passage. So that the risk of - ." ¹⁰³ Luckman does not answer but instead he silently gives him the finger. Barris is obviously fascinated by the fact that Luckman almost choke to death. In our advanced society we are so removed from how nature intended us to live, that this little snap back to reality is an exhilarating change for Barris. With technology, people are able to regulate reality to fit their needs. When they are cold they can turn up the heat, and too warm weather can be fixed with air conditioning. Pain can be eliminated with drugs, and when people are hungry they only have to walk a few steps to the fridge and pick something from one of the shelves. Death, however, instantly brings you close to reality and reminds you of the natural, physical limitations of the human being. As no technology has figured out how to conquer death yet, it is a reminder of what we are and that we have limited existence. This helps explain why Barris was curious to see what would have happened if his friend choked to death. It would have been a real event controlled by nature rather than human technology.

In *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick also considers what happens to individual agency in a hyper-real world. By leaving his comfortable family life behind, Arctor was for a little while able to lead a life where he was in control of his own actions. He was given a new identity that allowed him to ignore society's rules and expectations. This freedom does not last long, however, as the next thing to take control of him are the drugs. He explains to us that once the drugs control you, "[b]iological life goes on... But the soul, the mind - everything else is dead..." ¹⁰⁴ The forces that control him before and after his moment of freedom are different in nature. At first he was a slave to an external force, in the form of a society that had with its expectations shaped him into something he did not want to be. Louis Althusser argues that this social control relies on ideology, which he defines as the system of ideas and representations that dominate the mind of a man or a social group. ¹⁰⁵ He claims that ideology "interpellates" individuals as subjects, and that we can never be free from ideology, because there is no

¹⁰³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 112

¹⁰⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 49

¹⁰⁵ Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, Monthly Review Press (1971), p 158

practice except by and in ideology.¹⁰⁶ Ideology is present everywhere and is continually imposed upon us through institutions such as the school, church, media, and even the private sphere of the family.¹⁰⁷ By squeezing children in between the family and the school system during critical years of learning, they are taught the ways of a dominant ideology that imposes “obviousnesses as obviousnesses” on them without appearing to do so.¹⁰⁸ Although the ideology is imposed upon the individual by external forces, it is also a form of internal control, as Althusser argues that ideology only exist within the subject.¹⁰⁹ The second time something takes control of Arctor it is an internal force, as the drugs are starting to infiltrate his body and brain. The change in control from external to internal is included in Timothy Melley’s discussion on agency panic in *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Post-War America*. He argues that in post-war society, agency was first transferred from the autonomous individual to a discursive or social system.¹¹⁰ The nature of this transference and the control exercised on the post-modern subject then gradually changes. While individual behaviour is at first regulated by large systems external to the body, the controlling forces have entered the body when Melley discusses “cellular panic” in the final chapter.¹¹¹ His conclusion is that these various forms of control have created a post-modern subject that is “significantly less independent than those of an earlier era.”¹¹²

It is difficult to decide if Arctor acted independently when he got addicted or if some higher authority is to be blamed for his drug abuse. As an undercover agent, he was only supposed to pretend that he was addicted to drugs. As his superior officer points out to him, “[n]obody held a gun to your head and shot you up...” and “[y]ou could have pretended to. Most officers manage to cope with it...”¹¹³ The reason why we do not entirely believe that this is true is that we discover that it was planned all along that Arctor would develop a serious addiction, so that he could be used to infiltrate New-Path. We become aware of this through a conversation between Donna and Mike Westaway, which is also where we find out that they are undercover agents working on the same case as Arctor. Mike is positioned at New-Path but as

¹⁰⁶ Althusser compares this interpellation to when an individual recognizes that he has been hailed by the police and turns around. Ideology recruits subjects among individuals in the same way, by the act of recognizing them as subjects. Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p 170, 174

¹⁰⁷ Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p 143

¹⁰⁸ Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p 155, 172

¹⁰⁹ Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p 170

¹¹⁰ Melley. *Empire of Conspiracy*, p 41

¹¹¹ Melley. *Empire of Conspiracy*, p 62, 173

¹¹² Melley. *Empire of Conspiracy*, p 37

¹¹³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 180

a staff member he only has limited access to information. Their conversation occurs after Arctor has been admitted to New-Path. Donna feels guilty about Arctor's condition because "...this didn't happen accidentally; it was supposed to happen..."¹¹⁴ The question becomes whether someone actively made him addicted to the drugs or if he was chosen because his personality made him likely to develop a habit. Either way, the outcome of his actions had been decided for him.

Arctor is able to see that he does not understand the whole picture when he considers the situation of himself and others. He reflects that "[i]f the last to know he's an addict is the addict, then maybe the last to know when a man means what he says is the man himself."¹¹⁵ The question of individual agency is dealt with again during one of Arctor's paranoid fits. He is vaguely starting to feel that someone is after him, but he cannot yet figure out who or why. What he does know is that it must be a certain type of person:

Whatever was going on, whoever it was by, it was going to be chickenshit and devious: some freak without integrity or guts lurking on the periphery of his life, taking indirect potshots at him from a position of concealed safety. Not a person but more a sort of walking, hiding symptom of their way of life.¹¹⁶

This paranoia is a consequence of the tension between the individual and the collective, which appears as a result of the control exercised upon the individual. Arctor believes that Barris is after him, and in a way he is right. Barris is trying to frame him because he suspects that he is an undercover agent. This, however, is not the enemy Arctor should worry about. His identity has been sacrificed by the police department without his knowledge and when the truth is revealed to him, the superior officer wants him to agree that it was worth it.¹¹⁷ The department sees the situation from a utilitarian point of view, where the collective benefited from the sacrifice. The above quote can also be seen as a comment on people in general. A great number of people in post-war society are stuck in a certain routine and could be described as living "on the periphery" of their lives, with no opportunity or will to change things. Seen in this broader sense, Arctor is suggesting that man has become nothing more than a walking symptom of the surrounding culture. People are formed by society, and like a person in a

¹¹⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 203

¹¹⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 79

¹¹⁶ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 48

¹¹⁷ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 183

scramble suit, they become an indistinguishable sort of everyman.¹¹⁸ As he states towards the end of the novel, “*Activity does not necessarily mean life.*”¹¹⁹ It seems that people are nothing more than empty shells without any depth, just like the simulated society they live in.

Arctor’s identities are clearly imposed upon him by society. His “straight” identity is a result of growing up in a culture based on a consumerist ideology. It is apparent that in order to be an accepted member of this society, you need to behave in a certain way. You need to conform and become one of the masses. Arctor illustrates this when he says in his speech to the Lion Club members, “[i]f you saw me on the street...you’d feel aversion and walk away.”¹²⁰

His job as an undercover agent required Arctor to live among drug addicts and adapt to their life style for a period of time. While this was supposed to be a temporary identity, when we meet him this lifestyle has become the one he identifies with. You could argue that since he willingly accepted this mission, he chose to take on this identity. The problem is that his superiors have plans for him that he is not aware of, plans that will destroy him completely. As Donna says towards the end, “[h]e had no idea...And he never will again in his life, as long as he lives, have any ideas...”¹²¹ It is because of what is done to him that he receives his third identity in the last part of the novel. The extensive drug use has made him unable to continue his work, and he has lost completely track of his double identities. It is decided that he should be admitted at New-Path, a rehabilitating centre for drug addicts. When a drug addict is admitted to New-Path for rehabilitating, they are stripped of everything that marks them as an individual and given a new name. The New-Path policy is that once inside, wallet, name, and basically anything that will identify the patient is removed in preparation for building up a new personality that is not drug-oriented.¹²² After having been through this process, Arctor is known to all New-Path residents and staff as “Bruce.” At New-Path, another incident occurs where the real and the imaginary are mixed up in a conversation between Mike, one of the staff members at New-Path, and “Bruce.” Mike says that “I saw a commercial on TV...With a koala bear in it. They hop. They resemble a stuffed toy,” to which “Bruce” answers that “[t]he old Teddy bear, that kids have, that was created based on

¹¹⁸ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 16

¹¹⁹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly* (emphasis in original), p 195

¹²⁰ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 17

¹²¹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 203

¹²² Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 35

the koala bear, back in the twenties.”¹²³ As “Bruce” points out, it is the stuffed toy that resembles the real animal, not the other way around. This is an example of Baudrillard’s third stage of the simulacra, where the models have replaced the originals. The distance between reality and fiction has been eliminated, and people no longer seem to be aware that there used to be a difference.

The changes in Arctor’s personality do not go by unnoticed by his employer as it is standard procedure at the Sherriff’s Office to have psychologists monitor the behaviour patterns of the undercover agents. Because of these registered changes he is called in for a couple of mental evaluations, where his cognitive abilities are tested. After the second one, the psychologists arrive at a conclusion and informs him that

[y]ou show what we regard more as a competition phenomenon than impairment... Competition... between the left and right hemispheres of your brain. It’s not so much a single signal, defective or contaminated; it’s more like two signals that interfere with each other by carrying conflicting information.¹²⁴

According to the evaluation, Arctor’s condition causes him to see the world in a different way than most people. It is a side effect of Substance D abuse, and will in most cases disappear once the user gets the drug out of their system. However, with the amount Arctor has been doing, it looks like it might be a permanent condition. The psychologists further explain to him that “[i]t is as if one hemisphere of your brain is perceiving the world as reflected in a mirror.” Arctor assumes that they must mean the type of mirror that St. Paul wrote about in the Bible. He knows that at the time it was written they did not use glass mirrors, but metal ones that showed an imperfect reflection. He therefore imagines that he views the world as reflected back by a mirror in this fashion, like “[a] darkened mirror... a darkened scanner.”¹²⁵ Once the psychologists have figured out what Arctor is suffering from, they try to find out what consequences it will have for him. One of them gets excited about a certain scientific principle of parity, and explains that “[t]hey used to talk about seeing only ‘reflections’ of reality. Not reality itself.” It is explained that this principle is the idea that the universe consists of objects and their reflections, and that we take the latter for the former.¹²⁶ It is reasonable to believe that Dick was referring to Plato’s allegory of the cave. In Plato’s

¹²³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 198

¹²⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 167

¹²⁵ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, (emphasis in original) p 169

¹²⁶ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 170

allegory, a group of people have been imprisoned in a cave since childhood, chained up so that they must always face the cave wall. Behind them is a fire that casts shadows on the wall. Since they have never seen anything but these shadows, Plato argues that the shadows constitute reality for these people, and that they would consider the objects casting the shadows less real, should they ever see them.¹²⁷ The psychologists examining Arctor further explain that since photographs are neither the object itself nor its reverse this "...would make photographic images not images at all but the true form. Reverse of a reverse."¹²⁸ With Arctor's condition, it is possible that he can see both objects and their reflections, but he is unable to distinguish between original and copy. The scientists also suggest that he might even be able to see the true form that it is believed the photograph captures. This idea that the photographic image could be more real than the object it depicts reflects Baudrillard's theory about the models replacing the originals. Maybe the hyper-real condition means that we only see reflections of reality, while with Arctor's condition both reflection and reflected becomes visible.

Arctor does not agree that he can see clearer than most people. His conclusion after their discussion is that "...we are fucking backward right now, I guess, every one of us; everyone and every damn thing, and distance, and even time."¹²⁹ His condition might mean that he can see more possibilities and a reality that is lost to others, but it also means that he is unable to decide which one of his identities is really him. He describes how he perceives himself and the world around him:

I can't any longer these days see into myself. I see only murk. Murk outside; murk inside. I hope, for everyone's sake, the scanners do better. Because, he thought, if the scanner sees only darkly, the way I myself do, then we are cursed, cursed again and like we have been continually, and we'll wind up dead this way, knowing very little and getting that little fragment wrong too.¹³⁰

Arctor puts his trust in technology because he is unable to trust his own senses. This seems to be one of the consequences of living with the hyper-real. From what we have seen it does not seem like the scanners are able to clear the murk that separates us from reality. The more information they gather and manipulate, the less meaning it contains, and we are only

¹²⁷ Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#2H_4_0010 21.03.2012

¹²⁸ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 170

¹²⁹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 171

¹³⁰ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 146

removed further away from the truth. We saw earlier that Barris, too, did not trust his own senses to find out for him what he was eating. Instead he had to retrieve the information from an external source, in his case in the form of a menu. The way hyper-reality is perceived by the characters in *A Scanner Darkly* is expressed again in a quote where Arctor reflects upon the condition of man:

Any given man sees only a tiny portion of the total truth, and very often, in fact almost...perpetually, he deliberately deceives himself about that little precious fragment as well. A portion of him turns against him and acts like another person, defeating him from inside. A man inside a man. Which is no man at all.¹³¹

According to what Arctor is saying here, with hyper-reality the individual only has access to a tiny portion of truth, and still seems to deliberately turn away from this to embrace some manufactured truth instead. Just as Borgmann argues, reality and truth have become increasingly hard to reach as reality gets buried deeper and deeper under all the layers of information that we surround ourselves with.¹³² The “man inside a man” that defeats the individual from the inside could be the part of a person’s identity that exists as a product of the hyper-real culture. This part of the identity is conditioned to prefer society’s simulations and is reluctant to discover any underlying reality. Boorstin argued that we demand our illusions and are so used to them that we believe they are real, and Borgmann claimed that we produce and possess so much information that we lose contact with reality. We could draw from this that some of the hyper-real originates from within ourselves and is a result of unconsciously made choices. These choices are connected to an ideology where it is always better to have more, whether this is consumer goods, experiences, or information. The question then is whether individuals are doomed to live with these simulations or if there is hope at retrieving a hidden or lost reality. Although Arctor returns to a simpler existence at New-Path, we do not know if he will ever be able to function in society again. At the end of the novel he picks up one of the little blue flowers grown between the rows of corn at the New-Path farm he has been sent to. The flower is used to make Substance D and is evidence that New-Path is the manufacturer of the dangerous drug. It is uncertain whether picking the flower is a mechanical reflex or if it is a sign that he is getting better, and the ending therefore offers some hope that Arctor might be able to recover from what society has done to him.

¹³¹ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 147

¹³² Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 218

The protagonists of *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* share many of the problems related to the hyper-real condition. In *A Scanner Darkly* it becomes increasingly hard to reach the real, and the discussion on *Fight Club* will investigate whether this development has continued. We have seen that the different hyper-real aspects have influenced the individual in *A Scanner Darkly*, and similarities and contrasts found in *Fight Club* will give us a better picture of the hyper-real condition. This comparison will also allow us to see if the characters in a more recent novel have become better equipped to deal with the hyper-real, or if their future looks even darker.

3. *Fight Club*

Fight Club was published in 1996, almost two decades after *A Scanner Darkly*, and therefore allows us to investigate whether there has been a change in the quality of the hyper-real. The novels both demonstrate the loss of the real and a search for meaning, but *Fight Club* in addition offers nostalgia for what has been lost. This could be because the lack of meaning and distance from reality has become so much more apparent to everyone. The theoretical framework developed in the discussion of *A Scanner Darkly* assists in a comparison and contrast of the hyper-real in *Fight Club*. Although the two novels do not belong to the same genre they share certain structural elements that will be discussed later. Like the other works by Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* has not been widely analysed by scholars. The articles available mostly agree that a major theme in the novel is the consumerist society, and how in such a society the male struggles to find his role. It has already been suggested that there is a link between consumerism and hyper-reality, and an investigation of the hyper-real in *Fight Club* further supports this claim.

The first chapter of *Fight Club* is a scene that actually occurs towards the end of the book. The protagonist informs the reader that he and Tyler used to be friends, but when we meet him, Tyler is shoving a gun up his throat. This immediately catches our attention and makes us curious to know what has happened in the meantime to make them end up in this situation. After this we go back in time and follow a character that is tired of his consumer lifestyle, but together with his friend Tyler finds a way to cope with it. One night Tyler invites him to hit him as hard as he can, and after experiencing the liberating feeling of a fight, they decide to start a fight club. This is a turning point for the protagonist. The fight club offers a place where men leave their socially constructed identities behind and only rely on their own

bodies. Tyler soon realizes that he wants to change society as a whole, and that this requires a bigger effort than the fight clubs. As the protagonist explains, “[n]othing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered.”¹³³ The fighting helps ease the symptoms of a meaningless existence but does not eliminate the cause of the problem. In order to find a permanent solution, Tyler starts “Project Mayhem” and recruits fight club members to come train with him.

The nostalgia for the real and the natural is one of the driving forces for Tyler in his attempt to change society. The first time the nostalgia is illustrated is when the protagonist describes some of his precious possessions that got lost in the explosion that destroyed his apartment:

Everything, including your hand-blown green glass dishes with the tiny bubbles and imperfections, little bits of sand, proof they were crafted by the honest, simple, hard-working indigenous aboriginal people of wherever, well, these dishes all get blown out by the blast.¹³⁴

There is a very good chance that these glass dishes were made at some assembly line rather than by the hands of indigenous people, and only presented as authentic. It also seems as if it is unimportant where exactly these aboriginal people are from. Still, it expresses a wish to own something that is not just one of a countless identical copies, and that is made by human beings rather than machines. Tyler also expresses this nostalgia when he longs back to a time when people lived in harmony with nature and where each man provided for himself:

We were eating breakfast in the house on Paper Street, and Tyler said, picture yourself planting radishes and seed potatoes on the fifteenth green of a forgotten golf course. You’ll hunt elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center, and dig clams next to the skeleton of the Space Needle leaning at a forty-five degree angle.¹³⁵

It has already been demonstrated in *A Scanner Darkly* that the consumer culture of our society is an important aspect of the hyper-real, as its cultural practice does not distinguish between copies and originals. In *Fight Club* this culture has become the foundation on which the society is built. The basic ideology of the consumer culture is that the more things you own, the happier you become. According to Tyler, this ideology has weakened our individual identities. He claims that “[o]ur culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or

¹³³ Chuck Palahniuk. *Fight Club*. Norton (2005) p, 53

¹³⁴ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 41-42

¹³⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 124

black or rich, anymore. We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing.”¹³⁶ Tyler’s opinion is further expressed through one of the Project Mayhem members:

You have a class of young strong men and women, and they want to give their lives to something. Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don’t need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need.¹³⁷

Tyler also talks about the role of corporations in our society and how they affect individual agency. In a consumerist environment, they are the new masters of the world. While empires like Great Britain used to have the power to explore and colonize new territories, the corporations are the lords of modern day society:

This way, when deep-space exploitation ramps up, it will probably be the megatonic corporations that discover all the new planets and map them. “The IBM Stellar Sphere. The Philip Morris Galaxy. Planet Denny’s. Every planet will take on the corporate identity of whoever rapes it first. Budweiser World.”¹³⁸

While Donna was fighting her own private war against the Coca Cola Company in *A Scanner Darkly*, Tyler wants to get rid of all corporations by destroying the culture that created them. The corporations mentioned in the above quote are among the biggest in their respective industries, and possess great power in our society. This illustrates that we have lost our agency because we are controlled by constructed entities that according to law have the same rights as a human individual. According to Timothy Melley, these corporations are “self-motivated agencies...with the capacity for astonishing control of consumers and workers,” and their demand for unity is a threat to individualism.¹³⁹ Alex Tuss argues that Tyler Durden is an example of the “prototypical little man” who resists the corporate reality of consumerism.¹⁴⁰

Tyler believes that Project Mayhem is the only way for the individual to be free and in control of their own life. He also believes that it is the only solution to all of the problems that their culture has caused:

¹³⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 134

¹³⁷ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 149

¹³⁸ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 171

¹³⁹ Melley. *Empire of Conspiracy*, p 187-188

¹⁴⁰ Alex Tuss. Masculine Identity and Success: A Critical Analysis of Patricia Highsmith’s *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* in *The Journal of Men’s studies*, Vol 12, No. 2 (2004), p 101

It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world. A cultural ice age. A prematurely induced dark age. Project Mayhem will force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover.¹⁴¹

Although his methods are often cruel, his agenda seems to be honest enough. It is based on a genuine concern for the damage that our hyper-stimulated lifestyle is causing the environment and other life forms around us. Just like Nietzsche argues in his philosophical works, Tyler does not believe that humans should be privileged over other living things, or that the universe exists for the sake of human beings. In Nietzsche's works the "real world of nature" is contrasted with culture, which is said to only belong to the surface of things.¹⁴² It is unlikely that the members of Project Mayhem joined the project for the same reason. They are all middle class workers realizing that their expectations in life will never be met as they will never have all the things promised to them by the advertisement industry. Their actions are rather based on frustration and anger, which is clearly part of the motivation for Tyler too:

We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won't. And we're just learning this fact...so don't fuck with us.¹⁴³

It is obvious that media plays a role in reinforcing the consumerist ideology, since it is mostly through advertisement, television and magazines that we are told what we should desire and work to achieve. Eduardo Mendieta argues that through this role media participate in creating an unhealthy culture. He claims that individuals are never free of its sounds, images and simulacra because they "suffuse and infiltrate every social capillary."¹⁴⁴ Some of the problem with the hyper-real is that having grown up in such a society, most people do not want to be free from these simulations. One reason is that they are simply unaware that they are surrounded by hyper-reality. Another is that they fear the unknown, because they have never had to deal with reality. As Mendieta argues, we are afraid to be alone with our thoughts because we are "sound-holics" and "image-holics." We have become so used to our lives being accompanied by the soundtrack of movies, pop songs, and product jingles, that we would not know what to do if they were taken away from us.¹⁴⁵ Tyler Durden is going to force

¹⁴¹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 125

¹⁴² Roger Caldwell. Nietzsche and Morality: Roger Caldwell responds to an analysis of Nietzsche's morality. www.philosophynow.org (2008) 16.04.2012

¹⁴³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 166

¹⁴⁴ Eduardo Mendieta. Surviving American Culture: On Chuck Palahniuk in *Philosophy and Literature* Vol 29 No 2 (2005), p 402

¹⁴⁵ Mendieta. "Surviving American Culture," p 403

people to experience reality by destroying their culture and thereby free them from their slavery to the hyper-real.

Although most people prefer the artificiality that surrounds them, in both *Fight Club* and *A Scanner Darkly* attempts are made to escape the consumerist lifestyle. Arctor was able to leave his wife and kids and start over again, and does not describe it as a big ordeal. In *Fight Club* on the other hand, it seemed so impossible for the protagonist to change his existence that the solution became to create an alter ego. The alter ego is a way for him to fight the society that has imposed the hyper-real, as it frees him to do things that are far from socially acceptable. The resistance in *Fight Club* is different from what we saw in *A Scanner Darkly*. The characters in *Fight Club* are actively searching and fighting for a way to get back to a more real existence. Through Tyler Durden, the protagonist wants to make a difference in society and not just for himself. The first step was to establish the fight clubs to help men cope, and then further action was taken to help all of society in the form of Project Mayhem. By contrast, Arctor's struggle is more internal and individual. He starts out trying to make society a better place for everyone, by hunting down the manufacturers of Substance D, but as he loses contact with reality his focus is first and foremost on how to make sense of his own existence.

The wish to break free is demonstrated several places in *Fight Club*, for example when the protagonist states that "I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't see any way to change things."¹⁴⁶ He is stuck in a routine where every day holds the same, and it has become very hard to rebel against society's ideals when you are expected to always conform and keep your role in the collective. Matt Jordan argues that the sense of insignificance felt by the protagonist in *Fight Club* is closely related to his role as a modern consumer and producer.¹⁴⁷ The main problem with his lifestyle is that once he had acquired all the possessions he had been told all his life that he needed in order to be happy, he had nothing else to strive for. He was suddenly aware of how meaningless it all was and admits that the reason why he felt a need for change was that "I was too complete. I was too perfect."¹⁴⁸ The consumer ideology had taught him that he wanted and needed all these things,

¹⁴⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 172

¹⁴⁷ Matt Jordan. Marxism, Not Manhood, Accommodation and Impasse in Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* in *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 4 No. 4 (2002), p 372

¹⁴⁸ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 173

but he explains that once you have them “you’re trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you.”¹⁴⁹

Before the protagonist becomes friends with Tyler he struggles to find a way to cope with a seemingly meaningless existence. He goes to see the doctor because he suffers from insomnia, and is told that the insomnia is a symptom of something larger. He is advised to listen to his body and find out what is actually wrong, and it turns out that it will be difficult to recover from his condition. The insomnia is a symptom of the society he lives in, and by describing it he also offers a description of how the hyper-real distances you from reality. The protagonist explains that when you suffer from insomnia “[e]verything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy” and that with “[t]he insomnia distance of everything, you can’t touch anything and nothing can touch you.”¹⁵⁰ This distance from reality can be compared to the murk that separate Arctor from the real, as they both struggle to connect with their surroundings. The protagonist’s doctor suggests that he should go visit a support group for terminally ill people and witness real pain, in order to get some perspective on his own life. This advice is going to be the solution to his problems. Displaced from his surroundings, what he actually needed was a collective where he could connect to people. The support group collective is only available to him by creating a false identity where he has to pretend that he is terminally ill.¹⁵¹ These groups offer a place for him to completely relax and let go, and by visiting the groups regularly his insomnia is cured until the day another faker turns up. Her name is Marla, and she is immediately able to tell that he is doing the same thing as she is. In the presence of Marla everything falls to pieces. He cannot relax like he usually does and “...all of a sudden even death and dying rank right down there with plastic flowers on video as a non-event.”¹⁵² Even death becomes a copy of a copy now that someone is there to witness his falseness.

It is as a result of this situation that Tyler presents himself. The protagonist tells us that “I took a vacation. I fell asleep on the beach, and when I woke up there was Tyler Durden...”¹⁵³ The double identity offers a way to break free from the meaningless lifestyle and escape the layers of hyper-reality that separate the protagonist from reality. After the first fights arranged by the protagonist and Tyler, the protagonist realizes that “[m]aybe self-improvement isn’t the

¹⁴⁹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 44

¹⁵⁰ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 21

¹⁵¹ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 373

¹⁵² Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 23

¹⁵³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 173

answer... [m]aybe self-destruction is the answer.”¹⁵⁴ He no longer believes that owning things will make him happier, and through Tyler he later explains that “I’m breaking my attachment to physical power and possessions...because only through destroying myself can I discover the greater power of my spirit.”¹⁵⁵ The empty consumer goods created a distance between him and reality, and by getting rid of them he hopes to find a more meaningful existence. He soon discovers that even though he separated himself from his belongings, he has not escaped the culture that made him buy them.

The struggle to break free from society has a similar pattern in both novels. As soon as the protagonist in *Fight Club* has torn free from one collective, he ends up as the centre of a different one, and this is in addition one that he has made himself. Just like Arctor, he finds himself controlled, then free for a little while, and then controlled again. It seems that an existence completely free from society’s control is impossible. In the end their attempted resistance fails as they both end up in institutions. Jordan argues that *Fight Club* is in part the story of a personal crisis arising from an understanding of the modern world as destructive of personal identity, and claims that the protagonist sets a heroic ideal against such a weakening state of affairs.¹⁵⁶ This is demonstrated when Tyler gives instructions to his Project Mayhem members. In one of the assignments they need to complete, he orders the members to start a fight with someone on the street and let the other person win, and explains that “[w]hat we have to do...is remind these guys what kind of power they still have.”¹⁵⁷ The culture has wiped away any individual traits and shaped their identity for them, and this is a way to show them that they can change things.

In *Fight Club* the hyper-real is everywhere and is expressed in the form of a society where value and meaning can only be found in consumer goods. This has an obvious effect on people’s individual identities. According to Carsten Bagge Lausten and Bulent Diken, people are trapped in a society where nothing exists outside the mode of production.¹⁵⁸ They are taught that the purpose of being is to own as many things as possible and that once you have enough you will reach a state of happiness. The problem with this is that you will probably

¹⁵⁴ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 49

¹⁵⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 110

¹⁵⁶ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 372

¹⁵⁷ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 120

¹⁵⁸ Since the movie is such a close adaption of the novel, Diken and Lausten’s discussion on the movie supports an analysis of the novel as well. Bulent Diken, Carsten Bagge Lausten. *Enjoy Your Fight! – Fight Club as a Symptom of the Network Society in Genre, Gender, Race, and World Cinema*. Blackwell (2007) p 72, 75 n. 1

never feel that you have enough. If you do achieve perfection like the protagonist did, you will come to realize how hollow your existence is. The role as consumer and producer of products leaves the individual with a feeling of insignificance, as the products that were supposed to individualize you end up standardizing you instead, because everyone owns and wants the same things.¹⁵⁹ It is not until this moment that you discover the truth about the spiritual depression. When the protagonist reached this point he unconsciously decided that a revolution against the culture would be necessary. He ends up leading other men in a desperate search for a better existence and creates a way for them to express the anger and frustration they feel towards the inauthentic hyper-real society. Jordan argues that

[a]n incompetent at work can become, when fighting, “a god for ten minutes” because “who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world.” It is the “real world,” the product of history, that is inauthentic, and its definitions and constructions of self-hood must be jettisoned.¹⁶⁰

According to this, what we call the “real world” is a product of our culture and history. The never-ending storing of information suffocates whatever reality is left. Although the characters in *Fight Club* have never known any other way of living, they do feel that their culture is somehow to blame for their struggles. Jordan argues that the fight clubs seek to draw out in their members the authentic masculinity they all share by virtue of nature, and history is seen as corruption of this essence. The hyper-real only exists as a result of history and civilization, so their removal would mean a return to natural reality. By going back to a prehistoric state they would be released from the confines of civilization and the atomized existence that history has produced. Jordan also points out that there would be consequences to this freedom. Human beings today are strong and smart because they do not have to worry about surviving, which is arguably a result of historical progress. By removing history and civilization, humans would also be removed from the top of the food chain, and they would have to lock themselves in cages at night to protect them from predators.¹⁶¹ This, however, still seems like an improvement from an existence where it is hard to find any meaning to your existence.

Fight Club, like *A Scanner Darkly*, also deals with information as an aspect of the hyper-real society. In the protagonist’s job as a recall coordinator for a car company, decisions are made

¹⁵⁹ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 373

¹⁶⁰ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 374

¹⁶¹ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 374-375

based on algorithms rather than human moral. “A times B times C equals X. This is what it will cost if we don’t initiate the recall.”¹⁶² Based on the information entered in the algorithm, the protagonist and his colleagues find out whether it will be worthwhile to recall all the defect cars, or if it is cheaper to pay out-of-court settlements to those who get hurt in accidents. Human suffering is not taken into consideration as they rely on a formula that must always be followed. Tyler believes that all history must be erased in order to free people from this pseudo-valuation, but the way our society collects and stores information poses a problem. In the effort to destroy history, he plans to blow up the Parker-Morris Building so that it will come crashing down on the national museum. According to Baudrillard such an action is futile, because any operation meant to put an end to culture only serves to resurrect it.¹⁶³ The problem for Tyler lies in the fact that the photo series of the collapsing building will be documented in future history books.¹⁶⁴ While he may have succeeded in destroying some documents of history, he simultaneously adds new ones to the never-ending circle of information.

It is perhaps because the hyper-real society relies so much on information that Tyler creates a misinformation committee as part of Project Mayhem. He wants to cause as much chaos as possible, and to alter the information people depend on seems like a good way of doing this. A lot of power lies in the control of information, and Borgmann argues that control of information is control of reality.¹⁶⁵ As one of their assignments, the committee has been told to replace the safety instruction cards on airplanes. The original cards show unrealistically calm and unaffected people who follow the instructions they are given. In the new instructions people are panicking, “...fighting each other for oxygen masks while their jetliner flames down toward the rock at a thousand miles an hour.”¹⁶⁶ This illustrates Borgmann’s claim that the lightness of information has made the reality of humans and things seem offensively heavy and crude.¹⁶⁷ Also, according to Boorstin, we are so used to the hyper-real simulations that we believe that they are real, and it seems that Tyler is trying to change people’s existence just enough to make them recognize the hyper-realness they are surrounded by.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 30

¹⁶³ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 66

¹⁶⁴ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 14

¹⁶⁵ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 177

¹⁶⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 145

¹⁶⁷ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 218

¹⁶⁸ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 5-6

People have for too long been accepting the information handed to them without question, and the misinformation committee might be able to change this.

In Tyler's effort to change the world, the members of Project Mayhem are taught that they are nothing as individuals, and are reduced to pieces of information. Tyler explains that "[n]o one guy understands the whole plan, but each guy is trained to do one simple task perfectly."¹⁶⁹ This means that the members essentially function as parts of a machine. They are trained to follow Tyler's commands without questions, and they are more than willing to comply. The reason is that Project Mayhem gives the members a purpose for their existence. At the next assignment they might be "...risking quick death in offices where every day they felt their lives end one hour at a time."¹⁷⁰ And it is worth it, because now that they do not take it for granted, they can finally appreciate being alive. As part of Project Mayhem they finally feel like their actions matter. For once in their life they are working together towards a common cause that they have chosen to be a part of, and like the protagonist says, "[t]he goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world."¹⁷¹ The fight that needs to be fought is not apparent and visible like previous wars, but it is just as important:

We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression in our lives. We have a spiritual depression.¹⁷²

The hyper-real threatens to cover up meaning unless it is resisted, and it has already led to an existence where people search for something that will give them a sense of purpose in life. Tyler believes that the only way the war of the spirit can be won is if people are set free from the culture that shaped them into indistinguishable individuals.

The protagonist in *Fight Club* wants to change his life as a reaction to the pseudo-valuation of his society, where manufactured events and products are always valued over the real. His first thoughts about change occur when he reflects upon how technology has changed the way we travel. You can go to sleep in one city and wake up in another without having moved your body. The only way you can tell that you have travelled is by the time that has passed since

¹⁶⁹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 130

¹⁷⁰ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 121

¹⁷¹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 122

¹⁷² Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 149

you got on the airplane. You may also have gained or lost a few hours depending on what time zone you are in. Based on this the protagonist wonders if it would also be possible to wake up as a different person. This is similar to when Arctor wonders what it is that decides our identities. He has experienced how you can become someone else by acting and dressing differently.¹⁷³ The protagonist and Arctor both seem unable to understand what it is that defines them as an individual, which opens up for the possibility that their identity can be altered.

Diken and Lausten argue that there is in fact a desperate search for true identity in *Fight Club*, as people are looking for something that will correspond to actual being. The paradox of post-modern individuality is that, as an individual one is constantly urged to be oneself and to realize one's creative potential, but the result is the exact opposite. Everyone wants to express their inner being and therefore try on different masks in a confused attempt to be unique. The individual never accomplishes this uniqueness and is instead left with a feeling of inauthenticity of all acts.¹⁷⁴ The fight clubs offer a place where men can find their way back to their true identity and leave behind the one that media and society has given them. It gives them a reason to go to the gym that does not have anything to do with the ideals that have been imposed upon them by society. As the protagonist says, "[t]he gyms you go to are crowded with guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says."¹⁷⁵ Tyler suggests that these men are shallow copies and false representations when he points out that "...even a souffé looks pumped."¹⁷⁶ Mendieta argues that in a culture of mass production and simulacra, we are obsessed with attaining a beauty that is more beautiful than beauty.¹⁷⁷ This is in accordance with Baudrillard's claim that the real is abolished by that which is more real than the real.¹⁷⁸ It is partly as a reaction to the hyper-real ideal of beauty that the protagonist of *Fight Club* says that he does not want to die without a few scars. To him "[i]t's nothing anymore to have a beautiful stock body."¹⁷⁹ Another reason for wanting these scars is that they are proof of the life he has lived. They will

¹⁷³ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 20-21

¹⁷⁴ Diken, Lausten. *Enjoy Your Fight!*, p 60

¹⁷⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 50

¹⁷⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 50

¹⁷⁷ Mendieta. *Surviving American Culture*, p 399

¹⁷⁸ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 81

¹⁷⁹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 48

make sure that he does not end up like "...Raymond Hessel, Caucasian, aged twenty-three with no distinguishing marks."¹⁸⁰

As a contrast to the authentic identity discovered in fight clubs, body builders are offered as an example of a group of people who have taken the ideals of sculptors and art directors to the extreme. The protagonist meets Bob, a former body builder, at the support group for testicular cancer. Life as a body builder is extremely removed from any natural way of living. The contestants will starve themselves before a contest in order to lose body fat, which is the opposite of what our basic survival instincts tell us to do. They also use a lot of energy building muscles, without using this energy to produce anything. This is all done because society has decided that it makes a beautiful and impressive body. It is an improved model of the human body, and as such another example of hyper-reality. As Bob says, "[i]t's a stupid way to live... You're blind from the stage lights, and deaf from the feedback rush of the sound system until the judge will order, extend your right quad, flex and hold."¹⁸¹ The fight clubs and Project Mayhem provide meaning and purpose for Bob when he can no longer participate in competitions, and he ends up sacrificing his life for the project. When he admits that "[t]his was better than real life," it is not clear whether he is talking about his life as a body builder or his role as a member of Project Mayhem.¹⁸²

One of the ways in which identity is problematized is by Palahniuk's choice to leave the protagonist unnamed throughout the novel. We are only introduced to his alter-ego, who you could argue is a hyper-real version of the protagonist. He is a copy that is better than the original and nothing less than "...a perfection he'd created himself."¹⁸³ When he later tries to stop the plan that Tyler started, no one is willing to listen to him. The hyper-real copy that he created has more power than the original it was modeled after. Tyler is independent and free, and able to do everything that society's expectations stop the protagonist from doing.¹⁸⁴ A paradox in the novel is that Tyler believes that people are enslaved by the consumer culture, and yet he does not encourage personal freedom. On the contrary he preaches that "[w]e have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by

¹⁸⁰ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 152

¹⁸¹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 177

¹⁸² Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 177-178

¹⁸³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 33

¹⁸⁴ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 174

frightening them.”¹⁸⁵ The “space monkeys” of Project Mayhem even use lye to burn off their fingerprints, and thereby remove one of the most recognized proofs of identity in our society.¹⁸⁶ They are taught to repeat and remember that “[y]ou are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile.”¹⁸⁷ Jordan argues that “[t]he image of the snowflake seeks to reconcile uniqueness with the existence of multitudes that are ostensibly similar.” He claims that this requires ignoring certain aspects of reality and suggests that when Project Mayhem teaches its members that they are nothing special, it “...seems a realistic apprehension of one’s place in an inhuman social order in which the most important thing about people is that, like other things, they can be measured in units.”¹⁸⁸

Fight Club deals with the same type of tension between the individual and the collective that is present in *A Scanner Darkly*. As discussed in the previous chapter, this tension is a result of the identity imposed upon the individual through society’s dominant ideology. Mendieta argues that the heroes of Palahniuk’s novels “are testimonies to the resilient power of individuals to resist even the most invasive and persistent onslaughts by culture on the psychic life of freedom and individuality.”¹⁸⁹ We have become completely ruled by our culture, and Mendieta claims that Palahniuk’s novels are about disentangling ourselves from the normal self into which we have been socialized:

There is a disease that ravages the body and desolates the mind, that unhinges our identities and sunders us from our loved one; and then there is the disease of the imposed dependency, the fabricated and promoted addictions, which is not based on a physical and natural dysfunction, but is instead based on a social and culture pathology.¹⁹⁰

This suggests that both Arctor and Durden suffer their identity crises as a result of the society they live in. To Mendieta, their sickness is a coping mechanism developed as a way of surviving the surrounding culture. While Durden was passively drawn into the hyper-real through his role as a conforming member of the consumerist society, Arctor initiated the development himself, but is later driven deeper into it by a forceful collective. However, for both Durden and Arctor their problems are a result of a society that has imposed superficial

¹⁸⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 149

¹⁸⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 157

¹⁸⁷ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 134

¹⁸⁸ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 377

¹⁸⁹ Mendieta. *Surviving American Culture*, p 395

¹⁹⁰ Mendieta. *Surviving American Culture*, p 401

identities and a fabricated existence on them that they find impossible to live with, and therefore try to break free from.

There is an interesting parallel in the plots of the two novels in the way the protagonists of *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* develop their split personalities. In *A Scanner Darkly*, Arctor is originally aware that he is going to have two identities, and that one will be spying on the other. As he slips further and further into his drug abuse, he forgets this fact and his main mission becomes to find out who is following him. This development is a direct cause of the society he lives in as he is sacrificed by the collective. In *Fight Club*, the problem is completely opposite. The protagonist believes that he and Tyler Durden are two separate individuals, and that Tyler is a friend he met a short while ago. As Project Mayhem takes off, it becomes something of a mission for him to find out where Tyler is and what he is up to. He also wants to know why people he has never met before seem to recognize him wherever he goes. In the end Tyler reveals the truth to him, and explains that he and Tyler are two personalities in the same body:

We're not two separate men. Long story short, when you're awake, you have the control, and you can call yourself anything you want, but the second you fall asleep, I take over, and you become Tyler Durden.¹⁹¹

The reason for the protagonist's dual identity is linked to society in a slightly more indirect way than in Arctor's case. No specific enemy conspired against him in order to create a split personality, but his condition is a way of surviving, and possibly escaping, a culture where the only meaning available is superficial and hyper-real.

Until he discovers the truth about his split personality, the protagonist is unable to distinguish between reality and hallucination. Once he realizes what has been going on, he asks Marla to help him. He wants her to follow him around, so that she can tell him what he is up to during those hours when he is not in control of himself. By monitoring his activity, she becomes his link to reality, which is similar to what Donna is doing for Arctor. The difference is that Marla is not aware of the protagonist's double identity, while Donna knows all along that Arctor is an undercover agent. Donna also knows what it is that is causing his confusion about his identities, as she is part of the collective that made him this way. In *Fight Club*, Marla has no such control over the protagonist. She was able to see through the act the protagonist was

¹⁹¹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 167

putting on at the support groups, but is not able to comprehend that he is two personalities within one body.¹⁹² Still, when Marla confirms that it was the protagonist who saved her in the hotel room, he is finally able to see that he and Tyler are two sides of the same person. The only other way for him to decide what is real is through physical pain. To check that he is awake he would stick a finger into the open hole that never heals in his cheek. The pain from doing this is so intense that he cannot possibly be dreaming or hallucinating.¹⁹³

We saw in *A Scanner Darkly* that the hyper-real society is so removed from the natural way of life that the only time you have a chance to experience reality, is when you are close to death. This does not happen often in a society that prefers to ignore death. In *Fight Club* Marla claims that the main reason we are in this situation is that "...our culture has made death something wrong."¹⁹⁴ This is why both the protagonist and Marla keep returning to the support groups. As Marla explains to the protagonist, before the support groups "[t]here was no real sense of life because she had nothing to contrast it with." Marla had previously worked in a funeral home, but the services there were too abstract. The support groups, on the other hand, give her a real experience of death.¹⁹⁵ The support groups also offer a place where communication regains its importance, and becomes a meaningful act between individuals. The protagonist loves going to support groups because "...if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention." He is so used to compete with all the empty information and lack of real communication in society that he is happy to have found a place where people act as if he matters. He explains that "[e]verything else about their checkbook balance and radio songs and messy hair went out the window." For once, people are able to let go of the trivial things in their lives and focus on each other instead. Normally they would be so starved for attention themselves that they would not have time to properly pay attention to anyone else. At the support meetings it is different, as "[p]eople listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak."¹⁹⁶ The result is that when people leave the groups they walk away feeling that they connected with someone and achieved something.

The human body offers a link to reality in a society where the struggle to find meaning is closely related to a lack of contrast between life and death. The reason why the human body is

¹⁹² Tuss. *Masculine Identity and Success*, p 99

¹⁹³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 160

¹⁹⁴ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 103

¹⁹⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p38

¹⁹⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 107

given such importance is because it is something that is not just a “copy of a copy of a copy.” It is something unique to each and every individual, something you can be sure is real. In rare situations where the possibility of death must be faced, one is able to connect with reality. According to Bulent and Diken, when authentic experience has to a large extent disappeared, bodily harm offers an experience of both life and death. They argue that true experience becomes available through fighting, when fighters feel the finality of life. Bulent and Diken also claim that *Fight Club* depicts the lack of real life experience in a way that juxtaposes the body and words.¹⁹⁷ It seems that while words are connected to the inauthentic and artificial, the body is connected to the real. This is a reflection of how words have suffered the same faith as the signs that Baudrillard discusses in the third order of simulacra.

The emptiness of communication is exemplified when the protagonist describes the relationships you form with people sitting next to you on airplanes. The moment the plane hits the ground, you hear a “...staccato of a hundred seat-belt buckles snapping open, and the single-use friend you almost die sitting next to says: I hope you make your connection.”¹⁹⁸ This exchange of words means nothing to either one of you, and the new friend will be forgotten within a few minutes. Bulent and Diken argue that fighting on the other hand, is not about communicating, but rather about feeling physical pain in your own body. The feeling you get when you are hit and feel pain becomes a way to break through the layers of hyper-reality and re-conquer life.¹⁹⁹ The protagonist explains that “[y]ou aren’t alive anywhere like you’re alive at fight club,” and we understand that some of the reason for this is that “[f]ight club isn’t about words.”²⁰⁰ The scars and the fighting are attempts to feel individual existence, and to escape the imaginary simulacra that dominate the hyper-real society.²⁰¹

In addition to the support groups and fight clubs there are a few other instances where the hyper-real is escaped. When the protagonist is in a car with four of the Project Mayhem members, the one driving the car keeps moving over in the opposite lane, and almost ends up killing them all:

In one perfect second there’s no light inside the warm black leather car and our shouts all hit the same deep note, the same low moan of the truck’s air horn,

¹⁹⁷ Diken, Lausten. *Enjoy Your Fight!*, p 65

¹⁹⁸ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 31

¹⁹⁹ Diken, Lausten. *Enjoy Your Fight!*, p 65

²⁰⁰ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 51

²⁰¹ Diken, Lausten. *Enjoy Your Fight!*, p 66

and we have no control, no choice, no direction and no escape and we're dead.²⁰²

For a brief moment the protagonist feels alive and in contact with reality. The member driving the car says to him, “[y]ou had a near-life experience.”²⁰³ In *A Scanner Darkly* a similar scene occurs when the gas pedal suddenly falls to the floor and Arctor loses control over the car:

He felt, in his head, loud voices singing: terrible music, as if the reality around him had gone sour. Everything now- the fast-moving cars, the two men, his own car with its hood up, the smell of smog, the bright, hot light of midday- it all had a rancid quality, as if, throughout, his world had putrefied, rather than anything else.²⁰⁴

The protagonist in *Fight Club* embraces the lack of control and welcomes death, exactly because it makes him feel alive. To Arctor and his friends the episode was a confused and frightening experience. It offers a snapshot of reality to Arctor, but he does not appreciate what he sees and ends up lost in paranoid hallucinations. The near-life experience is offered again in *Fight Club* when the protagonist threatens to kill a young man on the street unless he promises to do something useful with his life. In the eyes of the protagonist, he has done this man a huge favour. After such an encounter with reality, he believes that “... your dinner is going to taste better than any meal you've ever eaten, and tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of your entire life.”²⁰⁵

Fight club makes the members aware of the distance between them and reality because the layers of information and representation that normally separate them from the real have been removed. Louis Althusser argues that ideology transforms individuals into subjects and that this function lies within our recognition of each other as unique and distinguishable. At birth the individual receives an identity defined by others, in the form of the name it is given and the gender characteristics imposed upon it. In a place like fight club, however, you are not a subject, because you have been released from all types of ideological recognition.²⁰⁶ For one night it does not matter what your name is, where you work, how much money you make or which neighbourhood you live in. You win or lose the fight regardless of all of these factors that normally define you to others. In other words, all the different layers of representation are

²⁰² Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 146

²⁰³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 148

²⁰⁴ Dick. *A Scanner Darkly*, p 63

²⁰⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 155

²⁰⁶ Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p 172-173, 176

gone. You are as close to reality as you can get, and you know it because the pain you feel is real. According to Bulent and Diken the men get exhilarated by violence because "...through fighting they discover the corporeality of their existence."²⁰⁷ After a fight they understand for the first time that watching a game on television is very far away from any authentic real life experience:

Fight club is not football on television. You aren't watching a bunch of men you don't know halfway around the world beating on each other live by satellite with a two-minute delay, commercials pitching beer every ten minutes, and a pause now for station identification. After you've been to fight club, watching football on television is watching pornography when you could be having great sex.²⁰⁸

By escaping the identity that has been imposed upon them by society, the fight club members might be able to regain their agency as well. Whether this will be possible for the protagonist is a more difficult issue. According to Jordan, the mobile nature of the protagonist's job has made him feel that he is no more than an interchangeable component among many.²⁰⁹ The protagonist does stand up against society, but only in the form of his alter ego. Tyler is the exact opposite of the protagonist and he is completely unaware of his actions once the alter ego takes over. While Tyler is a strong personality that believes that anything is possible, the protagonist is a conforming member of the consumerist culture. This makes it complicated to discuss whether the protagonist regained agency by establishing the fight clubs and Project Mayhem. Since Tyler is a part of the protagonist he must necessarily at some point have shared some of his views and ideas. He did after all tell us that he wanted to change his life. Once he understands that Tyler is a part of him, he does everything he can to stop him and is even willing to commit suicide in order to kill Tyler and end his project.

The attempted suicide/murder is the first independent action the protagonist performs without hiding behind a false identity. It is not until he attempts to kill Tyler that he is truly in charge of his actions. As he then ends up in a mental institution where society again has control over him, you could say that the ending is ironic. While the killing of Tyler was supposed to bring him back in charge again, the Project Mayhem members visit regularly to remind him that the plan goes on, and it seems unlikely that he will ever be fully in charge of his own life. The

²⁰⁷ Diken, Lausten. *Enjoy Your Fight!*, p 57

²⁰⁸ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 50

²⁰⁹ Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 373

ending in *A Scanner Darkly* leaves some hope that Arctor might be able to recover from what has been done to him. In *Fight Club* this is not the case, as the protagonist seems as controlled as ever after his failed attempt to get rid of Tyler.

Dick used science fiction elements to estrange the reader in *A Scanner Darkly* and make it see society in a new light. In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk describes grotesque images when he portrays a meaningless existence that most readers can relate to. While the novels use different textual strategies, they share a structure that places them in the genre of detective novels. In *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* there are multiple investigations going on, and these can be compared to the simultaneous search for the real in a world full of hyper-reality. The official investigation in *A Scanner Darkly* is the police investigation against drug dealer Bob Arctor. His roommate Barris is also investigating Arctor's activities. Early on in the novel he says to his friends that "I have been for some time conjecturing as to who Bob Arctor is really employed by, what specific actual organization it is that he can't tell us."²¹⁰ Arctor is later explained by his superiors that they have for a long time been investigating Barris, and that they used Arctor to get closer to him. Parallel to their investigation, Arctor is running a private investigation to find out who is after him, and he suspects that it might be Barris. In addition, Arctor is part of an investigation to find out if New Path is the grower and distributor of Substance D, but his drug abuse gradually makes him forget about this.

In *Fight Club* an official investigation is conducted by the police in order to find out who blew up the protagonist's apartment. This is not a central part of the plot, but is occasionally mentioned in the text. One example is when the protagonist is asked by a detective not to leave town, because he is one of their suspects.²¹¹ There is also a police investigation going on to track down the illegal fight clubs spreading throughout the country. When he is Tyler the protagonist is aware of this investigation, and he is determined to end it. He travels to Seattle and is informed that "Thursday night, you were standing right where you are now, and you were asking me about the police crackdown..."²¹² Because of incidents like this the protagonist is trying to figure out why people recognize him wherever he goes. He cannot figure out how it can happen in places he visits for the first time in his life. He thinks to himself that "[e]very bar I've walked into this week, everybody's called me sir. Every bar I go

²¹⁰ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 34

²¹¹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 111

²¹² Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 158

into, the beat-up fight club guys all start to look alike. How can a stranger know who I am?”²¹³ In the end he realizes that “Tyler Durden is a separate personality I’ve created, and now he’s threatening to take over my real life.”²¹⁴ Tyler tells the protagonist that he had been waiting for him to figure out what was going on, and explains that “[e]very time you fall asleep...I run off and do something wild, something crazy, something completely out of my mind.”²¹⁵ The reason why people recognize him everywhere suddenly becomes clear when Tyler admits that they have been sharing the same body all along.

Palahniuk wrote an afterword for the 2005 edition of *Fight Club*, in which he talks about how the novel took on a life of its own, with countless interpretations. At the same time he denies the significance of the book, and states that “[i]t was just an experiment to kill a slow afternoon at work.” He explains that the eight rules of fight club were in no way meant as a solution to the problems of society, nor were they taken from an actual underground fighting community. To him the rules functioned as a “transitional device” and had no significance beyond that.²¹⁶ By including this afterword some of the force of the novel is lost, as Palahniuk tells the readers not to take the solutions he proposes seriously. The consumerist culture as a satiric target is still clear, but it is harder to view the protagonist’s mental problems and the fight clubs as the symptom and solution to a hyper-real existence. Although the afterword weakens this aspect of the novel, there is something useful to be found in it too. Palahniuk offers an explanation for writing such a shocking book and states that it is because of the nature of our society:

In the workshop where I started to write fiction, you had to read your work in public. Most times, you read in a bar or coffee house where you’d be competing with the roar of the espresso machine. Or the football game on television. Music and drunk people talking. Against all this noise and distraction, only the most shocking, most physical, dark and funny stories got heard.²¹⁷

From this we gather that the novel is a reflection of the hyper-real society even though the fight clubs never existed outside of the novel. Palahniuk even compares *Fight Club* to *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and argues that it is a classic, ancient romance, but

²¹³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 158

²¹⁴ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 173

²¹⁵ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 163

²¹⁶ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 213

²¹⁷ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 215

updated to compete with the espresso machine and ESPN.²¹⁸ He thereby demonstrates that the style of the novel, as well as the theme, was chosen as a result of being surrounded by hyper-reality. The plot had to be interesting from the first page and keep the action scenes coming, in order to compete with a hyper-stimulated society saturated with information. To cut back on unnecessary and uninteresting text, the narrative is characterized by an oral style with short sentences, which Mendieta characterizes as “circling back around producing a rhythmic tempo that creates a thread that sustains a fragmented temporal sequencing.”²¹⁹ Mendieta also argues that Palahniuk provides a way for the readers to see that reality has more to offer than what they think. He believes that by including so many quirky details in the novel, Palahniuk illustrates that “under the mundane and pedestrian dwells the fantastic and horrific.”²²⁰ An example of such a detail is presented on the first page when we are informed that to make a silencer “...you just drill holes in the barrel of the gun...This lets the gas escape and slows the bullet to below the speed of sound.”²²¹

In *A Scanner Darkly* there are several examples of the hyper-real aspects of society. It is at times difficult to determine whether reality is inaccessible due to hyper-reality or whether it is inaccessible because Arctor is having trouble perceiving reality as a result of his condition. In *Fight Club* reality is always at a distance. The entire society is based on hyper-real copies, with an ideology that gives value and meaning to empty consumer goods. This pseudo-valuation is reacted to and resisted, but the ending leaves the effect of this open. According to Jordan, the masculinity gained by the characters seems to have been at the expense of what individuality they once possessed. He claims that this is illustrated when the protagonist is institutionalized and once again has lost all control.²²² The effort to regain individual identity seems to have had the opposite effect, and once Project Mayhem is out of the protagonist’s control, it is hard to tell whether it will achieve anything good or simply cause chaos and anarchy.

²¹⁸ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 215-216

²¹⁹ Mendieta. “Surviving American Culture,” p 407

²²⁰ Mendieta. “Surviving American Culture,” p 408

²²¹ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p 11

²²² Jordan. *Marxism, Not Manhood*, p 376

4. Conclusion

Through a discussion on *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* we have been able to investigate how the hyper-real manifests itself in our society, and how this relates to the problems that were proposed in the introduction. Philip K. Dick is well known for his sceptical view on reality, so to encounter him in a discussion on the loss of the real should not offer too much surprise. Chuck Palahniuk on the other hand may not have seemed like the most obvious choice for a discussion on hyper-reality, as his novels tend to be viewed as grotesque, but nevertheless realistic, stories about the real world. It has however been demonstrated in this thesis that the “real” world, which Palahniuk is supposed to be depicting, is a product of our culture and history, and not an authentic reality at all. *Fight Club* is largely recognized as a protest against consumerism, but when we dig deeper into this novel we discover the hyper-reality of the society it is presenting, where the consumerist ideology is just an aspect that helps to generate the artificial.

The protagonists of *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* offer two different experiences of hyper-reality, that include both cognitive observations and feelings related to the hyper-real. Arctor perceives the hyper-real as a dark layer that covers everything up, in a way that makes truth and reality inaccessible. In addition, he believes that people turn away from the little fraction of truth that is available to them. The protagonist in *Fight Club* also perceives the hyper-real as something that distances you from the real and prevents you from connecting with your surroundings. It causes him to suffer from insomnia, a condition where the lack of sleep makes everything feel like a copy of a copy of a copy. This is essentially a description of how the hyper-real manifests itself in society, with endless amounts of copies everywhere. Since the society he belongs to makes no distinction between copies and originals, it has made him unable to distinguish between real and false, perhaps even at the level of personal identity, and he explains that he views plastic flowers on video and death as equally unimportant non-events.²²³

One of the aspects of the hyper-real that has been dealt with in this thesis is the consumerist ideology, and how it creates a superficial culture that places value in products. The protagonists in both novels feel alienated from this culture and struggle to find a purpose with life. In *A Scanner Darkly* Arctor leaves his consumer lifestyle behind and starts a new life as

²²³ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p23

an undercover agent. This is a conscious act that is motivated by a search for a meaningful existence. Arctor is able to observe the artificial culture around him before he gets pulled to deep into the hyper-real, and describes it as a layer of “murk” that covers everything. In *Fight Club* the protagonist also wants out of the consumer lifestyle, because he feels insignificant and is unable to find any sense of meaning with his life. His escape is different from Arctor’s as the creation of Tyler is not a conscious decision. The protagonist in *Fight Club* is not able to observe the hyper-real in the same way as Arctor, because the hyper-real is present everywhere and accepted by everyone as real. Any hope of recovery for the two of them lies in a return to a more natural existence, but this solution seems unlikely for Arctor, and impossible for the protagonist of *Fight Club*, with ending scenes that place both of them in mental institutions.

Works of literature can be read as symptoms of the society in which they originate. In the twenty years between *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club*, the hyper-real did not disappear, which is a strong indication that it is still present in our contemporary society. The fact that the hyper-real is dealt with in two novels written so far apart in time, is in itself evidence that the hyper-real has been prevalent in our society for quite some time. It is interesting to see whether there has been a change in the character and manifestation of the hyper-real when two novels written two decades apart portray the same condition. From what we have found in this discussion, the novels demonstrate very similar aspects of the hyper-real, but there is a change from *A Scanner Darkly* to *Fight Club* regarding the way the characters feel about it. In *Fight Club* the world does not live up to the expectations that the culture has planted in its individuals, and their anger and frustration about this has created a desire to break free. This does not necessarily mean that they are able to recognize the hyper-reality that surrounds them, but they do feel the superficiality of their society. Until Tyler appears, the protagonist and other individuals like him have been unable to recognize the enemy they should be fighting, and this has allowed for a lot of tension to build up. The hyper-real has definitely caused tension between the collective and the individual in *A Scanner Darkly* too, which is mainly expressed by the way Arctor and other addicts are treated by the collective. Their addiction is also likely to be a result of failed expectations, but there is no joint effort to resist it. Arctor did attempt to make a difference by working to reveal the drug manufacturers, but he is lost in the confusion created by the drugs and the constructed reality he lives in before he is able to do anything. It is uncertain whether any of the other police agents will be able to put

an end to the dangerous drug, as it seems that everyone who gets too close to the source are eliminated.

There is also a sense of nostalgia for the real in *Fight Club* that was not present in *A Scanner Darkly*. The reason for this is that we are dealing with a society where the distance from the real has become more apparent. In order to feel nostalgia for the real, however, one must still possess a vague notion of the difference between the real and the unreal. Although Tyler desires a return to the real and natural, the protagonist only has brief moments where he reconnects with reality, mainly through the pain he feels in his body during and after a fight. Not everyone has access to a place like fight club, and for Marla the only chance to get a glimpse of reality is through interaction with individuals who are terminally ill. In order to do this she has to fake that she is dying herself, and this would not be considered an option for most people. The problem, then, is that while people are aware that there is a true reality beneath the layer of hyper-reality, and that it is gradually slipping away from them, they are unable to find a way to access it.

If the novels are reflections of society, then what we have seen is that people's attitude regarding the hyper-real has definitely changed. *A Scanner Darkly* was immediately labeled as a work of science fiction when it came out and never received recognition as a mainstream novel during Dick's lifetime. *Fight Club* on the other hand has been accepted by the public as a mainstream novel, and has also been adapted into a successful movie that carries the same name. This illustrates that the hyper-real is recognized in society today in a way that seemed impossible when *A Scanner Darkly* was published thirty-five years ago. In Dick's contemporary society there seem to have been no room for a critique of the established reality. Lawrence Sutin states that "[i]n America, if you are unfortunate enough to have a spiritual-seeming vision, it had better conform to the doctrines of an established church. If it doesn't, you're crazy, simple as that." It seems as if the society was not ready at that time to take Dick's attempts at poking "indelible holes in official reality" seriously.²²⁴ A discussion on artificial reality no longer belongs to the realm of obscure cult writings, and Dick's novels are finally recognized as an important contribution to modern American literature.²²⁵ The mainstream movie adaptation of *A Scanner Darkly* was released six years ago, and includes several high profile actors, which further demonstrates this point. The animated film is a close

²²⁴ Lawrence Sutin. *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick*. Harmony Books (1989), p 221, 263

²²⁵ Lawrence Sutin. http://www.philipkdick.com/aa_biography.html (2003) 03.02.2012

adaption of the novel, and the budget was deliberately kept low in order to have the freedom to stay true to the original story. Although it had the potential to be a huge production, director Richard Linklater did not want it to be just another high-speed action film. He included several scenes that usually would have been cut out in a big Hollywood production, because he wanted to please the Philip K. Dick fans.²²⁶

In the introduction the theorists suggested aspects and consequences of the hyper-real that the novels have been able to confirm, but one of the arguments about the origin of the hyper-real has been contradicted. Jean Baudrillard proposed that our lack of a God or some kind of higher authority has lead us into a hyper-real existence, because we no longer have a fixed reference point to navigate from. The result he claims is that there is nowhere to turn anymore for a confirmation of what is real and what is false. There is some support for this argument in the novels. In *A Scanner Darkly*, Donna tells Arctor about a guy who experienced God and after did not understand how he could go on living, knowing that he would probably never see God again for the rest of his life: “He realized he was going to have to live on and on like he was, seeing nothing. Without any purpose. Just a lump of flesh grinding along, eating, drinking, sleeping, working, crapping.” Arctor’s response to this is simply “Like the rest of us.”²²⁷ This could suggest that we are trying to make our reality better than it really is because we no longer believe that we will be rewarded in an afterlife. The lack of religion leads to a society where people want to make the most out of the short time they have on earth. Thus, when reality is not good enough, they demand more. *Fight Club* too relates some of the problems in society to an absent God. According to Tyler “[y]our father is your model for God, and if you never knew your father, you spend your life searching for both a father and a God.” He claims that “[w]e are God’s middle children...with no special place in history and no special attention” and asks his project members to consider “[w]hich is worse, hell or nothing?”²²⁸ This suggests that religion offers a more meaningful existence, where human moral is in focus and where living a superficial and immoral life will have consequences for you later. To possess the knowledge that nothing you do will ever matter might be worse than knowing that you will be punished for your actions.

²²⁶ Marc Savlov. Securing the Substance: Richard Linklater on his adaption of *A Scanner Darkly*. <http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2006-07-07/384134/> (2006) 27.04.2012

²²⁷ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p184

²²⁸ Palahniuk. *Fight Club*, p141

Although Baudrillard gets some support for his argument in the novels, we have to keep in mind that Louis Althusser argued that the Church is one of the main instances in our society that impose ideology upon us. According to him, the value system we receive from religion is yet another part of a human made culture that contributes to create a hyper-real society. This suggests that it is the presence of religion rather than the lack of it that poses a problem. If the absence of God is not the answer, we will have to rely on the other theorists for an explanation of how we ended up in a condition of hyper-reality. Albert Borgmann and Daniel J. Boorstin both claim that the developments within technology and the storing of information play a crucial role in enabling the hyper-real, and this has been demonstrated repeatedly in the novels. Humans continually find new ways to store increasing amounts of information. *A Scanner Darkly* and *Fight Club* have illustrated that the result of this storing is that we no longer experience reality directly, but through a layer of information about reality. In addition to technology and information, the novels confirm that the consumerist ideology is one of the most important factors in society that enable the hyper-real.

A Scanner Darkly and *Fight Club* reflect a value system where the artificial is preferred over the real, and where natural events are unable to compete with human-made ones. We should consider what this means for our society and future. People today increasingly live their lives through various forms of technology, and the developments within this area are likely to continue at the same pace for years to come. If the majority of us stay unaware of this fact then it is likely that we are going to slip even further into the hyper-real. In the novels, one of the reasons why the hyper-real is resisted is because it affects individual identity. In *Fight Club* especially, we see that not only does the hyper-real affect our identity, it has also come to affect the world around us. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner argued that the changes in reality are best explored through a combination of literary and theoretical works, but the consequences of the demanding modern lifestyle are not only discussed by authors and theorists. The concerns about the reality we have created are part of a much larger discourse that is also of interest to scientists. Erik Assadourian, a Senior Researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, discusses the nature of the consumer culture, which we have established is an important aspect of the hyper-real. He argues that our culture is the frame that shape how we perceive reality, and that it is the result of all the social processes that make the artificial seem natural. As an example of this, children today will recognize consumerist symbols more

easily than signs of common wildlife or any other elements of nature.²²⁹ This illustrates that the hyper-real is not restricted to works of fiction or theoretical articles, but actually do surround us in our daily life.

Assadourian explains that human beings are embedded in cultural systems and therefore shaped and constrained by their cultures. They act for the most part exclusively within the cultural realities of their lives. The cultural norms, symbols, values, and traditions a person grows up with are seen as natural and are therefore hardly ever questioned. This is in accordance with Althusser's claim that society's dominant ideology imposes "obviousnesses as obviousnesses" on us.²³⁰ According to Assadourian this means that asking people who live in consumer cultures to restrain their consumption would be like asking them to stop breathing. They can do it for a moment, but pretty soon they will have to draw their breath again. It also means that people are not likely to recognize the artificiality of this made-up cultural hyper-reality unless it is pointed out to them.²³¹

According to Assadourian, driving cars, flying in planes, having large homes and using air conditioning are not decadent choices but simply natural parts of life, at least according to the cultural norms present in a growing number of consumer cultures in the world. He argues that while these patterns seem natural to people who are part of those cultural realities, they are not innate manifestations of human nature. The reason why they might seem natural to so many is because they have been developed over several centuries and are actively reinforced and spread to millions of people in developing countries. Assadourian points out that it is a widely recognized fact that it is going to cause major problems. The Earth will struggle if societies all over the world embrace the values of the consumer culture. He offers a solution that is not unlike the solution suggested by Tyler in *Fight Club*. To prevent the collapse of human civilization, nothing less is required than a complete transformation of the cultural patterns that dominate industrialized and post-industrial societies. This transformation would reject consumerism, the cultural orientation that leads people to find meaning, contentment, and acceptance through what they consume, as taboo and establish in its place a new cultural

²²⁹ Erik Assadourian. *The Rise and Fall of Consumer Cultures in State of the World: Transforming Cultures-From Consumerism to Sustainability* (2010), p 7-9

²³⁰ Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p 172

²³¹ Assadourian. *The Rise and Fall of Consumer Cultures*, p 3

framework centered on sustainability. The problem lies in finding a way to change something that has been developed over centuries and is believed to be as natural as breathing.²³²

The final important question is whether it will ever be possible to return to nature and reality. For Baudrillard, the rediscovering of an absolute level of reality has become impossible as he believes that the distinction between reality and fantasy is long gone.²³³ Boorstin seems to agree with this, as he argues that people today live in a world where fantasy is more real than reality, and where the image has more dignity and importance than its original. If we seek more information in order to find a way back to reality, our problem seems to lie in the fact that, by defining information as knowledge about constructed pseudo-events, more information is going to multiply the symptoms rather than help us cure the disease.²³⁴ Boorstin does not believe that an awareness of the hyper-real is going to enable us to remake the real world, but states that it will liberate us and sharpen our vision so that we can see clearly what kind of world we live in.²³⁵

Assadourian stated that our culture seems as natural to us as breathing, and Borgmann claims that the development that led up to the hyper-real started thousands of years ago. Based on this it does not seem likely that we will be able to return to reality. Borgmann does however leave some hope for the future, although he states that things are bound to get worse before they get better.²³⁶ According to him, engagement of reality is the proximate remedy for our condition, and yet many find it hard to be faithful to persons and things when information and technology surrounds us everywhere. It seems that although we enjoy real interaction and experience once we have become drawn into them, we lack the motivation to enter them regularly. Borgmann claims that modern technology and information constitute a profound and irreversible change in the nature of reality. In this respect he agrees with Baudrillard and Boorstin, as he believes that a reality free from whatever artificiality generated by technology and information has been lost. We can never erase this development and return to earlier conditions, and therefore need to find a way to balance information and reality. He argues that the possible responses to what he calls a moral paralysis are many, and mentions Christians as

²³² Assadourian. *The Rise and Fall of Consumer Cultures*, p 3

²³³ Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, p 19

²³⁴ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 37

²³⁵ Boorstin. *The Image*, p 6

²³⁶ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 213

an example of people who are able to engage with reality in a meaningful way, due to their belief in salvation.²³⁷

Although religion might not be the answer, it seems that we are in need of some form of guiding lines for the future. Assadourian proposes a value system that is based on the well-being of nature rather than on an out-of-control consumption of products. Without any kind of critical response to the increasing hyper-reality around us, we might end up at a point where there is no chance of accessing reality at all. That is of course unless we believe that it is already too late. Baudrillard claims that we have missed our chance, and Boorstin and Borgmann propose an awareness of the hyper-real and a balance between it and reality as the only solution. A full return to an existence free from hyper-reality seems impossible to all of them. If we do nothing to preserve the real then we might have to accept the fact that future technological developments will lead us into a completely simulated universe, like the ones proposed by Nick Borstrom and Barry Dainton in the introduction. As a final comfort Borgmann states that it is impossible to reconstruct the full symmetry of humanity and reality through a virtual representation of reality, and claims that there are some indications that people are starting to value actual reality again. As an example he mentions the growing effort to preserve natural areas in the interest of wildlife and human recreation.²³⁸ For the sake of reality, it would be nice if he is right.

²³⁷ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 220-221, 233

²³⁸ Borgmann. *Holding on to Reality*, p 220-222

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