DIPLOMARBEIT

„Manifestations of the 'Other' in Contemporary
Psychological Thrillers"

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Introduction

"There can be little doubt that the thriller has been one of the most pervasive of popular genres to crystallize over the last two hundred years." (Cobley 328)

The thriller as a genre has been able to maintain its popularity until today for various reasons. In this thesis I will demonstrate that, especially in the late twentieth century and in the twenty-first century, a considerable number of thrillers focusing on psychological problems and mental diseases have appeared and, in fact, seem to continue appearing, and that it is exactly this focus on psychological issues which makes them so popular.

As the above-quoted statement by Cobley implies, the thriller already existed as a literary genre before the film industry was established. The genre of thrillers seems to have shown an interest in the phenomenon of psychological disorders – among others, split personalities – for a long time. Indick offers Stevenson's story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) as one example of literary thrillers (38). However, thrillers that were written before film was born were not associated with actual psychological findings and studies, as psychology had not yet been established as a scientific field. As Indick states, "psychology and film came of age together at the same time" (1). He adds that "[t]he archetypal characters of twentieth century film, characters such as […] the psycho killer […] were often developed in direct reference to the psychological themes that inspired them" (ibid). Thus, it becomes clear that while the focus on psychological issues such as multiple or split personalities are not inventions of the film industry, but have existed in literature before film was even invented, the focus on and reference to actual psychological disorders and findings described in the field of psychology came into existence with the development of the film industry alongside psychology. It may be said that the thrillers of the twentieth century gave birth to this connection of psychology and film, and it had to show mile stones concerning this connection, particularly movies by Alfred Hitchcock, especially *Psycho* from 1960 (Indick 2). Nevertheless, I share Indick's observation that "[a]s we enter the twenty-first century, interest in all things psychological has never been greater" (2). Although a considerable amount of psychological theories were developed in the twentieth century, they find their representation in movies up until today. This can be seen in the appearance of numerous psychological thrillers in the last few years, and it is also for this reason that I have decided to analyze contemporary psycho thrillers in my diploma thesis. Because there seems to be such a great interest in psychological issues in the movies, a study of contemporary psycho thrillers seems

worthwhile and might contribute to the field of cultural studies, as it appears to me that not much has been written about contemporary thrillers yet, presumably due to their fairly recent appearance. I find it interesting to deal with contemporary cultural texts that are rather untouched when it comes to academic writing, instead of re-discussing older, classical texts, that is movies such as *Psycho* and others about which much has been written already in the field of cultural studies and in other academic fields.

The movies I have selected for my thesis may be assigned to the genre of psychological thrillers. The first two movies I chose for my analysis, John Polson's *Hide and Seek* (2005) and David Koepp's film *Secret Window* (2004) – based on Stephen King's short story "Secret Window, Secret Garden" – show some similarities, which is the reason why they will be analyzed in one chapter. I decided to examine *Hide and Seek*, because the calling out of the Other becomes particularly visible in this psychological thriller. In *Secret Window*, the opposition between the protagonist and his alter ego is considerably illustrative. The third movie I selected, David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) – based on a novel of the same title by Chuck Palahniuk – is exemplary when it comes to the juxtaposition of the protagonist with his alter ego as well. In addition, the postmodern aspect of the movie is notably perceptible. The final psychological thriller I chose for this thesis is Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010). I decided to examine *Black Swan* as it features a female protagonist which seems to be rather seldom in the genre. As a result, the protagonist's Otherness may be said to be twofold, as she is also portrayed as the female Other.

Concerning the characteristics of the genre of psychological thrillers, Indick states that

> [a] psycho thriller is a movie born of three established genres: the psychological thriller, the horror picture, and the science fiction film. The defining quality of a psycho thriller is that the film must depict a psychological theme […] as central aspect of the characters or plot. (1)

The two subgenres, so to speak, that will be relevant for my thesis are the first two mentioned by Indick: the psychological thriller and the horror picture. At that point, it is important to note that – quite often – the boundary between these two subgenres seems rather blurred. For instance, while carrying out research, I found several movies that were labeled "psychological thrillers" in one incident, but "horror picture" in another. When it comes to the characters of psycho thrillers, Indick states that it is essential that they "clearly represent specific psychological issues," for example, as is the case in the movies I selected for this thesis, psychological disorders like dissociative identity disorder, which

will be of primary importance in this paper (2). All of the selected movies feature psychological themes and disorders as part of the characters – not primarily of the plot.

As can be seen from the title, this thesis associates psychological thrillers with the concept of the 'Other'. The question that needs to be answered at this point then is the following: how do contemporary psycho thrillers and the concept of the 'Other' come together? I have already discussed the connection of psycho thrillers and psychology. This connection may be extended, as the concept of the 'Other' is, among other things, associated with considerably influential theories in the field of psychology, in particular, psychoanalysis. Consequently, there is a connection between psychological thrillers, psychology, and the concept of the 'Other'.

To begin with, the process of perceiving something or someone as the 'Other' is as old as humankind. As Simone de Beauvoir states, the process of categorizing something or someone as 'Other' "is as original as consciousness itself" (6). She adds that "[t]he duality between Self and Other can be found in the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies" (ibid). The concept of the Other goes back to G.W.F. Hegel and his master-slave dialectic in which he argues that master and slave interrelate in "mutually defining" ways (Brooker 183). Central to the concept is the idea that the 'Other' stands in contrast with a 'Self', also referred to as subject (Brooker 183). Brooker explains that "in much cultural Studies, the Other is construed as the non-self who departs from and simultaneously defines the norms of a dominant social order, whether by sexuality, race or ethnicity" (184). In other words, descriptions or perceptions of the Other by the Self in fact reveal something about the Self. In addition, the Self projects everything it denies or does not wish to be onto the Other (cf. Beauvoir). Beauvoir points out that "the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object" (7). In cultural studies, the concept of the Other plays an important role in gender studies, Postcolonialism and Orientalism (Brooker 184). One further important theoretical approach to the concept of the Other is the theory of Jaques Lacan in the field of psychoanalysis. Lacan's theory suggests that

> the child simultaneously identifies with, and differentiates from, a non-self (the mother and an idealized self) in the mirror phase. The 'other' is the image of a unified and co-ordinated self the child sees and also, by extension, other children with whom it is in a relation of recognition, rivalry and competition. As the child is formed as a subject at the point of the entry into the symbolic order, [….] the Other, becoming capitalized in Lacan's theory, is the Other of the Unconscious. (Brooker 183-4).

Lacan's theory of the Unconscious Other is connected with and builds on Freud's theories concerning the Unconscious in the field of psychoanalysis (cf. Chiesa 5). Freud's theories of the Unconscious, the repressed and the division of the psyche into id, ego and superego will be of crucial importance in this thesis. Julia Kristeva also describes the phenomenon of the unconscious Other. In her terminology, it is the "abject" that is "opposed to [the] 'I'" (Kristeva 1). Similar to the ideas of Freud and Lacan, Kristeva's theory says that the abject is repressed to the extent that the I becomes entirely unconscious of it (2). However, the abject cannot remain hidden: as Kristeva claims, "it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out" (ibid). Although it is not explicitly allocated to or termed 'the concept of the Other', the ideas that are central to the concept are also reflected in modern psychology. O'Neil writes the following:

> The *I* as subject warrants some reflection. When attempting to study something, we invoke subjects and objects (e.g., calling the *object* of the study the s*ubject* matter). The relationship between these two throwns or jects (*ject* being the Latin root past participle of "to throw") is that one is thrown under (sub) and the other is thrown in the way (ob). So we stumble over the object thrown in our way, and wonder about the underlying subject. (299)

One can easily see the similarities to general perceptions of the concept of the Other in cultural studies. The quote emphasizes once again that the object (the Other), which seems easy to define as it stands in opposition to the Self, actually reveals something about the underlying subject. O'Neil, too, stresses that the subject or self "has traditionally been granted priority of place over *object*, as deeper, more real, truer, and fewer" (299). By "fewer" he means that while the number of subjects is somewhat determined and fixed as it is "a unity", there are various different objects underlying this subject (ibid). He further states that "the conscious human being" typically perceives of "itself as a model for what it thinks of whatever," that is, the Other, onto which these thoughts are then being projected (299-300).

It becomes clear that classifying or perceiving something as 'Other' seems to be a common human practice. Unsurprisingly, the Other has found its representation in the media from their earliest onset (cf. Brooker 184). Among other cultural texts, Brooker mentions crime and "science fiction, where the Other as murderer, monster or alien is a central agent in the narrative but has to be expelled to preserve psychic and social norms," which constitutes the Other as "an expression of an interior, if feared and repressed, self" (ibid). Kaufmann claims that in fiction, the Other usually surfaces in two distinct forms: first, as "a part of a character who" is unable to control his or her behavior, typically as a

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result of possession or some mental illness (1). Second, the character itself is the Other, that is, a character so evil that the audience will find satisfaction in its destruction (ibid).

As the title of this diploma thesis suggests, the focus lies on manifestations of the 'Other' in contemporary thrillers. There is a great variety of contemporary psycho thrillers that depict this unconscious or repressed 'Other' described by Freud, Lacan and Kristeva, for instance Brad Anderson's *The Machinist* (2004), Martin Scorcese's *Shutter Island* (2010), Mathieu Kassovitz's *Gothika* (2003), and Bill Paxton's *Frailty* (2001), to name but a few. I decided to focus on *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Garden*, *Fight Club* and *Black Swan*, as I conceived of these as particularly representative examples of a wider range of contemporary psycho thrillers. In each of the selected movies psychological disorders seem to lay the foundation for the development of the plot.

My thesis is the following: In contemporary psychological thrillers, the protagonists have or develop psychological disorders as an expression of the repressed Other. In other words, my assumption is that when the Other appears in contemporary thrillers, it is frequently associated with mental illness, that is, the emergence of some type of psychological disorder. Accordingly, psychological disorders emerge because the Other is repressed by the protagonists. Furthermore, I claim that the calling out of the repressed Other or the abject described by Kristeva lies at the core of and crucially shapes the climax of contemporary psycho thrillers. In simpler terms, the aim I pursue in writing this paper is to answer the following questions: What is repressed by the protagonists and how does this repressed Other find its representation in the chosen films? Which function do psychological thrillers fulfill in a socio-cultural context? What effect does the representation of the Other in form of psychological disorders have on the audience? In order to achieve this goal and to prove my assertions, I am going to use the theories I have introduced above: namely those theories that center on the concept of the Other in relation to the Unconscious and repression; in specific those of Lacan, Freud and Kristeva. Consequently, I am going to carry out my analysis from the perspective of psychoanalysis as it was shaped by Lacan and Freud. Furthermore, I am going to draw on some ideas and findings from the field of film studies, since the cultural texts at question in this thesis are films.

Finally, as I am writing this diploma thesis in the field of cultural studies, it is necessary to contextualize it further in terms of cultural theoretical approaches. The concept of the Other may be regarded as a key term in postmodernism (cf. Brandt 8). Furthermore, the cultural texts I selected for my thesis can all be classified as

contemporary texts, ranging from the latest turn of the century to the year of 2010, and so they may be categorized as postmodern texts and will be treated as such in this paper. Therefore, this thesis may be seen as a contribution to the study of postmodernism.

The term 'postmodernism' "[u]sually refers to a set of texts and ideas that are characterized by multiplicity of meanings and forms that are self-challenging and self-reflexive. In particular, postmodernism challenges the notion of an integrated, modernist, unified and absolute truth" (Lewis 401). As one source states, "Postmodernism resists monolithic universals and encourages fractured, fluid and multiple perspectives" (qtd. in Brandt 8). Concerning postmodernist movies, Brandt suggests that they typically aim at challenging the audience and "resist[…] and reject[…] the mainstream conventions of linear narrative structure" (8). These central ideas of postmodernism are also reflected in the movies that will be examined in this thesis. As postmodern cultural texts, they challenge the audience and also the characters displayed in them. They question absolute truths and beliefs about what is real and what is perceived as reality by narrating their stories from the perspective of unreliable protagonists who, throughout a large part of the movies, may seem sane and trustworthy to the audience who has to rely on observations and experiences of these unreliable protagonists. Eventually, it turns out that the protagonists were lost in a subjective reality or non-reality that is detached or dissociated from the reality of the outside world. Their former seemingly authentic world or reality collapses and the audience experience this collapse together with the characters. However, the audience does receive hints throughout the course of the films which indicate that the protagonists' perceptions might be faulty and highly subjective, and thus, the viewers are asked to question what they see. Therefore, the (postmodern) audience is challenged and asked to think and not merely accept what is represented, as it may not correspond with reality. This process of challenging the audience and demanding interference of the viewers may be said to be typical of postmodern texts. Accordingly, these postmodern films depict what Postmodernism is concerned with: there is no absolute truth; what is real, what is not? In brief, the movies function as postmodern microcosms: the questions raised by postmodernism in today's world are positioned in the microcosm of the movies and question the world and reality that is created and represented in the movies.

Concerning the function of the Other in these movies, my thesis is that they function as postmodern texts and thus, question beliefs in absolute truths and reality. Kaufmann states that the purpose of the Other "is to assure us that we're nothing like it" (2). While asserting that this is generally true, my impression is that in psycho thrillers, it often seems

that the aim is to achieve just the opposite. As I will contend in this thesis, movies like *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window* rather want to show us that there *is* an Other, a potentially "darker" side in each individual. Thus, these movies expose the dark abysses of the human mind. Nevertheless, they may simultaneously strengthen the audience's impression that they are different from the characters featured in psychological thrillers. At last, displaying psychological disorders as expressions of the Unconscious Other may be seen as a cultural practice of signifying the Other, which, as mentioned before, is a typical and common practice in any culture.

1. Psychology in Psychological Thrillers

Before beginning the analysis of *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, *Fight Club*, and *Black Swan*, it is necessary to elaborate some more on the role of psychology in psychological thrillers and on the psychological theories that will be important in this diploma thesis. Psychology seems to have a great impact on the media, especially "the two major strands of psychoanalysis that have heavily influenced media studies [, namely] Freudian and Lacanian" (Ott, and Mack 151). In this chapter, I am going to discuss relevant theories concerning repression and the Unconscious. Furthermore, I am going to elaborate on the psychological disorders that predominantly appear the movies examined in this thesis and various other psychological thrillers, most importantly, dissociative identity disorder and psychosis.

At this point, I want to stress that psychology in psychological thrillers – although it is related with and based on actual psychology – may not be equated with and taken as a completely authentic reflection of real life psychology. Indick describes this matter as follows:

> While psychologists in the real world spend most of their time dealing with mundane research projects or clients with relatively minor neuroses, psychology in the movie world is a roller coaster ride of raving psychotics, mad scientists, super-psychic powers, and mind control nightmares. The psy-fi world presents psychology as a dimension of supernatural and metaphysical wonders. (1)

Although the depiction of psychological issues in the movies considered in this thesis is not as drastic as the ones Indick refers to in the quote above, the fact that movies display an exaggerated and spectacular form of real psychological problems applies to them as well. Another phenomenon that supports the notion that psychology in the movies is an exaggerated form of real life psychology is the fact that "[p]eople with psychological disorders have always appeared in numbers highly disproportionate to the actual number of people with psychological disorders in the population at large" (Indick 28).

However, there is, indeed, a connection between real life psychology and psychology as it is represented in psychological thrillers. As I have touched upon in the introduction, "[t]he evolution of the psycho killer archetype through the twentieth century parallels film audiences' understanding and acceptance of psychology as a field, and the ability of psychology to provide explanations for people's behaviors and motivations" (ibid). It is safe to say that Freud considerably initiated the study of the human psyche with psychoanalysis. For this reason, I will provide a brief discussion of Freud's theories

concerning the Unconscious and repression in the next section, as these theories and findings will play a crucial role in this thesis.

1.1. The Realm of the Unconscious and Repressed Other

Freud is often perceived as the Father of psychoanalysis and a pioneer when it comes to the study of the human psyche. He proclaims psychoanalysis as "Metapsychology," which he understands as the research area of processes in the human psyche that occur beyond consciousness, that is, those mental processes that are unconscious (Holder 8). Moreover, Holder states that these processes constitute the basis for psychoanalysis (ibid).

Freud's commonly known notion that the human psyche is split into three realms, "Es" (id), "Ich" (ego), and "Über-Ich" (superego), builds the ground for his psychoanalysis (cf. Freud, *Abriß der Psychoanalyse*). According to Freud's theory, the id is the realm of the Unconscious (*Abriß* 58). Moreover, he says that the defining quality of the id is that it is solely governed by the Unconscious (ibid). The ego may be seen as a mediator between the id and the outside world (Freud, *Abriß* 42). At last, the superego is perceived as the conscience (*Abriß* 101). This constellation leads to the following conclusion suggested by Freud: "Eine Handlung ist dann korrekt, wenn sie gleichzeitig den Anforderungen des Es, des Über-Ichs und der Realität genügt" (*Abriß* 43).

At the core of Freud's theories lies the notion of "an essential opposition between what he called the pleasure principle and the reality principle" (Ott and Mack 151). In this theory, the "pleasure principle is the uncontrollable human drive to satisfy desire" (ibid). Freud generally understands these drives primarily as desires of a sexual nature, but they are also perceived as "yearnings for […] power […] or food" (ibid). In Freud's theory, the pleasure principle is connected with the id, or, in his terms,

> das Es; sein Inhalt ist alles, was ererbt, bei der Geburt mitgebracht, konstitutionell festgelegt ist, vor allem also die aus der Körperorganisation stammenden Triebe, die hier [im Es] einen ersten uns in seinen Formen unbekannten psychischen Ausdruck finden. (Freud, *Abriß* 42)

Since not all of the id's desires are acceptable or appropriate within society and might harm the ego, the reality principle intervenes and controls the extent to which the desires may be satisfied (cf. Ott and Mack 152; Freud, *Abriß* 95). Moreover, the ego has to decide whether certain desires may be fulfilled at all or must be repressed as their fulfillment might harm the ego or destroy its standpoint within society (Freud, *Abriß* 95).The task of the reality principle is thus to restrain "desire according to possibility, law, or social

convention" (Ott and Mack 152). The reality principle is connected with the ego. Freud argues that "Selbstbehauptung," that is, self-assertion, is the ego's primary task (*Abriß* 42). In his words: "Dies ist die Aufgabe des Ichs, das auch die günstigste und gefahrloseste Art der Befriedigung mit Rücksicht auf die Außenwelt herauszufinden hat" (*Abriß* 44). Ott and Mack write that psychoanalytic theory is based on the assumption "that the human psyche is born out of the tense relationship between the pleasure and reality principles" (52). They report that the relationship between the principles can be contemplated in two ways, namely "repression and lack" (ibid).

Concerning the Unconscious, Freud recognizes its relation to what he calls "das Vorbewußte," that is, the Preconscious, and the Conscious. He states the following: "das Bewußtsein [ist] überhaupt nur ein höchst flüchtiger Zustand. Was bewusst ist, ist es nur für einen Moment" (*Abriß* 55). According to Freud, everything that is experienced consciously depends on the way it is perceived. Mental processes that may easily change from being unconscious to becoming conscious are recognized as "vorbewusst", that is, preconscious (Freud, *Abriß* 55). Mental processes with seemingly no access to the conscious fall into the realm of the Unconscious (ibid). However, Freud states that the division between these three categories is neither "absolute" nor "permanent[…]" (*Abriß* 55-56).

> Das was vorbewußt ist, wird, wie wir sehen, ohne unser Zutun bewußt, das Unbewußte kann durch unsere Bemühungen bewußtgemacht werden, wobei wir die Empfindung haben dürfen, daß wir oft sehr starke Widerstände überwinden. (Freud, *Abriß* 56).

The term "Widerstände" is of crucial importance here, as individuals need to overcome these in order to make the unconscious conscious, which is a difficult and strength-sapping process (ibid). As the next chapters will show, this process plays a central role in contemporary psychological thrillers. Freud claims that this process may even happen spontaneously: "ein sonst unbewußter Inhalt kann sich in einen vorbewußten verwandeln und dann bewußt werden, wie es sich im großen Umfang in psychotischen Zuständen ereignet" (*Abriß* 56). This, too, may be observed in a number of psychological thrillers. According to Freud, the fact that mental processes or thoughts may suddenly reappear although they seemingly vanished from the individual's consciousness suggests the following: "daß die Vorstellung auch während der Zwischenzeit in unserem Geiste gegenwärtig gewesen sei, wenn sie auch im Bewußtsein latent blieb" (*Begriff des Unbewußten* 41). This latency has two qualities: if it easily becomes conscious again, it is

"vorbewusst," if it remains hidden from consciousness, it equates to the Unconscious (cf. Freud, *Begriff des Unbewußten* 41-44).

As Ott and Mack write, drives and desires that are restrained by the reality principle are, nevertheless, not removed from the psyche: They are repressed to the extent that they become unconscious, so that the mind is able to regulate the tense relationship between the reality and the pleasure principle (52). Freud describes the process of repression in neuroses, explaining that, typically, individuals suffering from neurosis perceive reality as too painful to bear and consequently, turn away from it (*Formulierungen* 31). As he states, the core task of repression is to keep away from consciousness these drives, mental processes, thoughts and desires (Freud, *Das Unbewußte* 119). However, these repressed desires are not extinguished permanently. Kristeva emphasizes that the abject seeks emergence into the conscious realm, and will not remain in its repressed state (2). Long before Kristeva, Freud described this phenomenon as follows: "das Unbewußte […] hat einen natürlichen 'Auftrieb', es verlangt nichts so sehr, als über die ihm gesetzten Grenzen ins Ich und bis zum Bewußtsein vorzudringen" (*Abriß* 74). He further says that "im Unbewußten besteht die verdrängte Wunschregung weiter, lauert auf eine Gelegenheit, aktiviert zu werden" (Freud, *Über Psychoanalyse* 125). This phenomenon of the calling out of the repressed and its return to the Conscious is central to the creation of suspense in contemporary psychological thrillers. As mentioned before, it takes much effort for the Unconscious to become conscious again (Freud, *Begriff des Unbewußten* 45). Finally, it is important to note that repression cannot be entirely equated with the Unconscious. "Das Unbewußte hat den weiteren Umfang; das Verdrängte ist ein Teil des Unbewußten" (*Das Unbewußte* 119).

Like Freud, Lacan claims that the human psyche consists of both conscious and unconscious fragments (Ott and Mack 155). In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory there are "three separate orders, or realms, of human existence: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. The Imaginary corresponds with Freud's pleasure principle and, moreover, it is the realm in which the mirror stage described in the introduction of this thesis takes place.

> The Symbolic realm, or the cultural plane of social meanings and relationships […] is analogous to the reality principle […], specifically in the ways that language structures, orders, and constrains the impulse for the Imaginary desire that continues to exist in the individual. (Ott and Mack 156)

In contrast to Freud, Lacan does not perceive the Unconscious as "a personal quality we as individuals carry with us" (Ott and Mack 156). Instead, he regards it as "a shared sense of

the unnamable […] desires of the Imaginary we desperately yearn to experience again"
(ibid). In this thesis, I will primarily refer to Freud's theory of the Unconscious, as I feel
that it relates to the portrayal of the unconscious Other within the protagonists' minds more
appropriately. As the protagonists suffer from psychological disorders that are connected
with the Other within them, it makes more sense to conceive of the Unconscious as "a
personal quality" (ibid).

1.2. Dissociative Identity Disorder and Psychosis in Psychological Thrillers

It appears that not only the interest in psychological disorders in the movies seems to have
increased drastically. Simultaneously, "interest in dissociative disorders has increased
exponentially in the last decade" of the twentieth century (Lynn, and Rhue 1). As
mentioned in the introduction, portraying characters with psychological disorders is no
invention of the film industry. In fact, literature already displayed characters with split
personalities "long before psychologists began to speak of 'split personalities," as Indick
states referring to Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which was
written in 1886, long before the time of Freud's psychoanalysis and other psychological
studies and findings (38). Although the psychological thrillers I selected for this thesis
never explicitly state that their protagonists suffer from dissociative identity disorder or as
is the case in *Black Swan*, psychosis, their behavior allows the assertion that they are
supposed to leave the impression on the audience that they are diseased with mental
disorders.

According to Kaufmann's classification of the two forms the Other typically takes in
fiction, "psychosis and Dissociative Identity Disorder […] have replaced stories about
possession in the fictional media" (2). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the
characteristics of these disorders.

The term that was first used in psychology to describe dissociative disorder was 'split
personality'. It was then changed to 'multiple personality disorder,' and eventually to
'dissociative identity disorder' (Kaufmann 2; Mollon 2). As Kaufmann states, the process
of dissociating from a painful memory or trauma "protects the birth [or core] personality
from the terrible things that happened" (2). Cardeña reports that "in the clinical and
personality realm, 'dissociation' has been viewed as a theoretical construct (i.e., as a
defense mechanism) to explain why certain mental contents are not part of an individual's
consciousness, as an explanation of the process(es) through which those contents are elided
from memory" (16). However, this is only a highly general definition. There is a minimum

of three different descriptions of dissociation in clinical and personality psychology (ibid). First of all, the term dissociation delineates "semi-independent mental modules or systems that are not consciously accessible, and/or not integrated within the person's conscious memory, identity, or volition," (ibid). Second, the term dissociation refers to "an alteration in consciousness wherein the individual and some aspects of his or her self or environment become disconnected or disengaged from one another" (ibid). Third, dissociation is characterized "as a defense mechanism that effects such disparate phenomena as nonorganic amnesia, the warding off of current physical or emotional pain, and other alterations of consciousness" (ibid). Mollon states that

> [d]issociation involves an attempt to deny that an unbearable situation is happening, or that the person is present in that situation. Thus dissociation involves the defence of denial, but in addition requires a degree of detachment of part of the mind from what another part is experiencing. (4)

What happens in dissociative identity disorder is that

> a single individual alternates between two or more identities, each associated with its own set of autobiographical memories; these identities are separated by a symmetrical or asymmetrical amnesia, so that while the person displays one personality, he or she is unaware of the others, and their associated autobiographical memories. (Kihlstrom 378-379)

This may be observed in the protagonists of *Secret Window*, *Hide and Seek*, and *Fight Club*. In all three psychological thrillers the protagonists alternate between two personalities without being aware of the fact that they have developed alter egos. In addition, they do not have any knowledge or memory of what they did when their alter personalities were dominant and in action. Mollon perceives the development of alternate personalities as "the most striking feature of [dissociative identity disorder]" (127). While the autobiographical background mentioned in the quote above is missing in *Hide and Seek*, as the audience does not really receive any information about Charlie's supposed background, it may be said to exist to some extent in the other two movies. In *Secret Window*, the audience learns that John Shooter comes from Mississippi. In *Fight Club*, the audience is provided with background information about Tyler Durden's different jobs, his education, and his father. Therefore, the contrast between the protagonists and their alter egos is emphasized somewhat more in *Secret Window* and *Fight Club*, because providing some background information on the alternate personalitites contributes to making them appear as real persons to the audience and to the protagonists themselves. Nevertheless, in

all three movies the alternate personalities have names which Mollon also regards as a typical characteristic of dissociative identity disorder (127).

Furthermore, Mollon stresses that one needs to differentiate between repression and dissociative identity disorder. He writes the following:

> The process of repression, the first mental defence described by Freud, refers to a state in which frightening mental contents are kept out of awareness on a relatively permanent basis, until such time as the 'return of the repressed' perhaps in the form of symptoms. What is implied here is that there is one main dumping ground, the unconscious, where unwanted mental contents are disposed of; this unconscious may speak, but only in the 'language of the unconscious', dreams, symptoms, parapraxes, etc. Dissociation, by contrast, suggests a fluctuating state of consciousness, wherein one part of the mind can know and speak about, in ordinary language, matters which another part of the mind does not know about. In dissociation there can be many consciousnesses. Repression usually seems to be applied to internally generated mental contents, whereas dissociation is applied to externally generated trauma. (7)

It seems that the distinction or boundary between repression and dissociation is rather blurred in contemporary psychological thrillers. In many of these movies, both appears to happen simultaneously. Mollon, too, states that frequently, "dissociation and repression may be combined" (8). This can be seen, for instance, in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, where the protagonists experience an external trauma, namely the deceits by their wives. In *Hide and Seek*, David Callaway is possibly also traumatized by the act of murdering his wife. In both movies, repression ensues this external trauma, as the next chapter of this thesis will demonstrate.

While the term 'dissociative identity disorder' did yet exist when Freud composed his theories, he, too, observed cases that depicted a splitting of the personality. He, however, referred to this phenomenon in the context of psychosis. According to Freud, there are two possible causes for the emergence of psychoses; the first one being that the individual experiences reality as having become too painful to endure, and the second that the drives have become immensely powerful (*Abriß* 97). As he says, this frequently leads to a splitting of the personality. Freud speaks of an "Ichspaltung" which he describes as follows:

> Es bildeten sich zwei psychische Einstellungen anstatt einer einzigen, die eine, die der Realität Rechnung trägt, die normale, und eine andere, die unter Triebeinfluß das Ich von der Realität ablöst. Die beiden bestehen nebeneinander. Der Ausgang hängt von ihrer relativen Stärke ab. Ist oder wird die letztere die stärkere, so ist damit die Bedingung der Psychose gegeben. (*Abriß* 98)

Freud reports that this split is also referred to as "double conscience" (*Über Psychoanalyse* 117). He argues that several mental states may exist in the human psyche that are independent from and ignorant of one another, dominating the conscious realm alternately (ibid). "Wenn bei solcher Spaltung der Persönlichkeit das Bewußtsein constant an den einen der beiden Zustände gebunden bleibt, so heißt man diesen den *bewußten* Seelenzustand, den von ihm abgetrennten den unbewußten" (ibid). This can be seen in the psycho thrillers I selected for this thesis and in various other movies of the subgenre. Typically, the protagonists develop an alter personality of whom their conscious personality has no knowledge, or at least, fails to recognize as an alter ego of their own personality. I will elaborate on this phenomenon in greater detail in the next chapters.

The protagonist of *Black Swan* does not suffer from dissociative identity disorder. It seems that ever since the movie first appeared, critics have been trying to diagnose Nina. Many critics argue that she suffers from schizophrenia (Donaldson James 1). However, a psychiatrist who was asked about Nina's mental health states that *Black Swan* does not portray the disorder properly (ibid). Instead, he claims that the movie "does present a reasonable portrait of psychosis" (qutd. in Donaldson James 1). Based on her interview with the psychiatrist, Donaldson James states that "[p]sychosis is a loss of contact with reality that usually includes false beliefs or delusions, and seeing or hearing things that are not there" (1). Furthermore, she reports that patients suffering from psychosis usually experience auditory hallucinations and not primarily visual ones (ibid). Again, the movie industry portrays the disorder as more spectacular than it is in reality, as Nina has both auditory and visual hallucinations. The psychiatrist's explanation for this is that it seems more "dramatic" to depict "the visual" in films (qutd. in Donaldson James 1).

The next chapters of this thesis will show that the disorders and symptoms described in this section apply to the protagonists of the selected movies. Moreover, these and other psychological disorders can be traced in the characters of a wider range of contemporary psychological thrillers.[1] In *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window* and *Fight Club* the main characters have or develop dissociative identity disorder, changing from their seemingly true personality to an alter ego. Particularly in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, painful memories of the past appear to be the reason why these alter egos emerge. In Black Swan,

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[1] In *Shutter Island*, for instance, the protagonist seems to be a paranoid schizophrenic, believing to be the victim of a conspiracy against him. In The *Machinist*, the protagonist has an eating disorder, and presumably also dissociative identity disorder, as he communicates with a person who is not really there, but appears to adopt some qualities similar to the alternate personalities in *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, and *Fight Club*. It may be assumed that the protagonist of *The Uninvited* suffers from a dissociative disorder, as she sees and corresponds with her sister who has, in fact, died before the story evolves.

the protagonist suffers from psychosis. In each of the movies the protagonist's psychological illness seems to be related with the Other. It appears that the disorders function as expressions of the emerging Other.

Once again, it needs to be stressed that while the symptoms of dissociative identity disorder, psychosis, and other psychological disorders are discernible in the characters, the circumstances under which the disorders develop do not fully correspond with real life findings in psychology. In addition, the extent to which these symptoms appear is exaggerated in relation to those of actual patients of dissociative identity disorder (Indick source). Furthermore, while in fiction, dissociative identity disorder frequently denotes the potential to kill, there is no evidence that persons suffering from the disorder are more likely to commit a murder in real life (Kaufmann 2). It has to be remembered that psychological thrillers are works of fiction who may relate to actual psychology and psychological disorders without representing them accurately. As works of fiction, these movies are supposed to entertain and therefore, psychology and psychological disorders are portrayed in a more spectacular manner (cf. Indick). By depicting psychological disorders, the movie industry responds to the audience's growing interest in psychology.

2. *Hide and Seek* **and** *Secret Window***: The Aftermath of Repression**

John Polson's *Hide and Seek* (2005) and David Koepp's film *Secret Window* (2004) show some striking parallels, which I will demonstrate in this chapter. Both of the protagonists, David Callaway (Robert De Niro) in the former movie and the author Morton Rainey (Johnny Depp) in the latter, have been deceived by their wives. After his wife's death, of which the audience does not learn the circumstances in the beginning, David Callaway moves to another town with his daughter Emily. Soon, Emily begins to tell David about her new friend Charlie, whom David first believes to be an imaginary friend, but then, begins to suspect a neighbor. Eventually, it turns out that it was David himself who killed his wife upon finding out that she had been unfaithful to him and, moreover, that he intentionally made it look like suicide. In the process of coping with this incident, David invents his alter ego Charlie who represents himself before the murder, and, furthermore, positive character traits of his wife. In *Secret Window*, the audience learns from the beginning that Morton Rainey's wife was unfaithful to him. Only later does it become clear that he threatened his wife and her new lover with an (unloaded) gun. After the incident, Morton seems to live a secluded life in a lonely cabin in a small town outside of New York City. Suddenly, a man named John Shooter (John Turturro) appears and accuses him of plagiarism. It turns out that John Shooter is not real, but Morton Rainey's alter ego. Unable to act after his anger and feelings of revenge, he has invented this alter ego. Seemingly having repressed the wish to kill his wife and her new boyfriend all the while, Morton eventually kills them both in the end.

In the first section of this chapter, I will analyze some techniques that are used to maintain suspense and the effect these techniques have on the audience. Afterwards, I will examine the causes of repression in both movies. In the third section, I will take a closer look at the nature and representation of the protagonists' second personalities. Subsequently, I will analyze the phenomenon of the calling out of the repressed and unconscious Other. In the last section, I am going to examine the Self's discovery of the Other and the consequences this discovery brings with it.

2.1. Throwing the Audience off the Scent

The technique of throwing the audience off the scent is central to the creation of suspense in psychological thrillers. If the audience knew from the beginning that in movies like *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window* the protagonists themselves are Charlie and John Shooter, these movies would be rather boring. Indeed, they live from the strategy that more than one

trail is laid out before the audience that might lead to the solution to the mysterious events in the movies.

In the beginning of *Hide and Seek*, which is set on the day after New Year's Eve, the audience sees a seemingly happy family consisting of a mother, a father (David Callaway) and their daughter (Emily) who spend a nice day at a park, but the audience soon realizes that something must be wrong as, in the evening, the mother takes pills and uses a glass of wine to swallow them. After having taken her daughter to bed, the audience finds out that the parents' marriage is not happy: David asks his wife if there was "something" she wanted "to talk about", and she answers that "some things are beyond therapy" (00:04:09). This explicitly demonstrates to the audience that the marriage is unhappy. It is important to note that at the gala, David saw his wife deceiving him with another man. However, the audience does not learn this until David himself remembers that he killed her because of this deceit. Keeping the audience ignorant of the deceit prevents them from suspecting too early that David murdered her and, later, develops a second personality. After this short exchange between David and his wife, the wife leaves for the bathroom in order to take a bath. The audience sees her lying in the bathtub while David, is lying in bed and seemingly going to sleep. Moments later, the audience sees him still lying in bed. This shot mixes with flashing images of the New Year's Eve gala he and his wife attended the night before. David wakes up at exactly 2.06 a.m., a time which will be of importance throughout the discourse of the film, finding that his wife still is not in bed. Upon this discovery, he goes to the bathroom, looking for her. While he is on his way to the bathroom, a dripping noise is heard, which leads the viewer, who is presumably trained to suspect something when hearing this noise from having seen a number of psycho thrillers and horror movies (e.g. Stephen Hopkins's 1990 movie *Predator 2*) in which it indicated the finding of a dead body with blood dripping from it, to infer that the wife is probably dead. The audience's expectations are answered this time as well: David's wife lies in the bath tub which is filled with blood, seemingly having committed suicide by slitting her wrists. Filming and cutting the beginning of the movie in this way is of crucial importance when it comes to the audience's perception of the movie. Through showing the events in this order, the audience is tricked into believing the images it is presented with. David's reaction to the discovery of his wife's dead body induces the audience to believe in her suicide: He is visibly shocked and cries. Therefore, the audience is further deluded into trusting in the authenticity of the presented images and the linearity of the narration. The audience automatically accepts the narrated contents as true and corresponding with the reality

presented in the film and does not question them. Thus, from the beginning of the movie, the audience falls for an unreliable perspective from an unreliable protagonist and an equally unreliable presentation of reality in the story. This technique of hoaxing the audience into believing in the images it is presented with is central to the effect of psycho thrillers. Accordingly, the first few minutes of the movie, its introduction, so to say, is of crucial importance, as the audience is at this point tricked to believe what it has witnessed which builds the ground for the audience's perception of and reaction to the movie and its further course. The audience experiences the death of David's wife from his perspective and until now, has no suspicions as to the real circumstances of the woman's death. The path is laid out for the plot to unfold based on this delusion of the audience. Only close to the end of the movie do the viewers learn the true circumstances of the wife's death and that David himself is Charlie. Therefore, they are deluded through the majority of the film.

In order to keep the audience from finding out too soon that Charlie is David's second personality and thus ruining the suspense of the film, the movie keeps laying and maintaining the foundation of possibly suspicious persons and potential origins of Charlie. For instance, when Emily and David arrive at their new house, the broker is shown from Emily's perspective. Her facial expression in the respective scene allows for the assumption that she is rather skeptic towards him. Shown in a close-up from her perspective, the broker appears somewhat frightening and unpleasant. His appearance, which is not randomly chosen and created, underlines this impression: He has long black hair, a black beard, and a somewhat grim facial expression. In addition, he is dressed almost entirely in black. Consequently, his appearance may be said to be typical of evil or uncanny characters in psycho thrillers and horror movies. Aside from the broker, there are also other characters appearing in *Hide and Seek* who seem rather eerie, namely the neighbors, Laura and Steven, a married and middle-aged couple. David meets his neighbor (…) for the first time when he is looking for Emily and sees her outside, talking to a man. The neighbor watches her swinging and seems to amuse her. David immediately appears to suspect that the neighbor might be dangerous, presumably a pedophile, as he approaches a young girl without having introduced himself to her father first. The audience is likely to perceive the scene like David, as the scene is shot from David's perspective, and, therefore, the audience observes the events from his viewpoint. The viewers do not hear what the neighbor says to Emily. Thus, they have no opportunity of evaluating whether he truly poses a threat to her. As the audience merely sees the image of a male adult approaching a little girl on a playground, it is most likely to assume that he does indeed have a hidden

agenda. From this moment on David is rather suspicious towards the neighbors, which throws the audience off the track, as the viewers who perceive the events from his perspective are likely to be just as suspicious as David himself. Sometime after the incident Laura comes over to apologize for Steven's behavior, sensing that it must have appeared strange to David. She explains to him that they have lost a daughter, and that Emily simply reminds them of their lost child. Nevertheless, David continues to suspect the neighbors. There is another scene in the movie that increases this notion: The audience watches David observe the neighbors with a telescope. They are fighting, and Laura gesticulates wildly, pointing her hands in the direction of David's house. Seeing this presumably intensifies his suspicions, as he pays them a visit in the next sequence in order to find out more about them. This demonstrates that he still does not realize who Charlie really is. In the contrary, he continues to suspect Laura and Steven. When he arrives at their house, only Laura is present. As David enters the living room which is filled with toys, Laura breaks down and begins to cry. Referring to his profession as a psychologist, he offers to help them cope with the loss of their child. Laura tells him that her husband makes the loss even "more painful," but then she suddenly stops talking, saying that she has already "said too much" (00:59:38). This sequence, and especially this statement by Laura, are important, as they add up to the impression that the neighbors might have something to do with Charlie.

Next to these 'wrong tracks', the most essential and most legitimate and convincing false trail the movie lays is the arousal of suspicions about Emily. After she has told David that she no longer needs her doll because she has found a new friend, Charlie, David takes out the trash and discovers the doll in the garbage can. He sees that it has been violently disfigured. As a result, the audience is tricked again, namely into believing that something must be wrong with Emily, as she brutally destroyed and threw away her doll. The notion that Emily might be mentally disturbed is further emphasized in one of the next scenes. Here, David and Emily go fishing, and Emily kills a bug to attach it to the fish-hook, although as David says, they brought bait with them to the lake. Furthermore, Emily destroys another doll belonging to Elizabeth's (a woman David gets acquainted with, and who has a niece the same age as Emily) daughter when she comes over to visit with her mother. As Emily has not only lost her mother, but even witnessed the discovery of her dead body, it seems plausible that she might have developed a mental illness. This notion is underlined by the fact that Emily stayed at a children's hospital before she moved away with David.

Similar to *Hide and Seek*, the audience is thrown off the scent in *Secret Window* as well. The crucial difference between the two movies is that in *Secret Window*, the audience sees Morton Rainey's alter ego, John Shooter, on screen from the moment he first appears in the film, whereas Charlie is never shown next to David in *Hide and Seek*. In fact, the audience does not see Charlie at all; only in the end when David realizes that he himself is Charlie do the viewers see Robert De Niro performing as Charlie. By contrast, John Shooter is played by a different actor, which keeps the audience from immediately understanding that he and Morton Rainey are one and the same person. As a result, the audience is highly unlikely to question his authenticity until the climax of the film. The viewers see John Shooter and therefore, they believe that he is a real character. Consequently, they are deluded into believing the false images the movie presents to them.

It appears that the only false trail that is laid out in *Secret Window* is Morton Rainey's suspicion of his wife's new boyfriend Ted. John Shooter tells Morton that he comes from a small town in Mississippi. Later, Morton questions Ted, finding out that he also comes from the American South, namely from a small town in Tennessee called Shooter's Bay. Because of this, Morton believes that Ted has hired John Shooter in order to threaten him so that he will finally sign the divorce papers and leave his ex-wife Amy alone. As the audience does not yet know that Morton Rainey suffers from dissociative identity disorder, it is likely to follow the protagonist in his suspicion. Furthermore, the fact that Morton goes to the police after John Shooter's first appearance contributes to the illusion that his alter personality is a real and independent character.

Aside from these false trails leading to other characters, the movies also employ a strategy to distract the audience from suspecting David and Morton. In order to prevent the audience from inferring too early that Charlie and John Shooter are alter egos, the movies show the protagonist's carrying out particular activities while their alternate personalities are dominant. This is done to create the impression that they could not possibly have anything to do with Charlie or John Shooter actions, as they were busy doing something else in the meantime. In *Hide and Seek*, the audience typically sees David sitting in his office, listening to music and making notes about Emily's psychological development, when in truth, Charlie is dominant in these moments, playing Hide and Seek with Emily or preparing messages for David. In *Secret Window*, it is suggested that Morton Rainey is sleeping when John Shooter is active. When John Shooter appears or Morton discovers that he has been there, he is almost always shown waking up from a nap.

Although the audience is supposed to be thrown off the scent, it does receive some hints throughout the movies. For instance, in one sequence David puts a water boiler on the stove and turns it on. Then, he leaves the room. Moments later, he reenters the kitchen, where the water boiler is now whistling and water is spilling all over the stove. He turns it off and goes into Emily's room, where Emily is sitting on her bed, seemingly smiling at someone. When David asks what is going on and if Charlie is there, she answers that "he just left" (00:34:59). It is possible that the audience might interpret the hint correctly. In any case, it becomes clear retrospectively that David set the water boiler on the stove, and then Charlie became the dominant personality and played with Emily in her room. Afterwards, he returned to the kitchen as David. This explains why the water was boiling over. In addition, there are some filmic elements that support the idea that the audience receives hints throughout the movie. For instance, David's and Emily's new house is shown from a frog perspective when they first arrive there. The effect of showing the house from this perspective is that it seems threatening and gloomy. Therefore, the shot may be regarded as a foreshadowing technique that tells the audience that the danger, in fact, comes from within and not from the outside. Furthermore, there is a conspicuously long shot of David standing next to a mirror. It seems as if the shot wants to get him to turn around and look into the mirror, but David eventually walks past it without casting a glance at it. Interestingly, when he finds out that he is Charlie, he is shown in the mirror, which underlines the assumption that the previous shot was supposed to be a discreet hint.

In Secret Window, the audience receives a hint considerably early in the movie, but for this reason it is most likely to be overlooked. When Morton Rainey meets John Shooter for the first time, he threatens to call the police. Shooter reacts to this by saying: "We don't need any outsiders, Mr. Rainey. It is strictly between you and me" (00:05:11). This points at the fact that what actually causes problems is not Shooter as an external and real person who truly accuses him of plagiarism, but that Morton Rainey is facing an internal psychological conflict. It is the Other within himself that is confronting him, therefore no external circumstances could solve the problem; he needs to settle the conflict within himself. In any case, the audience will hardly recognize this hint at the beginning of the movie, as they probably yet believe that John Shooter is an independent character.

It becomes clear that both movies offer different strands or wrong tracks that the audience might consider as possible causes of the mysterious happenings in the stories. Nevertheless, the audience simultaneously receives hints indicating that David and Morton themselves cause the mysterious happenings in the movies. The technique of throwing the

audience off the scent is by no means restricted to these two films. In the contrary, it may be identified as a common technique in various psychological thrillers.[2] *Fight Club*, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, is one example. Because there are several wrong tracks laid out in these movies, suspense is constantly maintained. In addition, they offer the audience the possibility or, in a way, even induce the audience to think actively while they are watching the films. Viewers who actively participate by making inferences while watching will constantly have to adjust their assumptions according to the new information it is presented with. Therefore, the movies fulfill their function as postmodern texts, as they challenge the audience to think about the images it is presented with and to question these.

2.2. Triggers of Repression in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*

Repression plays a major role in both *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window* as it is the reason why the protagonists develop dissociative identity disorder and, as a result of the illness, alter personalities. Consequently, repression is the cause of the emergence of the Other. Therefore, it is necessary to look at what it is that the characters are repressing.

Schwartz writes that in *Hide and Seek*, David Callaway "represses his rage" (464). She further states that this repression results in the creation of "an alternative personality – Charlie" (ibid). Indeed, the repression of rage may be seen as the starting point of all following repression in *Hide and Seek*. The nature of the rage David is repressing is his anger towards his wife whom he has seen betraying him with another man. He tries to get his wife to confess the incident to him by asking her if she wanted to talk about anything, but she refuses to do so. As a consequence, he has no chance of coping with his rage by confronting his wife. The result of this is that his repressed rage eventually entices him to murder her. However, this is not where the process of repression ends for David. In addition, he represses the memory of having killed his wife. This becomes clear in the following sequence: After having witnessed her father's discovery of her dead mother's body in the bathtub, Emily is taken to a children's hospital. At the hospital, David talks to Emily's psychiatrist, Katherine, telling her that he "should have seen it coming," referring to his wife's suicide (00:06:44). Although it is not clear to the audience at this point as it does not question the circumstances of the suicide, it becomes visibly clear when considering the film retrospectively that, by now, David has successfully repressed the murder he committed. The murder has been repressed to the realm of the Unconscious,

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[2] The same can be said of *Shutter Island*, *The Uninvited*, and *The Others*, to name but a few.

and, in this process, David has simultaneously succeeded in making himself believe in his wife's suicide. Moreover, David's process of repressing the murder is crucial to the continuation of the delusion of the audience, as it tricks them into trusting David's unreliable perspective.

The causes of repression in *Secret Window* are somewhat similar to the ones in *Hide and Seek*. In contrast to *Hide and Seek*, the audience learns from the beginning that Morton's wife, Amy, deceived him, as the first scene shows him driving to a motel where he catches her in flagrante delicto with another man. The story continues six months after this incident showing Morton living in a rather isolated cabin in the woods. This beginning demonstrates to the audience that the incident has resulted in the split up of Morton and his wife. Like in *Hide and Seek*, it only becomes clear near the end of the movie what it is that Morton has been repressing. At the climax of the movie, a flashback shows that Morton threatened his wife and her lover with a gun. This suggests that he felt the desire to punish his wife for her betrayal, but was unable to perform the act that would exact this revenge, namely to shoot her and her lover. As a result, Morton repressed the desire to kill them. However, in the realm of the Unconscious, this desire continues to exist. Similar to David, this leads Morton to create his alter ego John Shooter. The name of his alter ego emphasizes that John Shooter symbolizes his repressed desire, as in the end of the movie, Morton decomposes his alter personality's last name into the imperative "Shoot her".

As I have demonstrated in this section, repression leads to the creation of the alter egos Charlie and John Shooter. It is important to emphasize once again that both David and Morton create their alter personalities unconsciously: They are not aware of the splitting of their psyches. This may also be seen as a form of repression, since the creation of his alter ego is kept away from their consciousnesses.

2.3. The Strange Cases of David Callaway & Charlie, and Morton Rainey & John Shooter

Having discussed the causes of repression in the previous section, I will now examine the nature of the alter personalities created by the protagonists. In both *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, the alter personalities represent repressed and unconscious memories or desires.

I share Schwartz's observation that Charlie "was created by the character [i.e. David] upon his discovery of his wife's affair, and then it was maintained as an attempt to relate to his daughter, Emily" (ibid). When David and Emily are settled in their new home, David

tries to replace Emily's mother by making faces at Emily and trying to play Hide and Seek with her before bedtime as her mother used to, but he fails, as Emily does not show any interest in or positive reaction to his attempts. However, despite David's own failure and his inability to replace Emily's mother or at least some aspects of her character, his alternate personality, Charlie, is able to establish a closer relationship with her. As Charlie, David can approach her in a way that she responds to and seems to like. Nevertheless, it has to be remembered that the audience does not yet know that Charlie is David's alter personality. The movie attempts to keep this secret until the climax of the film in order to maintain suspense. Accordingly, the audience sees how David unpacks his boxes in the new house and learns that he is a psychologist as he hangs up his diploma. In the meantime, the audience sees Emily going into the woods where she discovers a cave. It is suggested that these events happen concurrently as the shots are shown alternately. Upon the discovery of the cave, Emily drops her doll. At this point, audience does not know what caused this reaction as the camera focuses exclusively on Emily while the cave is not shown again. Thus, the audience does not yet suspect what they will learn in the later course of the film when it becomes clear that it was Charlie, David performing as his alter ego, whom she met there for the first time.

The audience learns of Charlie's existence in the following scene: One night, David discovers that Emily no longer takes her doll to bed with her. She tells him that she does not "like her anymore," the reason for this being that she has found a new friend (00:20:45). David begins to guess who this new friend might be. However, Emily will not tell him more about this new friend, saying that "he does not want [her] to talk about him" (00:21:30). Thus, Charlie wants to prevent David from discovering that he is his alternate personality: If David was to learn that he himself is Charlie, this might lead to the destruction of his psyche, and eventually, he would lose his position as a sane man. Moreover, David would no longer be able to act out his unconscious drives through Charlie. To avoid this, repression comes in, as it keeps the fact that Charlie is David's alternate personality away from his consciousness. In addition, Charlie does not want Katherine to find out about him. When she tries to talk to Emily about Charlie, Emily says that Charlie told her "he is afraid [Katherine is] gonna get in the way" of their game (00:52:40). Katherine wants to know the name of the game Charlie and Emily are playing, and Emily tells her: "Upsetting Daddy" (00:52:52). This shows that Charlie (and consequently, David – unconsciously) knows that she, as a psychologist, might discover that David suffers from dissociative identity disorder. Again, this would endanger David's

method of acting out the drives and desires of the Unconscious. But moreover, it would also rob David of his way of punishing himself for murdering his wife, as this seems to be what Charlie intends to do via Emily. When David asks Emily if Charlie "is […] here right now," presumably believing that she has an imaginary friend, she answers: "I think he is sleeping" (00:22:03). David's response to this is: "Well in that case, we better not wake him" (00:22:15). Reading this in psychoanalytic terms, it might mean that David is unconsciously aware of the fact that Emily is talking about him in the role of Charlie, but he does not want to wake him up, that is, bring him back into the realm of the Conscious. Nevertheless, the next sequence demonstrates that he is unconscious of Charlie's existence as his alternate personality, as he calls Katherine to tell her about Emily's imaginary friend.

Concerning Charlie's characteristics, Emily describes him as being "fun" like her mother (00:25:50). It becomes clear once again that inventing Charlie has not only given him the opportunity to repress the murder, but moreover, the opportunity to replace the mother. Charlie has adopted those character traits of Emily's mother that she especially appreciated, but, moreover, he overcomes David's shortcomings. David is unable to establish a close and uncomplicated relationship with Emily, to cheer her up, and to play with her. As Charlie, however, he is able to achieve this. Therefore, part of Charlie may be seen as an improved version of David. Nevertheless, Charlie is by no means an entirely positive or good character. In the contrary: He is considerably violent and evil. Charlie is the one who kills David's and Emily's cat, and, eventually even a human being, namely Elizabeth, a woman whom David meets in the town and seems to like, but who also becomes a threat to Charlie's existence when she comes over unannounced one evening. In addition, Charlie even forces Emily to help him commit his dark deeds. Charlie symbolizes the Other, because he represents crucial characteristics that David lacks, namely the ability to communicate and interact with Emily. Thus, he is what David desires to be: a substitute for Emily's mother. Furthermore, he appears as the evil Other of a 'would-be good' David, as he represents the violence and brutality that David believes not to have within him. In fact, however, he does contain this violent side, since he has killed his wife. As this marks his satisfaction of an inappropriate drive, he represses the murder and projects this brutal side onto Charlie. This also hints at the fact that the Other always reveals something about the Self.

The next morning after the incident with the cat, David talks to Emily about Charlie, asking her why Charlie would do "such a horrible thing," that is, killing the cat (00:48:47). He asks if it has anything to do with Elizabeth whom David seems to be interested in a

romantic way. Emily answers that Charlie does not like Elizabeth, because of the fact that she likes David, and Charlie "does not want [David] to be happy" (00:49:21). Here, it becomes clear once again that Charlie represents David's repressed Other. Charlie, who knows that David killed his wife, does not want him to be happy. Thus, he judges him, and, even more importantly, wants him to be punished for what he did by not granting him happiness. This attitude of Charlie's may also be seen as David's unconscious guilt for the repressed memory of murdering his wife. In another scene David tells Emily that he wants her to introduce him to Charlie, but she responds that this will not work because Charlie does not like David "very much." (00:36:11). This supports the notion that David also invented Charlie because of a form of hatred directed at his own person because of the murder he committed. David tries to confront Emily with his presumption that Charlie sprung from her imagination. Therefore, he says that "Charlie does not exist" (00:49:39). Emily responds that he "shouldn't say that", adding that "it's gonna make [Charlie] mad" (00:49:43). David is further repressing his deed by denying that Charlie, his second personality, exists. The fact that Charlie will get angry about this again points at the nature of the repressed that it will not remain in its state, but seek a way to return to the conscious. It cannot be denied and remain repressed. When David says that he wants to see Charlie, Emily takes him to her room in which one of the walls is covered with drawings of Charlie and some of Charlie, Emily and her mother. The look of Charlie in the images somewhat reminds one of David, but he fails to see this, which demonstrates the intensity of the repressive forces in his psyche. The fact that Emily draws Charlie as a replacement for her father shows that while his alternate personality is dominant, David is a person who can make the family and particularly, the mother, happy. Accordingly, his alter ego represents a better version of himself. Consequently, Charlie also offers David the opportunity to escape from his shortcomings, and furthermore – although he is unconscious of this – from the memory of the murder itself, and the feeling of guilt that accompanies it. This is emphasized by Emily's statement that Charlie told her he would have been able to satisfy her mother. At this point, the audience might begin to suspect something about Charlie and his connection to David. David, too, is beginning to wonder about Charlie and asks Emily who told her that, still claiming that "there is no Charlie" (00:50:59).

In *Secret Window*, the audience experiences the first meeting with Morton's alter personality John Shooter together with Morton. One morning, there is a knock on the door. Morton opens it to a man with a rather conspicuous hat, who – speaking with a thick Southern accent – accuses him of plagiarism. John Shooters appearance on screen marks a

striking difference between *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*: In the latter film, there is a direct and visual juxtaposition of Morton Rainey and his alter ego John Shooter, and therefore, there is also a more direct confrontation of ego and alter ego as compared to *Hide and Seek*. David is confronted with Charlie to some extent, but merely through the information Emily provides of him. Other than Morton, David never sees or perceives Charlie as a truly existing person. The audience, and equally, Morton Rainey, learns the purpose of John Shooter's existence when the movie reaches its climax. Here, John Shooter tells Morton: "I did them things so you wouldn't have to" (01:16:45). While John Shooter talks to him, flashbacks are inserted, showing Morton wearing John Shooter's hat while setting Amy's and his house on fire, which shows that it was his alter personality that was dominant at that specific moment. Another flashback revisits an earlier sequence of the movie. In the first sequence, Morton is talking to John Shooter (still believing him to be real) while Tom Greenleaf, presumably a neighbor or an acquaintance, drives by them and waves. In the second version of this sequence, Morton is in the car with Tom Greenleaf and the private investigator he hired to protect him from and help him get rid of John Shooter. As Morton, he arranged a meeting of the three men so that Tom Greenleaf can confirm Morton's description of John Shooter. The flashback shows that while the three men are in Greenleaf's car to revisit the place where he supposedly saw Morton and John Shooter, John Shooter was the dominant personality. Anticipating that Greenleaf will tell the detective that there was no one with Morton, which would result in the detective finding out about his disorder and thus, preventing the alter personality to complete his task (to murder Amy), Morton – as John Shooter – kills the two men. After this flashback, John Shooter continues by saying: "Didn't have the stomach to do it yourself, but you knew I did" (01:17:10). Accordingly, Morton Rainey unconsciously developed his alter personality because he himself was not able to satisfy his desire to kill his wife. John Shooter, by contrast, is a ruthless character who does not recoil from committing murder. In addition, he is the representation of Morton's repressed wish to murder Amy. Ruthless, brutal, and capable of murder, he symbolizes Morton's darker side, that is, the Other within him.

However, as Freud and Kristeva write, the repressed Other will not remain hidden and continuously attempts to return to the realm of the Conscious. The next section examines how this is represented in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*.

2.4. The Repressed Other Calling Out

As has become clear by now, Charlie and John Shooter represent the repressed Other. However, while the repressed Other has already found its representation in the alter egos, the fact that they are alternate personalities is yet to be realized by the protagonists. To achieve this recognition, the Other calls out to the protagonists from the realm of the Unconscious.

The calling out of the Other as described by Kristeva becomes particularly visible in *Hide and Seek*. While Charlie initially does not want David to find about him, he does want him to remember that he murdered his wife. Again, this demonstrates that Charlie represents the part of David's mind where his unconscious guilt is stored. The first instance of the calling out of the other in *Hide and Seek* may be observed in the scene in which David is lying in bed, presumably sleeping and, again, dreaming of the New Year's Eve gala, as flashing images of the party are shown. Then, the audience sees how he suddenly awakes. Like in the night of his wife's death a dripping noise is heard and, again, it is 02.06 a.m. At this point, an attentive audience probably realizes that there must something meaningful about this repeated scenario. As in the beginning of the movie, David enters the bathroom which is flooded with candlelight, which also resembles the night of his wife's death. He pulls away the shower curtain, but this time he discovers the following writing on the wall: "You let her die." The camera turns and shows Emily standing in the door. Visibly shocked, David asks her why she did this. Like in the night of his wife's murder, David's reaction emphasizes that he has successfully repressed that he himself is responsible for the writing on the wall. Emily asserts that it was not her, but Charlie. However, unconscious of the fact that he placed the writing on the wall when he was performing as Charlie, David does not believe her. This scene perfectly illustrates what Kristeva perceives as the calling out of the abject, and what Freud describes stating that the Unconscious and repressed continuously seeks after reappearance to the Conscious (cf. Kristeva 2; *Verdrängung*). As David's alter ego, Charlie originates from the Unconscious. Therefore, he represents the repressed Other that is calling out to the I in Kristeva's terms, or the ego, in Freud's terms (ibid). It will not remain hidden and stored away in the unconscious realm of David's psyche. In addition, it becomes clear once again that Charlie symbolizes the place where David stores his guilt. Charlie calls out to him, wanting him to remember that he murdered his wife.

The next scene that visualizes the calling out of the repressed Other once again repeats the scenario described above: Again, it is night, David is sleeping and seemingly dreaming

of New Year's Eve since flashing images of the night are shown, but this time, they once mix with the "You let her die"-writing he previously discovered on the bathroom wall. A new detail is added to the images of New Year's Eve, as the audience sees David observing and following his wife. For the third time in the movie, he wakes up at 2.06 a.m. and hears the already familiar dripping noise. Once again, he goes along the badly lit and, thus, considerably gloomy-appearing corridor into the bathroom, where he pulls away the shower curtain. This time the writing on the wall, which is seemingly written in blood, reads: "Now look what you've done," with an arrow pointing down to the bathtub, which is filled with a dark liquid. David reaches into the bathtub and retrieves the dead cat. Once again, this scene drastically depicts the calling out of the repressed Other. From the realm of the Unconscious, the Other is calling out to David who, at that time, still fails to recognize it. As before, Emily tells him that "Charlie did it" (00:46:27). However, as David is still unable to read the signs his Unconscious is sending him and, furthermore, equally unable to realize that he himself killed the cat and placed the writing on the wall, he seems to suspect his own daughter and even appears to be afraid of her, as he retreats from her room and closes the door. The fact that, moments later, David hears noises coming from the outside of the house which leads him to open the door, finding the broker who is trying to slip an envelope (containing keys for the different rooms of the house) under the door, further keeps David from realizing that he is responsible for what just happened. In the contrary, David suspects the broker of being Charlie, and the audience is most likely to still follow him in this suspicion.

Interestingly, in both *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window* the alter egos advance from killing an animal to killing humans. While Charlie first kills the cat and, later, Elizabeth, John Shooter first kills his dog, and eventually Amy and Ted. This suggests an increase in the brutality carried out by the alternate personalities, which also intensifies their Otherness.

In contrast to *Hide and Seek*, the calling out of the Other is depicted somewhat differently in Secret Window. While David's alternate personality leaves him messages on the bathroom wall, Morton's alter ego does not directly call out to his Conscious. Rather, it seems that throughout the movie, the Other does not call out to him from the realm of the Unconscious at all. The only true hint Morton gets is placed shortly before the climax, leading directly to the moment of recognition. In the relevant sequence, Morton has just returned to his house after having picked up the envelope containing the magazine with the first publication of his story. Still in the car, he realizes that the envelope has already been

opened. As it was still closed when he picked it up at the post office and nobody else was in the car with him, it becomes clear that he himself must have opened it. However, the audience does not see him open the envelope, because other sequences are cut in, showing the sheriff and Ted following Amy who is on her way to Morton's house. As a result, suspense is still maintained until the protagonist fully realizes what has truly occurred. The moments of recognition for David and Morton will be examined in the next section.

2.5. Moments of Recognition and their Consequences

By moment of recognition, I mean that specific moment in psychological thrillers in which the solution to the mysterious events in the films are revealed. Typically, this revelation includes the protagonist's realization that his or her antagonist is, in fact, an alter personality and that, consequently, they themselves were the source of the unexplainable happenings. In addition, this moment usually marks the climax of psychological thrillers. In the moment of recognition, the protagonists finally recognize the Other – symbolized by their alternate personalities – as a part of themselves. The consequences of this recognition may have different effects. For instance, a fusion of Self and Other might occur, or the Other might take over. The movies do not always state explicitly what happens in the end. Therefore, it is left open for the audience to wonder and discuss whether the Other has taken over or not.

In Hide and Seek, the path leading to the moment of recognition is paced by Elizabeth's unannounced visit to Emily and David. She arrives when Charlie is just playing Hide and Seek with Emily, which Emily tells her when she enters her room. Assuming that Charlie is an imaginary friend, Elizabeth joins the game and begins to look for him. Emily shows her Charlie's hiding place, pointing at the closet. The audience witnesses the scene from Charlie's perspective, that is, from the inside of the closet. Unless the audience has already guessed that David is Charlie, it does not know what will happen next. As a result, the suspense seems to at a peak in this sequence as the audience experiences Charlie as a physical appearance for the first time. Elizabeth opens the door of the closet, and still from the person in the closet's perspective, the audience sees Elizabeth screaming as she is pushed backwards and out of the window. Thus, it becomes clear at this point that he is definitely not an imaginary friend, but seemingly a real person. At that moment, David wakes up from a nap. Still, the film wants to keep the audience in the dark as to who pushed her, since nobody can be seen. But the fact that David wakes up at that moment might already be read as a hint for the audience. In truth, David awakes from having

performed as Charlie and pushed Elizabeth out of the window some time after the incident. David goes into Emily's room to find her drawing a picture showing Charlie pushing Elizabeth out of the window. Shocked, he looks out of the broken window, but Elizabeth's body is nowhere to be seen. When he starts to look for the body, the sheriff arrives. At this point, David is still not aware of what happened. After the sheriff has interrogated him about Elizabeth's disappearance to which David responds by assuring him that he has not seen Elizabeth, David goes back upstairs to look for Emily. He finds her standing in front of a door, crying, and Emily holding up a children's alarm clock which is ringing and showing the time 2.06.a.m. Again, the repressed Other is calling out to David. Already knowing what this scenario indicates, David immediately goes into the bathroom. There, he finds the final writing on the shower curtain, again written in bloody letters, saying: "Can you see now?" Like his wife, Elizabeth is placed in the tub. This marks the most drastic attempt of the repressed Other seeking to return to his consciousness. However, David's inner resistance is still preventing him from seeing the truth, and the repressed memory is thus still prevented from returning to the realm of the Conscious. David's reaction to the discovery emphasizes this notion: He takes Emily by the arm and asks her what she did, and, as before, she answers that Charlie did it, and she adds that Charlie forced her to help him.

After the discovery of Elizabeth in the tub, the action begins to ascend to the climax of the movie. David locks Emily in her room while she begs him not to leave her, presumably because she does not want him to turn into Charlie again, as she is probably afraid of what Charlie might do next; having witnessed that he is capable of murder. Suddenly, somebody unlocks the door of her room from the outside, which allows the audience to infer that Charlie is back, starting another game of Hide and Seek. Emily manages to call Katherine, and tells her that she does not "want to play with Charlie anymore" and that "daddy can't save her now" (01:10:23). This may be read as another hint for the audience pointing at the fact that Charlie is David, slowly leading up to the moment of recognition. Again, the movie works with parallel shots: The audience sees how David prepares to get rid of Elizabeth's corpse, while Emily apparently sees Charlie. When David enters the bathroom to retrieve the body from the bathtub, it is already gone, and Emily tells him that Charlie just left with it. It seems that the closer the movie gets to the climax, the more frequently David alternates between his two personalities. As mentioned before, this technique is used to trick the audience. Moreover, what the audience sees does not always correspond with what truly happens. Upon finding that the body is gone, David goes outside to look

Charlie. All of a sudden Steven appears. As earlier in the movie, the audience might suspect him of being Charlie. David, who in fact believes this to be the case, attacks and wounds him with a knife. Then, David runs back to the house and locks him out. It becomes clear that David believes to have succeeded in defeating Charlie, as he tells Emily that "Charlie is gone now" (01:13:00). Emily, by contrast, knows that Charlie will come back again.

As the two of them hug, the moment of recognition occurs: David hears, and then also sees the door of his office open slowly. He goes there and discovers that all if the boxes he believed to have unpacked since their arrival at the new house are still closed. The audience, who presumably trusted the sequences in which David unpacked the boxes, makes the surprising discovery together with him. He opens one box and retrieves the wrapped head phones the audience has seen him listen to music with. In another box he finds the notebook in which he believed to have written notes about Emily's psychological development, and he sees that it is completely blank. Now, it becomes clear that all of this never happened. A flooding with flashbacks follows: The writings on the bathroom wall are shown again, and a voice-over of David asking Emily questions about Charlie is heard. Now David recognizes that he is Charlie and simultaneously, he has to recognize the Other within himself. In another flashback, the scene in which Emily discovered the cave in the woods is shown again. Revisiting former scenes and showing what really happened in them seems to be a common technique in psychological thrillers.[3] In the revisited version of the sequence, David (as Charlie) comes out of the cave. It is now, in this scene, that all the unexplained and mysterious events are solved, and it becomes clear that all of them lead back to David himself. The realization that Charlie is his second personality also brings with it the return of the repressed memory that caused his creation. The most crucial flashback revisits the night of the New Year's Eve gala. This time, all the details that David repressed are shown. The audience sees David follow his wife until he finds her in a spot in a stairwell that was empty in the former flashbacks. The fact that previously the spot was empty demonstrates that David repressed the deceit by his wife. Now, it shows his wife kissing, and, presumably, even sleeping with another man. Her lover is heard teasing her, saying: "Come out, come out, wherever you are" (01:15:18). It seems that they treated their affair as a game of Hide and Seek. Unconsciously, he turned the game into a game of his psyche, as Charlie and the repressed memory are hiding from him, but they

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[3] It may also be observed in *Secret Window* and *Fight Club*, and, furthermore, in *The Machinist*, *Shutter Island*, *The Uninvited*, and many others.

simultaneously want to be found. Accordingly, the title of the movie might have been chosen to represent the game of Hide and Seek David's mind is playing with him. In addition, the movie poster features the statement: "Come out, come out, whatever you are" (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382077/). "Whatever," then, is the Other within David. The night of the supposed suicide of David's wife is also revisited. Now, it is shown that she was lying in bed and not in the tub. The sequence shows how David suffocates her with his pillow, then lays her in the tub, and arranges her supposed suicide. Another flashback reveals that he pushed Elizabeth out of the window, and that she scratched his forearm before falling. As he pulls back his sleeves, he discovers the scratches that he failed or denied to notice before. This shows that his repression of Charlie is so intense that, while being David, he does not even consciously perceive the traces Charlie has left behind. Eventually Emily asks him: "Can you see now, Daddy?" (01:16:04). David turns around to her and answers: "Daddy is gone now" (01:16:32). This response demonstrates that the Other, Charlie, has taken over; he has become the dominant personality. Thus, following Freud, the ego has become so weak that the id is has been able to conquer it (*Abriß* 67).

Having recognized Charlie as the Other within himself and furthermore, having turned into Charlie, David unfolds his cruelty. It seems that for him the consequence of the moment of recognition is that the Other takes over. The last fifteen minutes of *Hide and Seek* become a depiction of the extent of David's violent side. First, he murders the sheriff. Then, when he senses that Emily does not want to play with him, that is, with Charlie any longer, as she says: "You killed mommy" (01:21:26), he even begins to direct his brutality at his daughter. Holding his hands before his eyes, Charlie begins to count, initiating what is to become their last game of Hide and Seek. It becomes clear that David, as Charlie, intends to kill his daughter, because he tells her that "Mommy misses [her]" (01:26:11) when he walks around the house looking for her. The showdown takes place in the cave that served as Charlie's birth place in the beginning. Katherine arrives just in time to save Emily, and kills David. Concerning the ending, Schwartz writes:

> Even in splitting his personality, De Niro reminds spectators of the difficulty of distinguishing where the violence ends and the man (in this case, David) begins. By the end, viewers cannot tell the difference between the film ''daddy'' and Charlie. (464)

This suggests that David and Charlie have melted in to one personality, and this fusion is expressed through the drastic portrayal of their violence. Nevertheless, my impression is that in this fusion, the Other seems to dominate.

In *Secret Window*, the moment of recognition appears in the form of a confrontation of the three realms of the human psyche recognized by Freud, namely, ego, superego, and id. Still sitting in his car, Morton Rainey notices that the envelope containing the magazine with his story has already been opened. When he leafs through the magazine, he sees that his story has been cut out, which robs him of the last opportunity to proof that he has written the story first. However, this becomes unimportant, as he will now find out that John Shooter is not real. Upon finding that his story is gone, he says: "You cut it out. You son of a bitch," referring to John Shooter (01:11:58). Then, Morton's voice is heard in a voice-over: "Wait a minute. How would he do that?" (01:12:13). This voice-over represents Morton's superego, which will become clearer in the further course of the sequence. Morton begins a conversation with himself in which he symbolizes the ego. He responds to his superego saying: "I don't know but he did it," which shows that he has not yet realized the truth (01:12:15). The superego is heard again, trying to help him see the truth: "Think about it. How?" (01:12:20). Morton repeats that he does not know how John Shooter could have done it. He leaves the car and enters his house. The first shot from the inside shows John Shooter's hat placed on Morton's coffee table. Morton sees it and puts it on. With the hat on his head he approaches the mirror in his living room and looks at his reflection. From the voice-over his superego asks: "Why did you put it on?" further leading him to his final realization (01:13:04). Again, Morton says that he has no idea. The superego tells him: "Maybe he wanted you to" (01:13:08). Morton, who still seems clueless, responds: "Why would he want me to put his head on?" (01:13:10). The superego continues: "Maybe he wants you to…" (01:13:12), and the camera turns from Morton Rainey's reflection in the mirror while Morton simultaneously turn away from the mirror so that the camera directly faces him . Looking into the camera, Morton interrupts the superego, asking: "Maybe he wants me to what?" (01:13:15). The camera turns again in the direction Morton was facing, showing himself without Shooter's hat on. Thus, Morton's superego is no longer merely a voice-over but has found its personification in form of a double of Morton with whom he now communicates. At this point, it becomes explicitly clear that Morton seems to suffer from a psychological problem, as he not only talks to but actually sees another version of himself which represents his superego. The superego finishes his statement, saying: "…to get confused" (01:13:18). Saying that he is indeed confused, Morton walks into the direction of the door, but his personified superego blocks the way out. The following exchange between Morton Rainey and his superego takes places:

> SUPEREGO. Wait a minute now. Back up just a sec. What about that?
> MORTON. What about what?
> SUPEREGO. Well, pilgrim. Shooter's Bay. And the half a dozen other details you've chosen to ignore.
> MORTON. You know what? You're nuts. I don't need to listen to this shit from you.
> SUPEREGO. Are all those things coincidences?
> MORTON. I'm wearing his bruises, aren't I? Aren't I?
> SUPEREGO. Are you?   (01:13:25-01:13:51).

This exchange demonstrates that Morton still refuses to see the truth, while his superego is trying to get him to finally do so. In addition, it becomes clear that Morton has lost his sanity, as he talks to himself and tells his superego-double that it is crazy. Looking down at his arms, Morton discovers that there are, in fact, no bruises at all. Still uncomprehending, Morton says: "This doesn't make any sense" (01:13:57). The superego responds: "Would you like to hear something that does make sense? Call the police" (01:13:59). Picking up the phone and holding it in Morton's direction, it continues: "Call Dave Newsome, tell him to come here this second and lock you up before you can do any more damage" (01:14:05). Morton's reaction to this demonstrates is facing an internal struggle, torn between the demands of the superego and, at this point still unconsciously, the drives existent in the id. He says: "I'm gonna get a knife and cut you out of me" (01:14:12). The next shot shows the living room from above: Morton is alone in the room, talking to himself. The superego is heard again in form of a voice-over, adding the following to its last statement: "Before you kill anyone else" (01:14:14). The camera angle changes back to Morton. Finally, the moment of recognition has arrived. Like David in *Hide and Seek*, Morton is inundated with flashbacks which also solve the mysteries of the narration for the audience. Now, he remembers that he went to the motel with a gun that he pointed at Amy and Ted, wanting to kill them. This is also a new detail for the viewers, as in the opening scene of the movie, they only see how Morton discovers them together, but in that sequence, there is no gun. Accordingly, Morton has repressed this memory while the wish to kill Amy and Ted continued to exist in the realm of the Unconscious. This becomes clear in another exchange between Morton and his superego:

> SUPEREGO. You had a gun.
> MORTON. Wasn't loaded.
> SUPEREGO. Really?
> MORTON. No.
> SUPEREGO. You almost killed them. You wanted to.
> MORTON. The gun was not loaded!
> SUPEREGO. You still want to.
> MORTON. Shut up! (01:14:26-01:14:42)

Morton's exclamation suggests that he seems to be in a sort of state of denial at this moment as he does not want to hear the words of the superego. The superego finally tells him the truth which the audience presumably already knows by now: "There is no John Shooter. There never has been. You invented him" (01:14:47). The fact that his superego appears and leads him to this moment of recognition may be associated with Freud's understanding of the superegos task, that is, the "Einschränkung der Befriedigungen" of drives (*Abriß* 44). The ego, Morton Rainey, has failed to fulfill its task, namely to find a way to satisfy the drives originating from the id in a way that is harmless and acceptable in the outside world (ibid). As a result, the superego intervenes to prevent the ego from causing further harm. The fact that the superego did not intervene at an earlier stage, for instance, before Morton killed the two men, demonstrates that the strength and dominance of the id within him, personified by John Shooter. Once again, the audience can see that Morton is facing a psychological conflict, struggling torn between the superego and the id represented by John Shooter. The following plea by the superego supports this notion: "Listen to me, not to him, before it's too late" (01:14:54). Eventually, the superego seems to have disappeared and, instead, John Shooter reappears. He tells Morton the following: "I exist, Mr. Rainey. I exist because you made me. […] You thought me up. Gave me my name. Told me everything you wanted me to do" (01:16:10). Now, Morton understands what has truly been happening, and furthermore, he remembers how he slowly created the character John Shooter. A flashback shows Morton and Amy at a market where Morton tries on a hat, the hat John Shooter wears throughout the movie, posing in front of a mirror and pretending to be "a dairy farmer from Mississippi" (01:16:20). Then, John Shooter asks him: "What's the real reason I come for?" (01:17:21). It becomes visible that Morton realizes that John Shooter is telling him the truth. Morton answers: "Fix the story. […] Fix the ending. Got to fix the ending" (01:17:25). The only way Morton is able to achieve this is by becoming John Shooter again, that is, by giving in to the Other within him and letting it take control over him. Furthermore, Morton's realization that he needs to correct the ending of the story, that is, execute Todd Downey's murder of his wife in the short story, demonstrates that the repressed desire to kill his wife has found its return to the conscious realm. John Shooter offers him his hat, and Morton takes it. This gesture demonstrates that the Other has become dominant within his body, enabling him to finally kill his wife and her new boyfriend.

Simultaneously with reading the moment of recognition in Secret Window as a confrontation with the three realms of the human psyche recognized by Freud, Morton

Rainey can be diagnosed as suffering from dissociative identity disorder. Considering him as suffering from the disorder, the painful situation that has become unbearable to him is the deceit by his wife and the couple's ensuing separation. In dissociative identity disorder, John Shooter is his second or alternate personality. One might even argue that the superego constitutes a third personality within him.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that David Callaway and Morton Rainey suffer from psychological problems as a result of repression. In both movies, the protagonists have been deceived by their wives. Both David Callaway and Morton Rainey cannot cope with their wives betrayal and consequently, they kill them. The difference between Hide and Seek and Secret Window is, nevertheless, that David kills his wife in the beginning and represses the murder, whereas Morton only wants to kill her, but is unable to do it. As a result, he represses the desire until, through his alternate personality, he becomes able to murder her in the end. In both movies the moments of recognition reveal that the protagonist actually suffer from a psychological disorder, leaving the alternate personalities as effects of these disorders. As the alternate personalities represent the protagonists' repressed memories and desires, they symbolize the Other within them. This Other has to undergo two steps before it fully returns to the Conscious. First of all, it emerges in form of the alter egos. Secondly, the protagonists have to realize that they have alternate personalities who have emerged as a result of repressed contents which now return to the protagonists' consciousnesses.

3. *Fight Club*: The Alter Ego as a Means to Escape from a Standardized Life

This chapter examines David Fincher's *Fight Club*. The fact that *Fight Club* is a filming of a novel of the same title by Chuck Palahniuk can be traced in the movie, as there is a narrator, the protagonist, who narrates the story in form of voice-overs.

Fight Club differs from the *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window* in that there is no murder or wish to murder someone out of revenge that is repressed. Rather, the nameless protagonist (Edward Norton) seeks after a way of escaping from his standardized life and, therefore, he develops the alter ego Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) who offers him this opportunity by creating Fight Club, an underground club in which men meet to carry out fist fights against one another, and, later throughout the movie, the underground organization Project Mayhem, which organizes operations against materialism and consumerism. Although all of the movies examined in this thesis may be regarded as postmodern texts, *Fight Club* particularly stands out as a postmodern film. The line of narration the movie follows is typical of postmodern cinema: It is not linear, as, for instance, the first scene is actually taken from ending of the movie, thus framing the movie (cf. Brandt 8).

Moreover, Fight Club employs the same strategy as the previous psycho thrillers, as the audience tricked and thrown off the scent like in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*. Throughout the majority of the film, the audience does not know that Tyler Durden is, in fact, the protagonist's second personality that he has developed as a symptom of dissociative identity disorder.

In this chapter, I will examine the role repression plays in *Fight Club*. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that repression is connected with the fact that the protagonist is suffering from a psychological disorder which represents the emergence of the Other. Finally, I will analyze the consequences of the return of the repressed Other to the protagonist's consciousness.

3.1. The Role of Repression in *Fight Club* as a Postmodern Text

After the short introduction displaying a sequence from the ending of the movie, the narrator, that is, the protagonist, says that he has been unable to sleep for six months. As a result of his sleeplessness, everything seems unreal to him. While the audience watches him at work, seemingly exhausted due to his inability to sleep, he says: "everything is a copy of a copy of a copy" (00:03:50). Ta recognizes this as a representation of "the postmodern idea of simulacra" (272). The shot changes to the inside of a trashcan

containing garbage showing labels from popular companies (i.e. Starbucks and Krispy Kreme Doughnuts). The camera slowly moves backwards out of the trashcan so that the labels are clearly visible to the audience. The sequence seems to criticize a capitalist society and consumerism, which is emphasized by the protagonist's next statement: "When deep space exploration ramps up, it'll be the corporations that name everything. The IBM Stellar Sphere. The Microsoft Galaxy. The Planet Starbucks" (00:04:00). It appears that the protagonist is tired of his everyday life which is controlled by these companies who seem to rule and determine the course of the world. There are various other instances in the movie which visualize the critique of standardized and company-determined life. For instance, when the protagonist's suitcase is kept at the airport because it vibrated, he says that he "had everything in that suitcase. My CK shirts. My DKNY shoes. My AX ties. Never mind" (00:24:24). Again, labels are mentioned to demonstrate their omnipresence and seemingly overvalued meaning in everyday life in which one is defined by their possessions. When the protagonist finds that his apartment has been blown up, he calls Tyler Durden. In the ensuing scene, the protagonist and Tyler are at a bar, where the former tells the latter that he had all he needed at his apartment, listing his sofa, stereo, and other things, saying that he "was close to being complete" (00:28:17). It becomes visible that the protagonist is trapped in a system that simultaneously frustrates him, as this statement denotes that he was close to attempting to reach personal completion by buying furniture and consequently, participating in a consumerist world in which one is what one owns or, as Tyler puts it: "The things you own end up owning you" (00:29:59). Now that "it's all gone," he is liberated from materialism and consumerism (00:28:20). The protagonist seems to be aware of this, as he even tells Tyler that they are "consumers" (00:28:43). Tyler's response is: "We are by-products of a lifestyle obsession," criticizing the dominant lifestyle in American society (00:28:52). Tuss describes the protagonist's dilemma as follows: "the narrator in *Fight Club* experiences a […] negative impact and alienation from the culture of the 1990s" (96). In another scene, the audience sees the protagonist's apartment, while in the role of the narrator he says: "Like so many others, I had become a slave to the Ikea nesting instinct." (00:04:36). Here, Ikea is used as a symbol for the standardization of life. Therefore, showing the protagonist's Ikea-furnished apartment, consumerism and materialism is again criticized. Furthermore, this may be read as a hint at the loss of individualism, as Ikea seems to be in everybody's home and nobody seems to question its legitimacy. Ta recognizes "the film's critical yet problematic portrayal of late capitalism's obsessive push for profits and excessive consumerism," and

what she considers to be of even greater importance, "the latter's damaging effects on an American masculinity gone soft" (265). The protagonist feels frustrated, as he is oppressed by consumerism and capitalism, while, simultaneously, he actively participates in this consumerist society. It appears that he is caught in a vicious circle of materialism and consumerism. As a result, he does not directly cope with his frustration. It seems that he submits to the role that is assigned to him: Ta aptly describes him as an "unfulfilled cog in the wheel of bureaucratized America who cannot seem to escape the (feminized) trappings of corporate oppression and Swedish home furnishings" (265). As a result, while the protagonist is indeed aware of his frustration, he represses his rage at consumerist American culture, and even more intensely, he represses the wish to be more masculine in a society in which, as Ta argues, he is continuously emasculated (265). This emasculation or loss of true masculinity seems to originate from a sense of purposelessness (cf. Ta). Tyler describes this in a speech he delivers to the members of Fight Club as follows:

> Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes. Working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We're the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our great war is a spiritual war. Our great depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars. But we won't. We're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off. (01:07:22)

Again, the criticism of consumerism becomes visible. In addition, as the men do not seem to have a clear purpose in life as their forefathers did, they are facing a "commercial-ruled, image-based culture that has essentially reduced masculinity to a mere accessory that can increase a man's manliness as long as he literally buys into the market" (273). Similarly, Boon perceives the problem of masculinity as follows:

> *Fight Club* is populated with men at the end of the 20th century who are struggling to preserve their male heritage. Their opponent, the force that threatens to disavow their manhood, is not people, political movements, or authoritative institutions; it is the episteme of contemporary American culture that drives human perception. (271)

Once again, the protagonist's frustration does indeed become visible in the first sequences of the movie and may thus not be regarded as unconscious; however, his seeming inability to change his situation causes him to repress his anger and mentally flee or dissociate from this frustration. As Freud states, repression may be regarded as "ein Mittelding zwischen Flucht und Verurteilung" of a particular drive (*Verdrängung* 105). Nevertheless, his desire to be more masculine is, in fact, clearly an unconscious one (cf. Ta 271). This idea is supported by the fact that he does not criticize the emasculation of men by capitalist

society in the beginning of the film as he does consumerism and capitalism. After he has met Tyler, he is able to talk about the problem of misrepresented masculinity. In the respective sequence, the protagonist and Tyler are on a public bus, looking at a Gucci advertisement showing a male body in underwear. In a voice over, the narrator says: "I felt sorry for guys packed into gyms, trying to look like how Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger said they should" (00:43:15). Then, the protagonist asks Tyler: "Is that what a man should look like?" Here, the fact that fashion determines what men should look like is criticized. In a way, Fight Club might be seen as a rebellion against this distorted image of masculinity. However, the fact that the protagonist does not address the issue of emasculation before he meets Tyler demonstrates that his desire has been kept away from consciousness, repression thus having fulfilled its task (*Verdrängung* 106).

However, the repressed does not remain completely inactive. Freud states the following:

> Wir dürfen uns vorstellen, daß das Verdrängte einen kontinuierlichen Druck in Richtung zum Bewußten ausübt, dem durch Gegendruck das Gleichgewicht gehalten werden muß. Die Erhaltung einer Verdrängung setzt also eine beständige Kraftausgabe voraus, und ihre Aufhebung bedeutet ökonomisch eine Ersparung. (*Verdrängung* 110)

Freud further explains that during sleep, the resistant forces that work against the repressed are less powerful and controlled, and only when one wakes up are these reestablished (*Verdrängung* 110). Sleep plays a major role in *Fight Club*, as the protagonist is suffering from insomnia. Considering Freud's theory, this might be interpreted as the protagonist's mechanism to prevent his resistant forces to lose control while he is sleeping. In addition, his sleeplessness is a further expression of his frustration and his repressed feeling of emasculation.

To get rid of his insomnia, the protagonist even consults a doctor, but he refuses to give him any medical treatment. In this sequence, the protagonist also mentions that he suffers from narcolepsy, "wak[ing] up in strange places" without knowing "how [he] got there" (00:05:32). This important for the later course of the movie, as it turns out that his second personality was dominant when he believed to be asleep. Obviously not taking him seriously, the doctor jokingly tells him to go to the support group meeting of men with testicular cancer. Seemingly not knowing what else to do against his sleeplessness, the protagonist indeed decides to attend the meeting. It is no coincidence that the motto of the support group is "Remaining Men Together." When the men are asked to pair up, he meets Bob. In his arms he is able to "let go" (00:08:48): He cries, and finally, he is able to sleep

the following night. Like Ta states, "[a]lthough he does not actually have the disease [i.e. testicular cancer], he feels he is able to recover his masculinity by participating in a form of male bonding that allows him to release his emotions" (267). As a result of the positive effect these meeting have on him, the protagonist becomes "addicted" to them (00:09:18). From then on, he goes to various support group meetings for several diseases. However, his method of curing his sleeplessness does not last. Eventually, he notices Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter) whom he recognizes as an imposter like himself. Since another impostor is present, he can no longer cry at the meetings, nor sleep. Moreover, it seems to be no coincidence that a woman should destroy his newfound peace, as it supports the notion that masculinity is threatened by femininity Ta recognizes in Fight Club (cf Ta). It is no surprise then that he finds his true cure in Fight Club, as it is a sphere free from women. As Ta states, the protagonist's "quest to cure his ailment [i.e. insomnia] […] eventually leads to the creation of Tyler" (272).

In this section, I have demonstrated that Fight Club particularly stands out as a postmodern text, because the protagonist's process of repression is directly linked with problems postmodernism is concerned with. As one source states, "postmodernism is concerned with how the authority of […] meta-narratives […] are subverted through fragmentation, consumerism, and deconstruction" (qutd. in Brandt). This is reflected in Fight Club's critique of capitalism, materialism, and consumerism. In his frustration, the protagonist seems to suppress the desire to escape from standardized life, and submits to his role within society. However, he does find a way to release his frustration, which the next section will show.

3.2. Representation of the Repressed and Unconscious Other: The Nameless Protagonist vs. Tyler Durden

One of the first things that strike one when watching *Fight Club* is that the protagonist does not have a name. At one point in the movie, when he gives Marla his number, she notices that his name is not on the piece of paper containing the number and asks: "Who are you? Cornelius? Rupert? Travis? Any of the stupid names you give each night?" (00:18:20). However, the question is not answered; instead, there is a cut to the next scene. The fact that the protagonist does not have a name serves at least two functions. First of all, it makes him appear even less individual in a standardized and bureaucratic society in which, as Tyler says, they are all "slaves with white collars" (01:07:32). Second, it strengthens the notion that he is inferior to Tyler. He is passive and consequently, nameless, while Tyler

has a name and is an active aggressor. Another reason that he does not have a name is, of course, that he himself is Tyler Durden. Other than in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, he does not invent a name for his alter ego. Remaining nameless and calling his alter ego by his name suggests that he perceives himself as 'nothing', while Tyler represents everything that he wants to be.

Unlike in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, the protagonist's alternate personality does not appear abruptly in *Fight Club*. Instead, it is suggested that it slowly develops until it finally breaks out and stays. However, this is not unlikely to pass unnoticed by the audience as it is depicted in form of radically short cut-ins showing Tyler for what seems to be less than a split second. The first instance of this can be observed in the scene in which the protagonist is at his office, saying that everything is merely a copy of something else. While he says this, there is a cut-in of Tyler, but it is so short that it may easily be overlooked by the audience. One does, indeed, have the impression to have seen something, but it is not very probable that someone recognizes Tyler without pausing the movie. The next scene that features a cut-in of Tyler is the one in which the protagonist is at the hospital, talking to the doctor about his sleeplessness. Again, Tyler becomes visible for a brief moment. The same happens at the first meeting of the support group for men with testicular cancer, and again, when he talks to Marla. What is striking is that in all of these cut-ins, the audience (provided the image is captured on pause) sees Tyler in relaxed positions, for instance, putting his arm around the leader of the support group, and, in addition, he is always smiling. It seems as if he was calling out to the protagonist, appealing to him to relax and let go of his attachment to a culture that frustrates him. In addition, when considering *Fight Club* retrospectively, or when watching the movie for a second time, one might say that these cut-ins serve as hints, pointing at the fact that Tyler Durden is not a real person, as he was there with the protagonist all along; a mere projection of the Unconscious. In any case, Tyler will not remain a cut-in. When the audiences watches the protagonist travel different places in the context of his job, Tyler can be seen in the background on the stairway going into the opposite direction of the one the protagonist is using. During this shot, the narrator asks: "If you wake up at a different time, in a different place, could you wake up as a different person?" (00:18:54). As he says this, the camera turns so that he fades out of the frame on the right side, and the focus is put on Tyler on the left side of the frame. This sequence hints at the birth, or rather, the final emergence of the protagonist's alter ego, as Tyler is no longer merely a cut-in.

The first 'true' encounter between the protagonist and Tyler Durden occurs on a plane. The scene begins with the protagonist sudden awaking. Tyler, who is sitting next to him, engages him in a conversation. As in *Secret Window*, there is a direct and visually perceivable confrontation between Self and Other as the alternate personality is played by a different actor: whereas the protagonist is played by Edward Norton, Tyler Durden is played by Brad Pitt. Moreover, there is a visible contrast between protagonist's momentary life and the life he appears to strive for: He is dressed in a business suit, while Tyler looks somewhat more liberal and independent from the individual-suppressing mass of "slaves with white collars" (01:07:32). He is wearing red-glassed sunglasses, spiky hair, and a red jacket. Portraying him as such, he appears 'cooler', more easy-going, and carefree than the protagonist. This juxtaposition of Self and Other is similar to the portrayal of the contrast between Nina and Lily in *Black Swan*. The protagonist eventually asks Tyler what he does for a living. Tyler reaches down under the seat in front of him to fetch his briefcase in order to show him that he makes soap. The shot shows the front seats with two identical briefcases below them. The protagonist even notices that the briefcases are identical, but he does not read this as a hint to the fact that he himself is Tyler Durden. Near the end of their conversation, after Tyler randomly tells the protagonist that it is possible to "make all kinds of explosives using simple household items," the protagonist tells him: "You are by far the most interesting single-serving person I ever met" (00:22:33). This stresses once again that he is tired of his standard life and the common people in it. The fact that Tyler is played by a different actor, and the depiction of this first encounter of the protagonist and Tyler, create the effect on the audience, and indeed, the protagonist himself as well, that they believe Tyler to be a real character in the movie. It is unlikely that the audience will question his authenticity at that point, and therefore, like in *Secret Window*, the audience is thrown off the scent.

The fact that Tyler finally appears represents the emergence of the Other. The feeling of frustration and the wish to be more masculine that have been repressed by the protagonist are now embodied by Tyler Durden. With Tyler Durden as his alternate personality, the protagonist has created a personality that – unlike himself – is free from the consumerism and materialism of a capitalist society. In addition, Tyler corresponds with the protagonist's notion of masculinity. As Ta states, the protagonist "project[s] his desire for masculinity onto Tyler, who is the hyper-masculine embodiment of [the protagonist's] lost 'manhood'" (272). However, it has to be remembered that, at his point, the protagonist is not aware of the fact that Tyler Durden is his second personality. Instead,

he believes to have found a 'Guru' who can teach him how to live a life free from the society he detests (Gmür, and Just). Therefore, the repressed Other – although it has found its embodiment – has not been recognized as such yet. Moreover, it has not yet returned to the realm of the Conscious. As Biermann states referring to Findlay's findings, "prior to this realization, a self-consciousness aims to eradicate this alien other" (86). This is represented by the protagonist's attempt to repress the Other.

Moreover, it is Tyler who introduces the protagonist to violence and awakens his brutal side. The fact that Tyler is an alter personality demonstrates that, unconsciously, the protagonist has already had this violent side within him. However, as acting it out would not be accepted in the society he lives in, he has repressed this side, and it has become part of the Other within him. This repressed Other has now found its personification in Tyler Durden. In addition, as Ta writes, *Fight Club* seems to depict "the use of violence as a vehicle for critiquing a culture dictated largely by consumerism and commercialism" (266). The first fistfight between the protagonist and Tyler occurs when they leave the bar after the protagonist's apartment is destroyed. To the protagonist's great surprise, Tyler tells him: "I want you to do me a favor. […] I want you to hit me as hard as you can" (00:30:55). The fact that the protagonist is somewhat shocked by this request demonstrates once again that he is not aware of the repressed Other within himself, and, moreover, that Tyler is not real, but merely an embodiment of this Other. Before the actual fist fight evolves, the narrator addresses the audience in form of a voice over, saying: "Let me tell you a little bit about Tyler Durden. Tyler was a night person" (00:30:52). Although the presumably does not realize it yet, this hints at the fact that Tyler is the protagonist's alter personality who comes to live at night, when he is plagued by insomnia. While the protagonist describes Tyler and his different jobs, he looks into the camera, directly addressing the audience. Thus, the protagonist breaks up the boundary between the fictional world of the movie and the reality of the audience. As one source states, postmodern cinema uses "small alterations to the conventions of traditional cinema […] [to] emphasize the artificiality of the world depicted" (qutd. in Brandt 8). *Fight Club* achieves this by letting the protagonist look directly into the camera, seemingly at the audience. At the same time, Tyler can be seen in the background at a work-bench. The protagonist continues: "While the rest of us were sleeping, he worked" (00:30:53). Considering the film retrospectively, this is somewhat ironic, as in fact, the protagonist was not sleeping, but instead worked each of the jobs he believed Tyler to be carrying out. As the protagonist informs the audience, Tyler has a "part-time job as a projectionist"

(00:30:55). The protagonist describes Tyler's job while the audience sees him in the foreground of the shot and Tyler working in the background. Tyler adds comments to the protagonist's descriptions, completing them thus, which might be read as a hint to the fact that they are one and the same person. In addition, the audience sees the protagonist and Tyler alternately; Tyler is working and commenting, while the protagonist is describing the job. It may be said that this reflects the alternating dominance of the two personalities within the protagonist. In addition, this marks the protagonist as passive in contrast to an active Tyler. Next, the protagonist describes Tyler's second job as a banquet waiter at a luxurious hotel. Here, the audience watches the protagonist sitting in the restaurant, eating, while Tyler is working. Again, the protagonist looks directly into the camera. It becomes visible that in both of his jobs, Tyler's behavior is rather rebellious: As a projectionist, he adds pornographic images of erected penises in between the slides of the family movies playing at the cinema. The fact that Tyler first appears in the shape of cut-ins like the ones of erected penises may be read as a hint at his phallic power, since he embodies the protagonist's notion of a truly masculine man. As banquet waiter, he urinates or spits into the food before serving it to the guests. The protagonist describes him as "*the* guerilla terrorist of the food service industry" (00:32:10). In this short sequence, the narrator establishes an autobiographic background for Tyler, making him appear as an authentic and real person to the audience, and also to himself, as he is unaware of the fact that Tyler is his second personality. Furthermore, an observation made by Mollon becomes visible: "Some alters carry out adult coping function; for example, one may go to work, another may deal with social functions, yet another may have a sexual relationship" (128). In *Fight Club*, Tyler carries out all of these actions.

After the protagonist's brief description of Tyler, the movie returns to the setting of the first fistfight. Tyler eventually convinces the protagonist to hit him. A few moments later, he punches him back, and thus, their first fight evolves. Following Ta's assertion that violence serves as a vehicle for the criticism of a capitalist society (266), I further claim that the violence of the fight enables the protagonist to release his inner tensions and his frustration. This argument is emphasized by the fact that, after the fight, the protagonist tells Tyler: "We should do this again sometime" (00:33:54). This shows that the protagonist has been able to lose himself in the fight and release his aggression.

After the fight, the protagonist goes home with Tyler to a dilapidated house where Tyler has supposedly been living for a year. Provided that this is true, it would mean that the protagonist has been suffering from dissociative identity disorder for at least a year.

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However, there has not been, as it seems, any 'contact' between the two alternate personalities for that time, as the protagonist meets Tyler for the first time on the plane. This demonstrates that up to this moment, the two alternate personalities existed side-by-side within the protagonist, but only on the plane do they begin to interact. It appears that during this year, Tyler prepared for the protagonist's deliverance from capitalist society. The fact that he lives in a dilapidated house stresses the contrast between the protagonist and Tyler, and simultaneously, between his former life at his Ikea condo and his life together with Tyler. Tyler's house symbolizes his complete freedom from consumerism, materialism, and capitalism. In contrast to the protagonist's fashionable apartment, Tyler's house is decayed, the things in it are broken, water is constantly leaking, and "there [is] no lock on the front door from when the police, or whoever, kicked it in" (00:34:30). The longer he lives with Tyler, the more the protagonist feels liberated from his former life. This can be seen, for instance, from the following statement by the protagonist: "By the end of the first month, I didn't miss TV. I didn't even mind the warm, stale refrigerator" (00:35:42).

Simultaneously with the protagonist's liberation from consumerism, the fighting evolves. Again, the audience sees the protagonist and Tyler fighting on the parking lot outside the bar they went the night the protagonist's apartment was destroyed. Other men appear to watch and participate. Eventually, Fight Club is established in the basement of the bar. As Ta says, Fight Club is "an underground world of rebellion and hyper-masculinity where men can reclaim their lost manhood by stripping down and pummeling each other pulpy" (265). Thus, Fight Club has come to function as a substitute for the war the generation is lacking. In addition, the protagonist states that "[y]ou weren't alive anywhere like you were there" (00:42:23). For the protagonist, Fight Club becomes a method that helps him cope with his everyday life. Moreover, the fights offer him the opportunity to feel alive in a numbing social system. Although he lives with Tyler, the protagonist still continues working for a major car-manufacturing company. However, as he is able to release his inner tensions in the fights, he no longer seems to feel suppressed by the system, which becomes clear in the following scene: The Protagonist is at his office at work, and wipes his wounds, presumably from a fight of the previous night. The narrator says: "After fighting, everything else in life got the volume turned down. [...] You could deal with anything" (00:37:35). At that moment, his boss asks him if he has finished the reports, but, as a demonstration of how the protagonist perceives the situation – the boss's voice is barely audible. This demonstrates that work has become unimportant to the

protagonist. He seems to no longer feel as responsible for and at least somewhat interested in his job as he used to before he met Tyler. Consequently, it may be stressed once again that Tyler's appearance has helped him to break free from what formerly used to be the controlling system in his life. The protagonist's newly-achieved careless attitude when it comes to his job and other people's opinion of him becomes even more drastically visible in another scene at his workplace. In this scene, his boss finds the rules of Fight Club which the protagonist accidentally left in the copy machine. When his boss asks him how he would react in his situation, he gives him an answer that the narrator proclaims as "Tyler's words coming out of his mouth," adding "[a]nd I used to be such a nice guy" (01:02:46). Seemingly no longer "a nice guy" since he met Tyler, he gives his boss the following response:

> Well, I gotta tell you, I'd be very, very careful who you talk to about that. Because the person who wrote that is dangerous. And this button-down, Oxford-cloth psycho might just snap and then stalk from office to office with an Armalite AR10 carbine gas-powered semiautomatic weapon, pumping round after round into colleagues and co-workers. This might be someone you've known for years. Someone very, very close to you. (01:02:12)

Appositely, the protagonist names his boss when he talks to Tyler about whom they would like to fight. Interestingly, Tyler names his father. A conversation between the two about their father's evolves. The protagonist says that he does not know his father. The fact that, as his alter ego Tyler, he wants to fight his father demonstrates that the protagonist is – possibly unconsciously – angry at his father because he left him when he was a child, remarried and had further children, as he tells Tyler. The protagonist projects his own problems with his father onto Tyler. It may be assumed that he unconsciously does this to find consolation by speaking about it with someone who understands him. In addition, the fact that the protagonist grew up without a father suggests that he did not have a male role model. This might be interpreted as another reason for the projection of his notion of true masculinity onto Tyler. In such a reading, Tyler also becomes a kind of father figure who leads the protagonist's way and shows him the possibilities that lie before him.

As Fight Club evolves further, Tyler start to give homework assignments to the members. The first assignment is to "start a fight with a total stranger. You're gonna start a fight and you're gonna lose" (01:11:42). Leaping at the chance to fulfill his fantasy to fight his boss, the protagonist goes to his boss and says that he wants to talk. He threatens his boss, saying that he must continue paying him his salary and in exchange, he will never tell anyone about the conscious negligence of the company concerning automobile equipment

it installs although it does not apply to existing safety regulations. The boss reacts to this by firing him and calling security, but as he does so, the protagonist starts to hit himself. He continues to fight himself, and while doing so, he talks to his boss as if he was the one fighting him. For instance, he asks: "What the hell are you doing?" (01:14:09), or he exclaims: "Oh, my God! No! Please stop!" (01:14:27). The narrator comments on this by saying: "For some reason, I thought of my first fight, with Tyler" (01:14:33). That is, of course, because his first fight with Tyler must have looked exactly the same, as he was actually fighting himself. The security men arrive when the protagonist is kneeling before his boss, bleeding. This compromising situation results in the protagonist receiving everything he wants, including 48 flight tickets. Since he does not have to go to work anymore, he and Tyler can now "have Fight Club every night of the week" (01:15:47). Accordingly, his alter personality helped him break free from his hated job in order to be able to do what he loves every night.

As mentioned before, Mollon states that one alter personality may be engaged in a sexual relationship (128). It seems that the protagonist is unable to establish a sexual relationship with a woman. When he talks to Marla, he seems somewhat clumsy and at a loss. In addition, he seems to feel that Marla does not recognize him as a sexual being, which becomes clear in the scene in which Marla calls him, wanting him to come over and check her breasts for knots as she cannot afford going to a doctor. In a voice-over, the narrator says: "She didn't call Tyler. I'm neutral in her book" (01:03:24). This demonstrates that as himself, he seemingly believes to appear sexually uninteresting to women, which is why he interprets the situation in this way. Tyler, however, is more successful. In an earlier scene, Marla calls the protagonist at Tyler's house, and asks him where he has been since she has not seen him go to any meetings. Furthermore, she tells him that she has taken pills, explaining that it is not a real suicide attempt, but more of "a cry-for-help thing" (00:45:34). The protagonist puts the receiver down without hanging up the phone and leaves, while Marla is still heard talking. Then, there is a cut and the audience sees blurred images of Marla having sex with a man. Another cut follows, showing the protagonist who suddenly awakes, seemingly from just this dream. He gets up and notices that the door of Tyler's room is closed. The narrator informs the audience that this has never happened in all the time he has lived with Tyler. In the bathroom, the protagonist finds condoms in the toilet. All of this leads the audience, and also the protagonist, to the inference that Tyler must have had sex. The next shot shows the protagonist having breakfast in the kitchen when somebody is heard coming down the

stairs. He says: "You won't believe this dream I had last night," seemingly assuming that he is talking to Tyler (00:46:29). But instead of Tyler, Marla enters and responds "I can hardly believe anything about last night" (00:46:31). The protagonist somewhat rudely asks her what she is doing in his house and Marla, startled, answers "What?" and after a few moments, she says "Fuck you" and leaves (00:46:58). This scene is important, as it is most likely to contribute to the process of throwing the audience off the scent. At this point in the movie, it has not yet been revealed that Tyler Durden is the protagonist's alternate personality. Therefore, the protagonist believes that Tyler, not he himself, had sex with Marla. The audience will probably follow him in this assumption, as it presumably still continues to believe that Tyler is an independent character. Marla, however, does not know that the protagonist suffers from dissociative identity disorder, which explains her reaction. It may be assumed that she believes that he throws her out after having used her for sex, presumably leaving her with the impression that he thinks she has no right to be there still after sex. When Marla has left, Tyler comes downstairs in a bathrobe. He tells him that he found the phone "off the hook" and Marla was on "the other end" (00:47:20). In a voice-over, the narrator says: "I already knew the story before he told it to me" (00:47:23). The protagonist believes that Tyler talked to Marla, rescued her from her suicide attempt, brought her back to the house and had sex with her. However, what this really shows is that he ended the conversation with Marla, because he does not know how to communicate with women. Because of this, Tyler, who is able to cope with women, became the dominant personality within the protagonist's psyche. As Tyler, he is able to deal with Marla and, most importantly, have a sexual relationship with her. In another sequence, the audience sees the protagonist working out, and later, reading in his bed while Marla is heard moaning loudly, and plaster crumbles from the ceiling. Like in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, the audience watches the protagonist carry out these activities while, in truth, Tyler is the dominant personality in these sequences, and has sex with Marla. Again, the purpose of this is to distract the audience and maintain suspense, as the audience is not yet supposed to find out that the protagonist is actually suffering from a psychological disorder. In one of the sex scenes, the protagonist walks by Tyler's bedroom door. Tyler opens it and asks the protagonist if he wants to "finish her off" (00:51:43). The protagonist refuses and leaves, while Marla is heard asking Tyler who he was talking to. In response, Tyler merely tells her to "[s]hut up" (00:51:52). In fact, if Tyler and the protagonist were two different persons, Marla would know that he lives in the house as well, and thus, she would not be asking this. The fact that she does ask and, further, that Tyler does not

answer, indicates that it was the protagonist himself who slept with her, briefly falling into his identity disorder and communicating with his alter personality.

Like in *Hide and Seek* Charlie forbids Emily to talk to anyone about him, especially to her father, since this would reveal who he truly is, Tyler tells the protagonist that he may under no circumstances talk to Marla about him. "Say anything about me or what goes on in this house to her or anybody,… we're done" (00:51:07). Here, one can see what Freud describes as the task of repression: The repressed must be kept from the realm of the Conscious (cf. *Verdrängung* 106), and Tyler wants to achieve this by forbidding the protagonist to speak about him. This is also emphasized by the narrator's comment: "Except for their humping, Tyler and Marla were never in the same room" (00:55:30). In fact, they cannot be in the same room, because when the protagonist speaks to Marla, it is this personality that is dominant at the moment and not Tyler, so he could not possibly be there at the same time without Marla finding out about his personality disorder. Therefore, keeping Marla and Tyler apart, and forbidding the protagonist to speak to her about Tyler, is a way of the protagonist's Unconscious to keep his consciousness ignorant of his second personality. As the protagonist is Tyler, this demonstrates that – unconsciously – he attempts to keep himself from finding out that Tyler is not a real person and, thus, robbing him of his vehicle to act out his repressed desires. There are some other incidents in the movie in which the protagonist and Marla superficially talk about their relationship with Tyler. In each of these sequences, it becomes clear that the protagonist is completely unaware of the fact that he is Tyler Durden, which demonstrates that the repressive forces in his mind are considerably strong. In the meantime, Marla is becoming more and more frustrated with their complicated relationship, as she has to deal with a man who sometimes seems to like her, but then, out of nowhere, as it must appear to her, rejects her.

Throughout the course of the film, the relationship between Tyler and the protagonist seems to become increasingly ambiguous. It appears that Tyler is increasingly making decisions without him. For instance, the protagonist goes into the basement in one sequence and notices that several bunk beds have been installed there. He asks Tyler what they are for, but he simply answers "What do you think?" (01:24:00). The next shot shows Tyler stepping out of the front door, where a man in what appears to be a sort of military uniform is standing. Tyler looks at him and says that he is "[t]oo young" (01:24:12). As the narrator explains, "Tyler built himself an army" (01:27:00). Therefore, he instructs the protagonist how to handle the "applicants": "If the applicant is to young, tell him he's too

young. Old, too old. Fat, too fat. […] If the applicant waits three days without food, shelter or encouragement, he may then enter and begin training" (01:24:20).

Thus, Tyler establishes Project Mayhem. As Ta writes, Project Mayhem turns into a "highly organized paramilitary group that rebels against seemingly impersonal and feminized dominant culture by blowing up that very world" (265). Interestingly, as Tyler and the protagonist seem to be drifting apart to some extent, since Tyler does not inform him about his plans, Tyler seems to become more and more radical. The increasing gap between them represents the slowly evolving escalation of the Other's actions. In Project Mayhem, Tyler is the driving force. As the narrator says, "[s]ooner or later, we all became what Tyler wanted us to be" (01:25:13). In addition, he seems to have gained a god-like or savior-like status, which can be seen from the following statement by the narrator: "In Tyler we trusted" (01:27:23).

The fact that Tyler seems to increasingly exclude the protagonist also becomes clear in the sequence in which he meets Bob in the road. He learns that Bob is also a member of Fight Club. However, Bob's account of his experiences at Fight Club seems to confuse the protagonist. When the protagonist says that he has never seen him there, Bob tells him that he goes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Somewhat surprised, the protagonist says that he goes Saturdays. The audience gets the impression that the protagonist does not even know that there is Fight Club on other days. In addition, Bob asks him if he knows the founder of Fight Club, saying that he has heard various stories about him, for instance the following: "Supposedly, he was born in a mental institution and he sleeps only one hour a night" (01:05:52). This is somewhat ironic, as Tyler originates from a mental disorder, and the protagonist suffers from insomnia. Bob says that the founder of Fight Club "is a great man" (01:05:58). The protagonist smiles, presumably feeling flattered because he is actually one of the founders, but then, Bob asks him: "Do you know about Tyler Durden?" (01:26:20). Upon hearing this, his smile fades away. It becomes clear that the protagonist feels that Tyler is excluding him, promoting Fight Club as his invention without granting him a part of the limelight. As a result, the relationship between Tyler and the protagonist is growingly complicated. Consequently, the conflict between Self and Other is also intensified.

The protagonist's feeling that Tyler does no longer include him in his plans is further emphasized in the sequence in which the members of Project Mayhem watch the news, seemingly waiting for a particular report. Again, the protagonist does not know what is happening. This demonstrates that Tyler is becoming increasingly dominant to the extent

that the protagonist seems to be oppressed by his dominance. While previously, he actively experienced his alter ego's actions as those of another person, that is, of Tyler, he now no longer experiences them at all. He has become completely amnesic to what his alter personality does. In the sequence, he therefore wants to hear from Tyler what has occurred. Tyler simply tells him that they are celebrating. Eventually, the news the members of Fight Club have been expecting are broadcasted: The police commissioner reports about "one of many recent acts of vandalism in the city somehow related to underground boxing clubs" (01:28:14). A giant smiley is shown on a corporate building; its eyes consist of fire coming out of two windows. It seems that the protagonist was not involved in this plan, as he asks: "What the fuck did you guys do?" (01:28:46). In fact, he has repressed the matter that it was his own plan to begin with. The members laugh at this question, as they know that he is their leader and assume that he is making a joke. The protagonist does not join in their laughter, but looks rather puzzled. Bob tells him "Sir, the first rule of Project Mayhem is you do not ask questions, sir" (01:28:57). The operations of Project Mayhem continuously become more drastic. One sequence even shows how the members abduct the police commissioner in order to threaten him not to execute a planned security campaign against vandalism. Tyler delivers a brief speech to him which goes as follows:

> Hi. You're gonna call off your rigorous investigation. You will publicly state there is no underground group or these guys are gonna take your balls. […] Look. The people you are after are the people you depend on. We cook your meals. We haul your trash. We connect your calls. We drive your ambulances. We guard you while you sleep. Do not fuck with us. (01:30:33).

This speech makes Project Mayhem appear as a working class organization. In addition, the extent of Project Mayhem becomes visible: Tyler has been able to recruit members from several service areas that are crucial in any Western society. The protagonist looks shocked as he listens to Tyler's words. It appears that he is somewhat terrified at how far Tyler and Project Mayhem are willing to go. Thus, the contrast between the Self and the Other has become even greater. When the members of Project Mayhem leave the building, Tyler takes Angel Face's head in his hands, seemingly as an acknowledging gesture. The protagonist observes this and is jealous, which is underlined by the narrator's statement: "I am Jack's inflamed sense of rejection" (01:31:31). Moreover, the notion that the protagonist is jealous because someone else seems to be Tyler's favorite now can be observed in the next fight, which is carried out between the protagonist and Angel Face. The protagonist fights him more violently than usual to the extent that the crowd of Fight Club members even stops cheering. Tyler asks him: "Where did you go, psycho boy?" and

he answers: "I felt like destroying something beautiful" (01:33:00). Accordingly, Tyler has let out his rage on Angel Face.

Eventually, the subliminal conflict between Tyler and the protagonist comes to the surface when Tyler and the protagonist on their way home. Tyler is driving the car, the protagonist is seated in the passenger seat, and some other members are sitting in the back. The protagonist asks Tyler why he was not informed about Project Mayhem, and they begin to fight. Instead of giving him answers that will satisfy him, it seems that Tyler wants to teach him another lesson of how to be truly liberated. He drives irresponsibly, trying to demonstrate that a life could end at any moment, while the protagonist continuously attempts to control the steering wheel. At one point, he asks the protagonist: "Why do you think I blew up your condo?" (01:35:42). While the audience might have already inferred that Tyler has set his apartment on fire, this appears to be a shock to the protagonist. Tyler justifies himself by explaining to him that "[h]itting bottom isn't a weekend retreat. It's not a goddamned seminar. Stop trying to control everything and just let go!" (01:36:07). Once again, the contrast between Tyler and protagonist is emphasized. The protagonist needs to be control, whereas Tyler is able to 'let go'. Finally, Tyler lets go off the steering wheel. It becomes clear that this is a test for the protagonist to see if he will intervene and take control over the car, thus proving that he has not understood Tyler's point. However, he does not intervene. Consequently, they hit another car and slide down a steep slope. The next section demonstrates that this incident begins to lead the way to the protagonist's moment of recognition.

In this section, I have demonstrated that throughout the movie, it is Tyler who is active. The protagonist seems to stand in the background, and appears rather passive. His alter personality Tyler gives him the opportunity to become active, and thus, he awakens his masculinity. By splitting his psyche, the protagonist can be both passive and active:

> By fighting himself or depriving pleasure from taking a hit, he enjoys a masochistic satisfaction that has been traditionally associated with the feminine, for to be the aggressor is to be masculine and to receive is to be female. But through self-violence, [the protagonist] is able to play both these roles. (Ta 273)

Furthermore, it has become clear that Tyler represents the protagonist's repressed Other. Biermann considers *Fight Club* in a Hegelian context. Based on Hegel's master-slave dialectic he writes:

> The protagonist reflexively projects his subconscious desires into the sensual world in order to establish his subjectivity by a negation from another self-consciousness, which is paradoxically himself, or the

character known as Tyler Durden. Viewed in this way, the novel presents a variation on this Hegelian theme in that the protagonist's primary negative relation is not with other individuals, but rather with a mental projection of what he desires to be. […] As a consequence of his conditioned desires, the protagonist finds himself trapped in Hegel's notion of a "desiring" consciousness, or the primitive stage that precedes either "servant" or "mastery" consciousness. While Tyler initially appears to be the bohemian revolutionary, or the kind of "lacerated" consciousness the protagonist longs to be, he is actually the mastery consciousness that permits the protagonist to see himself as the unifying principle, which is characteristic of an "understanding" consciousness. […] As the lord-like other, Tyler provides a Hegelian negative relation that the protagonist must "fight" so that he can ultimately realize the true nature his subjectivity and achieve a genuine level of self-understanding.

This fight the protagonist must carry out against his alter ego, Tyler, will eventually lead him to the moment of recognition in which he understands that Tyler is a projection of the Other within himself.

3.3. The Moment of Recognition as Crucial Turning Point

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the moment of recognition is always also a moment of recognition for the audience. In Fight Club, it is slowly called into play after the car accident provoked by Tyler. As the protagonist eventually stops to intervene when Tyler lets go off the steering-wheel, he passes the test and the car crashes, offering the passengers a "near-life experience" (01:37:41). After the incident, the protagonist is shown lying in bed and resting. It seems that he is in a kind of in-between state, alternating between dream and waking, so that it is not clear if he is fully awake or not. Shots are faded in and out, featuring a black screen in between the different images, which underlines the dreamlike state of the sequence. While he is in this state, Tyler tells him the following:

> In the world I see, you're stalking elk through the Grand Canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center. You'll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life. You'll climb the thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. And when you look down, you'll see tiny figures pounding corn, laying strips of venison in the empty car-pool lane of some abandoned superhighway. Feel better, champ. (01:37:21)

This description seems like an apocalyptic vision of a "new" world and creates a rather primeval image of protagonist as hunter in a dilapidated world or a world ruined by Project Mayhem and thus freed from consumerism and materialism. In this world, as he is portrayed as a hunter, the first and most primordial image of man, he has regained his

masculinity. When Tyler finishes his brief speech, he takes his briefcase and leaves the room. Apparently the next morning, the protagonist gets up while the narrator says that "Tyler was gone" (01:38:24). It seems that Tyler's mission is accomplished. The protagonist has become who he needed to be; the only thing that is left for him now is to realize that he was able to do it by himself in a way, as Tyler, his alternate personality, sprung from his own mind. It appears that the accident was the final act, liberating the protagonist from all fears, even that of dying. Moreover, the protagonist seems to truly wake up for the first time after he discovers that Tyler is gone. The narrator asks: "Was I asleep? Had I slept?" (01:38:34). As he walks around the house room after room, he sees – for the first time, as it seems – that it is crowded with people. For the first time, he realizes how large the organization has become. The narrator continues: "What comes next in Project Mayhem only Tyler knows" (01:39:58). It seems that now, for the first time, the protagonist realizes the extent of Project Mayhem. Indeed, it appears that he has woken up from a dream only to see that what he believes to have dreamt truly happened. This is emphasized by the fact that the protagonist walks around the house somewhat lost, as if he has no idea of the things that are going on inside.

When the protagonist goes outside to smoke a cigarette, Marla appears and asks if she can come in. The protagonist tells her that Tyler is not there. Apparently, since Tyler is no longer there, he does not see any reason why he should not talk to Marla about him. Marla is rather surprised at his response, as she exclaims: "What?" (01:40:49). At this point in the movie, the audience might not think this strange, as he could have simply left without telling her and, therefore, she has a right to be surprised. The same may be inferred when the protagonist repeats: "Tyler isn't here. Tyler went away. Tyler's gone" (01:40:31). Marla slowly moves backwards and leaves. As in the previous sequences showing Marla and the protagonist speaking about Marla's relationship with Tyler, Marla's reaction is due to the simple matter that she knows that the protagonist is Tyler. Again, she is frustrated, because she does not understand his behavior towards her.

Moreover, it becomes clear that the protagonist seems to distance himself from the group and their actions. When learning that Bob was shot while carrying out an assignment, the protagonist gets angry and agitated, calling the members of Project Mayhem "morons," and asking what they believed would happen if they went and blew up things all the time (01:42:23). In his rage, the protagonist runs into upstairs into Tyler's room, to look for something in a chest of drawers. In one of them, he discovers several flight tickets made out to Tyler Durden.

Presumably wanting to find Tyler as he feels that he has left him alone with Project Mayhem, the protagonist sets out to all the cities that Tyler visited according to the tickets. This lays the path for the moment of recognition. In each city, he goes into bars looking for Tyler, assuming that he will be most likely to find him there. In the first bar, the bartender says "I wish I could help you, sir" and winks at him knowingly with one eye, presumably sticking to Tyler's rule not to talk to anyone about him (01:44:17). The narrator says: "Every city I went to, as soon as I set foot off the plain I knew a Fight Club was close" (01:44:52). From everyone he asks, the protagonist receives similar responses, namely they must not speak to him about Tyler Durden. The protagonist still does not realize that he is Tyler, as the narrator says "Tyler had been busy…setting up franchise all over the country" (01:44:58). Then, once again, he repeats the questions he asked when he found that Tyler was gone: "Was I asleep? Had I slept? Is Tyler my bad dream, or am I Tyler's?" (01:45:05). While audience still sees the protagonist traveling around, the narrator says: "I was living in a state of perpetual déjà vu. Everywhere I went, I felt I'd already been there. It was like following an invisible man" (01:45:26). Slowly, more and more hints are given, pointing at the fact that the protagonist is Tyler Durden. Equally slowly, the protagonist seems to sense something, as he "was always just one step behind Tyler" (01:45:12). One might say that the protagonist's journey represents the 'Widerstände' recognized by Freud that have to be overcome for the Unconscious to return to the Conscious (cf. Abriß 56). As Freud states, this is a strength-sapping process (ibid). The effort this process takes is represented in the protagonist's eager search for Tyler.

Finally, the protagonist seems to catch up with Tyler. As he enters another bar, the bartender greets him by saying "Welcome back, sir. How have you been?" (01:46:04). The protagonist's surprised response is "Do you know me?" to which the man returns "Is this a test, sir?" (01:46:07), seemingly assuming that he is testing him to see if he will stick to the rules of not talking about him. The protagonist responds that he is not testing him, and the man tells him that he last came to the bar last Thursday. "You were standing exactly where you are now, asking how good security is" (01:46:21). Now, the audience has probably at last understood that he is Tyler. However, the protagonist has not realized this yet. Confused, he asks the man "Who do you think I am?" (01:46:30). He answers: "You're Mr. Durden. You're the one who gave me this," holding up his right hand exposing a wound similar to his (01:46:38). Despite what the man says, the protagonist yet seems unable to accept it as the truth. His first reaction is to call Marla and ask her if they have "ever had sex," in order to check if the assertion that he is Tyler is true (01:47:03). The

conversation affirms the presumption, as Marla's gives him the following response: "You fuck me, then snub me. You love me, you hate me. You show me your sensitive side, then you turn into a total asshole. Is that a pretty accurate description of our relationship, Tyler?" (01:47:20). Now, the audience understands Marla's behavior when the protagonist talked to her about her relationship with Tyler. Furthermore, this description by Marla mirrors the protagonist's two personalities. While he is Tyler, he seems to be able to communicate with Marla and establish some form of relationship with her. As himself, he is unconscious of the fact that he has a relationship with her, and, as a result, his behavior towards her appears rather cruel and ruthless. To be completely sure that he has understood her correctly, the protagonist asks her to repeat his name and Marla does so, calling him a "fucking freak" afterwards (01:48:10). As he hangs up, Tyler suddenly appears in the room. Now, the moment of recognition unfolds, which becomes clear in the following exchange between the protagonist and Tyler:

> PROTAGONIST. Why do people think that I am you? Answer me!
>   […]
> TYLER. I think you know.
> PROTAGONIST. No, I don't.
> TYLER. Yes, you do.
> PROTAGONIST. Why would anyone possibly confuse you with me?
> TYLER. I…I don't know. (01:48:28)

The protagonist begins to anticipate the answer, as – like Morton Rainey and David Callaway – flashbacks appear in his mind, returning the memory of the things he did as Tyler. These flashbacks are shown alternately with shots of Tyler telling him to "say it," that is, the reason why people believe that he is Tyler, and with shots of the protagonist in disbelief that he has an alter ego. The protagonist eventually answers his question, saying: "Because we're the same person" (01:48:32). When the protagonist says that he "do[es]n't understand this" and Tyler gives him the following explanation:

> You were looking for a way to change your life. You could not do this on your own. All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you wanna look, fuck like you wanna fuck. I am smart, capable and, most importantly, I'm free in all the ways that you are not. (01:48:40)

Thus, Tyler explicitly states why he came into existence. In addition, this illustrates a clear projection of the protagonist's desires onto the Other. Furthermore, it becomes visible that the protagonist is suffering from dissociative identity disorder, as he dissociated from reality by developing a second personality. Ta states that "most of the film serves as a Freudian reading where [the protagonist] expresses the melancholic loss of his 'manhood' by repressing his libidinal identity and creating the alter-ego of Tyler" (271). Like in *Hide*

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and Seek and *Secret Window*, parts of former scenes are shown again, this time revealing what truly happened. In one of these flashbacks, the audience re-sees the first fight which originally was depicted as having taken place between two physically present men, that is, the protagonist and Tyler. This time, however, the viewers only see the protagonist, the true Tyler, fighting himself. Ta recognizes symptoms of the Freudian melancholic that may be said to apply to the protagonist. She states that he suffers from

> sleeplessness, […] undergoes a lowering of self-esteem and starts to belittle, scold, and punish […]himself. But more importantly, the primary feature of the melancholic subject is that […]he experiences a splitting of the self. (271)

All of this is reflected in the protagonist's relationship with Tyler. Thus, the full effect of the movies unfolds retrospectively. Furthermore, his twice posed question if he slept is answered: He was never healed from insomnia, but worked the jobs he believed Tyler had during the nights, or made soap. Like Katherine in *Hide and Seek*, Marla becomes a problem for Tyler and Tyler, as she "knows too much" (01:49:55). Therefore, the protagonist tells him: "I think we're gonna have to talk about how this might compromise our goals," implying that they need to get rid of her (01:49:58). Presumably due to the amount of information the protagonist is flooded with when he recognizes that he is Tyler Durden, he passes out moments later.

From this point onwards, the protagonist's conflict between his two personalities turns into a visible struggle. When he wakes up, the phone is lying next to him off the hook. Subsequently, he is on the verge of leaving the hotel, but the receptionist calls him back in order to check his list of phone calls. The list shows that he made several calls between 2.00a.m and 3.30a.m. However, the protagonist does not have any memory of having made any calls. This shows that, although he has realized that he is Tyler Durden, he is still not in control of his disorder and continues to do things that are repressed from his conscious memory. Now that he has recognized the Other, his battle against it begins. When he returns to his house, he finds that everybody is gone. In the basement, another memory comes back to him, namely that of Tyler telling him that soap can serve to build dynamite. At this point, he realizes that Project Mayhem has been producing explosives, and begins to anticipate the extent of the plans he made while being Tyler. In order to find out what he planned while he was Tyler, he calls all the numbers on the list, learning that all of them lead to the buildings of major credit card institutes that are supposed to be blown up. Here, the audience can observe the protagonist realizing that Tyler has gotten out of control and

gone too far. As a result, he distances himself from his alter personality, and decides to stop the operations of Project Mayhem. It seems that, other than in *Hide and Seek* and *Secret Window*, the Other does not overwhelm the protagonist. Instead, he decides to fight against it. Therefore, he tries to warn the supervisor of the institutes, but the response he gets is the following: "It's under control, sir" (01:52:21). Consequently, he apprehends how far the network of Project Mayhem has extended. The same can be observed when he tries to turn himself in to the police, hoping that they will be able to prevent the explosions. During the interrogation, he gives the police detailed information about the group, the crimes they have committed, proving his statements with documents and records. As soon as one of the detectives leaves the room, presumably the only one who is not a member of Project Mayhem, the other police officers begin to smile at him. One of them tells him: "You said if anyone ever interferes with Project Mayhem, even you, we gotta get his balls" (01:57:10). Now he comprehends that even the police are invaded by members of Fight Club, which demonstrates that they gained control over the authorities within society as well. Furthermore, it becomes clear that his alter ego has found a way to prevent him from intervening with its plans, which the following exchange between the police officers and the protagonist demonstrates:

> PROTAGONIST. You're making a big mistake, fellas.
> POLICE OFFICER. You said you'd say that.
> PROTAGONIST. I'm not Tyler Durden!"
> POLICE OFFICER. You told us you'd say that too.
> PROTAGONIST. All right. I am Tyler Durden. Listen to me. I'm giving you a direct order. We're aborting this mission now.
> POLICE OFFICER. You said you would definitely say that. (01:57:20)

Evidently, there seems to be no way out for the protagonist, no matter what he does. His alter ego has determined what will happen, and it seems impossible to reverse his actions. In addition, this sequence illustrates that Tyler knows the protagonist's weaknesses. A physical struggle between the police officers and the protagonist ensues. Eventually, the protagonist gets hold of one of the police man's guns and is able to free himself.

Even before he tries to turn himself in to the police, he seemingly wants to apologize to Marla, presumably having realized how his behavior must have hurt her. He tells her: "I know that it's gotta seem like there's two sides to me…", and Marla immediately interrupts him, saying: "Two sides? You're Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Jackass" (01:53:09). This intertextual reference to the literary thriller *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide* corresponds with the protagonist's own split personality. He apologizes to Marla and tells her that cares for her. But more importantly, he tries to cross Tyler's plans once again,

warning Marla that her "life is in danger" (01:53:45). Therefore, he advises her to "leave town for a while [and] get out of any major city" (01:53:52). This demonstrates that he anticipates that while he made the phone calls at the hotel, he must have given all Fight Club members in the larger cities the order to kill her. Now that he is himself again, he wants to protect her from them. Eventually, he gives her money to leave on the next bus that happens to drive by. What is important here is that he turns away while Marla gets on the bus, so that he will not see were it is headed. This demonstrates that he still does not have control over Tyler, and as he senses that he might turn into him again, he turns away to prevent himself from giving away her destination to the members of Project Mayhem.

As he can no longer count on the support of any authoritarian institution, he decides that he himself has to stop the operation. As he tries to break into one of the buildings, Tyler suddenly reappears, wanting to know what the protagonist is doing. Tyler tells him that he "got [them] a great place to watch from" (02:00:07). This illustrates ego the Other is still trying to conquer his mind. Tyler laughs at him from inside of the building. Wanting to get rid of him, the protagonist shoots him, and Tyler disappears. The fact that he shoots Tyler further demonstrates that he has completely distanced himself from him. In addition, it has enabled him to into the building, as now, the window is broken. In the building, he eventually finds a transporter which holds several canisters with explosives. Tyler reappears once again, smoking, and asking him what he plans to do now. Although Tyler still tries to dominate his psyche, the protagonist arduously tries not to succumb to him. This can be seen from the following exchange between the two personalities while the protagonist is trying to defuse the bomd:

> PROTAGONIST. I'm stopping this.
> TYLER. Why? The greatest thing you've ever done.
> PROTAGONIST. No, I can't let this happen.
> TYLER. You know there are ten bombs in ten other buildings.
> PROTAGONIST. Goddamnit! Since when is Project Mayhem about murder?
> TYLER. The buildings are empty. We're not killing anyone, we're setting them free!
> PROTAGONIST. Bob is dead. They shot him in the head.
> TYLER. You wanna make an omelet, you gotta break some eggs.
> PROTAGONIST. No. I'm not listening to you. You're not even there. (02:01:35)

It becomes visible that the protagonist is trying to free himself from his alter ego. As he succeeds in defusing the bomb, seemingly having used all of his strength to resist Tyler while doing so, Tyler attacks him. One may presume the protagonist's ego has been

weakened by his efforts to maintain resistance against the Other while defusing the bomb (cf. Freud, *Abriß* 67). In this brief, weak moment, the Other is able to take over again. The protagonist and Tyler fight, which reflects the inner conflict between the two personalities. Their fight ends with the protagonist falling down the stairs, while Tyler disappears. Then, after a cut, the screen briefly remains black, which represents the protagonist's blackout. Subsequently, the movie returns to where it began. The protagonist is tied to a chair and Tyler is sticking a gun in his mouth. This illustrates that the protagonist has been overwhelmed by the Other. Accordingly, the protagonist still has not won the struggle, since Tyler has gained dominance over him once again. As Tyler says, there are only three minutes left till the detonation. The protagonist has failed to stop the operation, because Tyler would not let him destroy his plan. When Tyler pushes the protagonist against the window to force him to look at the world they will be destroying, he looks down and sees how some members of Project Mayhem pull Marla out of the bus he sent her away with. He knows that they will harm her, and the following dialogue occurs between him and Tyler:

> PROTAGONIST. Why is she here?
> TYLER. Tying up loose ends.
> PROTAGONIST. I'm begging you, please don't do this.
> TYLER. I'm not doing this. We are doing this. This is what we want.
> PROTAGONIST. No. I don't want this.
> TYLER. Right. Except you is meaningless now. We have to forget about you. (02:05:23)

 Again, this visualizes that the alter ego, the Other, has taken over control and suppresses the ego. The protagonist attempts to regain control over his mind, telling himself: "You're a voice in my head" (02:05:34). But Tyler, in his dominant position, responds: "You're a voice in mine" (02:05:36). This demonstrates that Tyler claims the position of the ego in the protagonist's mind, thereby Othering him as he wants him to be repressed. The struggle between Self and Other continues:

> PROTAGONIST. You're a fucking hallucination. Why can't I get rid of you?
> TYLER. You need me.
> PROTAGONIST. No. I don't. I really don't any more. (02:05:39).

Again, this shows that the protagonist wants to free himself from his second personality. Tyler tells him: "Hey, you created me. I didn't create some loser alter ego to make me feel better" (02:05:44). This suggests that the protagonist is a weak version of Tyler, or more importantly, that the protagonist created his alter ego to be a stronger and improved version

of himself. As in many other psychological thrillers, the alter personality tends to be stronger than the self.

Finally, the protagonist finds a way to overpower Tyler, as he reaches the following conclusion: "You're not real, that gun… That gun isn't even in your hand. The gun's in my hand" (02:06:49). As he says this, the gun becomes visible in his hand. Mollon reports that when it comes to alter personalities, there exists "the assumption […] that one alter could kill off another personality through inducing suicide and then continue to live in the body" (127). It seems that this is what the protagonist attempts to do, as he puts the gun to his head, and, eventually, he shoots himself in the mouth. Corresponding with Mollon's observation, the protagonist does not die – at least not immediately, as the movie leaves it open whether he survives the injury or not in the end. At last, the protagonist has succeeded in eliminating Tyler. What is striking here is that, again, the solution was to direct violence at himself. He tried to shoot Tyler previously, but nothing happened. When he shoots himself, the alter personality seems to have disappeared permanently, as the audience sees that Tyler has an exit wound at the back of his head, falls down to the floor, and then, he is gone. Thus, the protagonist has succeeded in overpowering the Other within himself. When the members of Project Mayhem arrive with Marla, he tells them to leave him alone with her. Holding hands, the protagonist and Marla watch the buildings explode one after another. Seeing Marla's dismay, he tells her: "You met me at a very strange time in my life" (02:20:19). My personal interpretation of this ending is that the protagonist realizes that he has been going through a crisis. However, having claimed the Other by acting in out in the form of an alternate personality, the product of dissociative identity disorder, he has been able to free himself from it.

Finally, when Tyler explains to the protagonist that he is Tyler Durden, he says: "People do it every day. They talk to themselves. They see themselves as they'd like to be. They don't have the courage you have to just run with it" (01:49:38). To me, this appears as if *Fight Club* was trying to get the audience to think about themselves: how much of what we do is normal? Do we all have the potential to develop alter egos, idealized versions of ourselves?

4. The Other in *Black Swan*

Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010) narrates the story of the ballerina Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) whose greatest artistic dream comes true: she is offered the role of the swan queen in *Swan Lake*. Throughout the story, Nina struggles to perform both the white swan and the black swan perfectly. Caught in this struggle, she seems to get lost in a number of psychological disorders.

Black Swan differs from the other movies examined in this thesis, and in fact, seemingly from a majority of contemporary psychological thrillers displaying characters with psychological disorders, in that the protagonist is female. There seem to be only few contemporary psychological thrillers that depict female characters with psychological problems.[4] However, *Black Swan* does not only differ from *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, and *Fight Club* when it comes to the protagonist's gender. In addition, the effect of the movie on the audience seems to rely less on tricking the viewers and challenging them to question the images they are presented with. While this is partially also the case in *Black Swan*, the audience of this movie learns fairly early that Nina suffers from a number of psychological problems, including visual and audible hallucinations. Therefore, the audience already knows that not everything that is presented from Nina's perspective is real: The viewers are aware that Nina's perspective is considerably unreliable from the beginning. The result of this is that the audience gets an insight into the perceptions of a character with psychological disorders and thus, is able to observe and – to some extent – experience the repercussions together with the protagonist. Nevertheless, there are still some instances in which the audience might be thrown off the scent to some extent, which will become clear in the course of the following analysis of the movie.

4.1. Nina's Twofold Otherness

Other than in the first three movies examined in this thesis, the protagonist's Otherness can not only be found on an internal level. Instead, Nina's Otherness is twofold. On the one hand, she is struggling with the repressed and unconscious Other within herself like the protagonists in *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, and *Fight Club*. Yet, on the other hand, Nina is also the Other in terms of gender relations, which I will demonstrate in this section.

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[4] Other exceptions are, for example, Mathieu Kassovitz's *Gothika* (2003) with Halle Berry in the role of Dr. Miranda Grey, and Charles and Thomas Guard's *The Uninvited* (2009), a remake of the south-Korean movie *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003) by Kim Jee-woon, with Emily Browning as Anna.

The New York ballet company Nina dances for may be seen as a sphere that is considerably dominated by Thomas, the principal and choreographer of the company. Thomas is a dominating, active, and rather aggressive character who seems to govern the ballet world at the company. Seemingly referring to Thomas's dominant role in the movie, a reviewer even characterizes *Black Swan* as being "a movie about […] fear of being supplanted in the affections of a powerful man" (Bradshaw). As a consequence of Thomas's dominance, Nina is posited as the female Other in a male-dominated and male-determined world. In this male-dominated sphere, Nina appears rather fragile and vulnerable. One critic further describes her as "quiet [and] timid" (Outlaw). Because of these character traits that become visible through Natalie Portman's acting, Nina appears considerably weak. It seems that Aronofsky puts great focus on Nina's soft or feminine side to emphasize her weakness, fragility and vulnerability, as there are several sequences in which the audience sees Nina sniffling or crying. The consequence of portraying her as such is that Nina seems completely inferior to Thomas, who apparently recognizes her weakness, telling her to "[s]top being so fucking weak" during a rehearsal for the role of the Black Swan (00:52:11). One critic even perceives Nina as "a fragile and repressed ballerina," presumably meaning that she is repressed by Thomas (Donaldson James 1). This may be associated with Beauvoir's characterization of the relation between man and woman: "she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is Absolute. She is the Other" (6). Freud, too, recognizes that man and woman are typically perceived as binary oppositions of each other, as he writes: "Wir heißen alles, was stark und aktiv ist, männlich, was schwach und passiv ist, weiblich" (*Abriß* 83). This is reflected in Thomas's and Nina's relationship.

In addition, this weakness, which largely shapes Nina's position as the Other in front of a strong and dominant man, is stressed by her constant portrayal as 'wounded woman' throughout the movie. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir, for instance, referring to Leviticus, outlines that woman is generally perceived as wounded (cf. 169). This notion of woman as wounded originates in women's loss of blood during menstruation (cf. Beauvoir). It appears that *Black Swan* resumes this notion as there are several sequences containing blood. As one critic says, "Aronofsky likes to see her [Nina] bleed" (Dargis). Nina's portrayal as wounded woman begins with scratches on her back which continuously worsen throughout the film. Furthermore, in a highly illustrative scene, Nina notices a piece of skin protruding from her bleeding middle finger. When she tries to pull it off, she tears off a large piece of skin, pulling it down all the way to the middle bone of her finger.

The audience literally suffers with her, although moments later, it turns out that this was merely a hallucination, and her finger is still intact. In another sequence, blood drops into the tub while Nina is taking a bath.

The noticeable emphasis Aronofsky puts on blood, or the loss of blood, led me to the assumption that Nina's struggle to perform both the White Swan and the Black Swan is not only an artistic one, but also a struggle of becoming a woman and a sexual being. As Beauvoir describes, virginity myths have always pervaded images of femininity (cf. Beauvoir 209-210). The virgin is the most innocent image or representation of woman (ibid). Consequently, Nina's loss of blood may be regarded as a symbolical loss of her virginity. Although Nina tells Thomas that she is not a virgin, she does indeed seem innocent and sexually rather inexperienced. This innocence is reflected in her role as the White Swan. However, in order to become the Black Swan, Nina seemingly has to turn into a sexual being and cannot remain in her innocent state. In such a reading, Nina's loss of blood throughout the movie may be perceived as her symbolical defloration, allowing her to become a sexual woman and therefore, the Black Swan.

Generally, strong focus is put on pain in *Black Swan*. On the one hand, this may be read as a hint at the notion of woman as wounded. On the other hand, however, this may also be interpreted as a portrayal of the typical hardships of being a ballerina. In such a reading, Nina's pain becomes pain for art's sake.

Furthermore, Beauvoir states that woman is the Other because man perceives her as mysterious (cf. 159-274). She states that this mysterious nature of woman originates from ambiguous notions and images of woman: "[S]he has both faces. […] the good and the Bad […]. Is she angel or devil? Uncertainty makes her a sphinx" (Beauvoir 208-209). Beauvoir further writes that woman "is the carnal embodiment of all moral values and their opposites, from good to bad" (213). It becomes clear that there exists a notion imagining woman as ambiguous, being both angelic and diabolical. This notion is expressed in *Black Swan* in Nina's dilemma of being torn between the White Swan, which represents the angelic woman, and the Black Swan, symbolizing the diabolic woman. While on the outside, her struggle appears to be primarily an artistic one, it is also a struggle with the ambiguity of womanhood on a deeper level.

Additionally, Nina's sexuality plays an important role in her appearance as the female Other. Beauvoir states that woman is generally perceived "as an object" (206). This objectification becomes most visible when it comes to sexuality, which can be observed in several instances in *Black Swan*. In an early sequence, Nina goes into Thomas's office

trying to convince him that she is able to play the Black Swan. Seemingly in order to persuade him, she makes use of her feminine charms by highlighting her lips with red lipstick and wearing her usually tied up hair loosely over her shoulders to appeal to him sexually. Thomas notices this and, presumably to awaken the Black Swan inside Nina, he suddenly kisses her. This may be read as an expression of male sexual violence and a response to Nina's own act of objectifying herself, almost provoking a sexual reaction by accentuating her femininity. However, Nina does not remain passive in this situation. Her defense against this sexual attack is that she bites Thomas's lip. It appears that exactly this reaction convinced Thomas to change his mind about Nina, because in that short instant, she was uncontrolled and followed her inner drive. Shortly after this, she receives the role of the Swan Queen. This idea is underlined by the fact that during the first rehearsal, Thomas tells her that he "knew the White Swan wouldn't be a problem. The real work will be your metamorphosis into her evil twin. And I know I saw a flash of her yesterday. So get ready to give me more of that bite" (00:26:35). Thus, it becomes clear that Nina seems to have a less innocent, fragile and naïve side within her, but she still has to learn to let it out. She contains both the angelic and the diabolic woman, but the latter is still repressed.

The notion that Thomas equates Nina's performance as a ballerina with her sexual performance becomes even more visible in the following sequence: During a rehearsal in which Nina dances with her male co-dancer who performs the Prince, Thomas shakes his head and asks him: "Honestly, would you fuck that girl?" to which he only responds by snorting (00:45:05). Thomas continues "No. No one would. Nina, your dancing is just as frigid…," being unable to finish the sentence because the lights are suddenly turned off (00:45:10). Here, once again, Nina is evaluated in a male environment and, what is striking, by her sexuality. Beauvoir states that "[w]oman is nothing other than what man decides" and that "[s]he is determined and differentiated in relation to man" (6). These notions by Beauvoir become particularly clear in the described sequence, as Thomas and Nina's male co-dancer appear as the superior or essential "Subject[s]" who determine Nina, who is inferior to them as "[s]he is the Other," and, moreover, strongly objectified in sexual terms (Beauvoir 6). Although it appears that Thomas views this in an artistic light, Nina is, nevertheless, defined and judged by men who equate her dancing performance with her sex appeal and her potential sexual performance. Interestingly, Nina seems to submit to this position Thomas is assigning her. Beauvoir perceives this as a general character trait in women, saying that

> [t]he man who sets the woman up as an Other will thus find in her a deep complicity. Hence woman makes no claim for herself as subject because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she derives satisfaction from her role as Other. (10)

This may also be observed in the ensuing sequence of *Black Swan*. As Donaldson James writes, Nina becomes "the object of sexual advances by her director" (2). Thomas sends everyone home, except Nina, with whom he continues to practice. He tells her to "let it go," to "feel [his] touch" and "respond to it" (00:46:13). Again, the boundary between art and sex becomes rather blurred, similar to Nina's role as dancer and sexual partner, respectively. Thomas pulls Nina towards him and kisses her. Once again, it seems that for him, this is necessary for art's sake, while, in fact, it may be regarded as a sort of sexual molestation in which he, as the man, is superior over her. He forces Nina to "Open [her] mouth. Open it. Open it. Open it," which hints at the aggressiveness behind his advances (00:46:48). The fact that he sends the other dancers home before doing this emphasizes the notion that he is doing something incorrect which no one else is supposed to see. He continues to kiss her, which she apparently responds to as the audience hears her moan quietly. Then, Thomas even touches and massages her breasts and her genital area. As mentioned before, the difficulty here is that the movie seems to portray this as a necessity for the arts, but indeed, outside of an artistic context, as Thomas is Nina's boss, this is clearly a matter of taking advantage of her, since she is in an inferior position. Nina would not resist him as she wants to keep the role of the Swan Queen and it is possible that she, too, believes that this is necessary for art's sake. Suddenly, Thomas lets go off her, saying "[t]hat was me seducing you, when it needs to be the other way around" (00:47:15). The sequence vividly illustrates what Beauvoir writes about woman's role during sex which she describes as "largely passive" (413). Nina remains passive by submitting to Thomas's sexual advance. Accordingly, Thomas's remark when he stops touching her in a way also means that she needs to overcome her inferior and receptive position as woman and become the aggressor in order to be able to perform the Black Swan. It is worth noting that Thomas is not the only man who perceives Nina as a sexual object. Her role as sexual object and victim is stressed again in a sequence in which the audience sees her sitting on a train. An elderly man across from her starts blowing kisses in her direction and touches his crotch in a masturbating rhythm. Here, it becomes clear once again that, as a woman, Nina is a victim to male sexual aggression.

The notion that Nina is objectified sexually which marks her as the Other is also recognized by Gibson and Wolske. They state that "we content that *Black Swan* reinscribes patriarchal power by following traditional conventions of the male gaze to emphasize themes of lesbian-spectacle, sexual pleasure as madness, and the good-girl-gone bad" (79). The scene they are referring to here is the sex scene between Lily and Nina in which Lily practices cunnilingus on Nina. In their article, Gibson and Wolske refer to Laura Mulvey's "groundbreaking" work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," summarizing her theory as follows:

> a dominant male gaze structures mainstream Hollywood films and invites the viewer to identify with male protagonists and to marginalize and objectify women. […] From the camera work to the movement of the plotline […] the narratives of mainstream film feature an active and controlling male ethos that renders women as passive objects of desire – coded to connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. (80)

In their opinion, the same holds true for *Black Swan*, in particular, for the sex scene displayed in the movie (86). They state that the movie's "visual and narrative framing reinforce[s] the power of the panoptical male connoisseur by presenting female-female sexuality as a spectacle, by conflating female sexuality with mental illness, and by punishing the expression of female sexuality" (ibid). As Gibson and Wolske describe, the sex scene between Nina and Lily is shot to appeal to man, as, for instance, the female body is strongly accentuated (86). Furthermore, they identify the scene as a portrayal of "pseudo-lesbian sexuality," as Nina and Lily are not homosexual (88). This is of importance, as sex between two women who are, in fact, heterosexual "does not pose a threat to patriarchy because it is represented as situational" (ibid).

It becomes clear that Nina represents the female Other in a male-dominated sphere because of her portrayal as fragile, weak, vulnerable, and sexual object. The next chapter examines the internal Other Nina is confronted with when she is awarded the role of the Swan Queen.

4.2. The Struggle of the White Swan and the Black Swan as a Struggle with the Repressed Other

As the previous section has already introduced, Nina is facing the struggle to perform the White Swan and the Black Swan. Throughout the movie, the struggle evolves, becoming increasingly drastic. While it may be assumed that she suffered from mental problems even before Thomas gives her the role of the Swan Queen, the challenge to perform the Black

Swan visibly intensifies her psychological symptoms. This section will show that Nina's struggle to dance both Swans convincingly turns into a personal struggle against the repressed Other within herself.

From the beginning, Thomas emphasizes the difficulty of performing both the White Swan and the Black Swan, asking the ballerinas: "But which of you can embody both swans? The white *and* the black" (00:10:01). This is exactly the problem Nina is facing when she is awarded the role of the Swan Queen. During the first audition, Thomas tells her: "If I was only casting the White Swan, she'd be yours. But I'm not" (00:12:58). This statement demonstrates that Nina already has the pure and innocent side of the White Swan in her, and that she can easily and convincingly perform the White Swan. However, she yet lacks the capability to perform the Black Swan. During the conversation in which she tries to convince him to cast her as the Swan Queen, Thomas tells her: "The truth is, when I look at you, all I see is the White Swan. Yes, you're beautiful, fearful, fragile. Ideal casting. But the Black Swan? It's a hard fucking job to dance both" (00:19:42). Nina tries to convince him that she can also dance the Black Swan, but Thomas doubts that, saying: "In four years, every time you dance, I see you obsess, getting each and every move perfectly right, but I never see you lose yourself. Ever. All that discipline, for what?"(00:20:03). Nina answers that she "just want[s] to be perfect" (00:20:18). Thomas then tells her that "Perfection is not just about control. It's also about letting go" (00:20:25). As one critic writes, Thomas tries to show Nina, "dass es bei der Rolle des schwarzen Schwans nicht um Perfektion geht, sondern um Leidenschaft, Begehren und Verführung, also um etwas, das durch keine Technik der Welt zu erlernen ist" (Kadritzke). However, Nina cannot easily let go off her obsessive perfectionism. In fact, aside from suffering from psychosis, Nina may also be diagnosed as suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), which is also recognized by Donaldson James (2). As Indick states, typical characteristics of OCD are, among others, "perfectionism that interferes with task completion, workaholism, […], and the obsessive need for complete personal, [and] professional […] control" (127). Nina's strive for perfection is omnipresent in the movie. While it seems that her perfectionism might keep her from achieving her goal, namely to perform both Swans convincingly, she does indeed reach it, but at a high price, namely her mental health and her life. Linked with this sense of perfectionism is her habit of keeping herself under control. It is exactly this drive to keep control that she needs to abandon to be able to perform the Black Swan.

Nevertheless, Nina does not lack the darker and more passionate side that is necessary to perform the Black Swan. It seems that she is unconsciously repressing it, as it does not correspond with her strive to be perfect and controlled. Consequently, Nina represses the Other in herself. One critic observes the following:

> Für die zarte wie labile Tänzerin ist der Übergang von weißer Unschuld zu schwarzer Leidenschaft jedoch nicht ohne Opfer zu haben. Vor allem Ninas Verhältnis zu ihrer kontrollwütigen Mutter […] sowie die blutigen Kratzer am Rücken, die sie sich selbst zufügt, deuten darauf hin, dass sich hinter dem unschuldigen Rosa der Kinderzimmer-Tapete eine dunkle Realität verbirgt. Wenn sich Nina ruckartig einen Hautfetzen vom Finger reißt, dann ist das kein Ausbruch aus ihrem zarten Wesen, sondern bringt nur zum Vorschein, was in diesem Wesen schon angelegt ist. (Kadritzke)

This underlines the notion that Nina, appearing pure, fragile, and innocent, represses the Other within her: There is a darker side in her already, but she cannot let it emerge yet. Aside from the sequences mentioned in the quote above, there is another scene which visibly illustrates this: The audience sees Nina, who is cutting her nails in the bathroom, through her reflection in the mirror. A distorted laughter is heard. Suddenly, Nina's facial expression changes: She looks at herself somewhat evil and seductively, and then cuts herself in the finger. Immediately, she seems to return to her senses, and distorts her face briefly in shock and pain. Again, this shows that she has a darker, more violent and sexual side within her. In addition, these incidents demonstrate that this side wants to emerge and, furthermore, that it succeeds in doing so sometimes, as the sequence illustrates. Moreover, Nina is unable to control these breakouts. Although she does not suffer from dissociative identity disorder like David Callaway, Morton Rainey, and Tyler Durden, the Other seems to take over equally uncontrolled in these brief moments as the alter personalities in the previously examined movies.

In contrast to Nina, Lily (Mila Kunis) seems to be the ideal cast for the Black Swan. Nina watches Lily during practice: She is dancing passionately and, other than the rest of the dancers, she does not wear her hair tied up in a bun. In addition, she seems to enjoy herself and laughs together with the male dancers, which suggests that – in contrast to Nina – the male dancers seem to find her sexually interesting.. Thomas appears behind Nina and says: "Watch the way she moves. Imprecise, but effortless. She's not faking it" (00:28:03). Accordingly, the effortlessness of Lily's dancing, her carefree mind, and her disinterest in control and perfection are stressed. Other than Nina, Lily would be a perfect Black Swan, because she is able to lose herself in what she is doing without having to think about perfection. In order to perform the Black Swan, Nina first has to let go of her perfectionism

and doggedness. After she has perfectly danced a sequence featuring the White Swan, Thomas asks her to dance another sequence of *Swan Lake* containing the Black Swan. He criticizes Nina, telling her to dance with less control and to "seduce us. Not just the Prince, but the court, the audience, the entire world" (00:13:32). Saying this, he fully addresses her problem: As of yet, Nina is unable to seduce anyone, because she has not come to terms with her own sexuality yet. Lily interrupts the audition, coming in too late, but visibly casually, relaxed and carefree, with headphones in her ear. Here, the audience sees again that Lily is the complete opposite of Nina. She appears relaxed, equable and carefree, lacking Nina's striving for control and perfection. To support this image of Lily, it is also mentioned that she just arrived in New York from San Francisco, suggesting that she is used to a more laid-back lifestyle. In addition, Lily has a giant tattoo on her back showing two black wings, which already points at the fact that she would be the perfect cast for the role of the Black Swan.

This portrayal of Lily hints at a strategy Aronofsky maintains throughout the movie. In order to emphasize Nina's struggle between the two extremes of the White Swan and the Black Swan, and consequently, between the innocent, naïve and fragile girl and the passionate and seductive woman, respectively, *Black Swan* works with dichotomies that seem to permeate the movie, most obviously and importantly, the dichotomy of black and white. A reviewer appositely describes *Black Swan* as a "Schwarzweiß-Film […], ästhetisch wie inhaltlich" (Kadritzke). The movie's black and white dichotomy finds its most explicit representation in the opposition of the White Swan with the Black Swan. The White Swan is pure, innocent, and fragile, just like Nina before her transformation. The Black Swan, by contrast, is seductive, naughty, evil, and brutal. Accordingly, at least when it comes to sexuality and naughtiness, Lily represents the qualities of the Black Swan. Consequently, as an extension of the black and white dichotomy in *Black Swan*, Nina and Lily are portrayed as binary oppositions of each other. This notion can be traced throughout the entire film, beginning from the first few minutes of the movie. In an early sequence when the audience watches Nina on her way to the ballet company for the first time, Nina is on the subway and sees another woman at the other end of the wagon who seems to look exactly like herself. This notably startles Nina and makes her feel uncomfortable. A few moments later, the audience sees Nina in the changing room at the ballet company when the woman whom she saw on the train arrives. Nina is able to recognize her from the clothes she is wearing. It turns out that it is Lily, who is to become her competitor and rival to some extent in the later course of the film. Depicting the first

encounter of the two young women in this way may be read as foreshadowing, as it hints at the evolving opposition between them. In a different scene, Nina makes another experience of the same nature. She is sitting on the floor of the rehearsal room when, suddenly, someone appears at the door. She looks up and seems to be looking at a copy of herself standing in the doorway. However, as the person approaches, Nina realizes that it is Lily. This constant play between the two characters, that is, Nina's confusion of herself with Lily, supports the idea that they are represented as binary oppositions of each other. The contrast between Nina and Lily is maintained throughout the entire movie. In addition, whenever the audience watches Nina and Lily together on screen, the black and white dichotomy of the *Black Swan* is also mirrored in their clothes: Nina is always dressed in white or light colors, whereas Lily is wearing black. Again, this also underlines their symbolical representation of the White Swan and the Black Swan. The black and white dichotomy of *Black Swan* and its reflection in Nina and Lily may be interpreted as an expression of the contrast between Self and Other. For Nina, Lily – although she is not an alter ego like the antagonists in the other movies examined in this thesis – is the embodiment of the repressed Other within herself. It seems that Lily represents what Nina needs to become – or let out, as it is already inherent in her Unconscious – in order to turn into the Black Swan.

While the black and white dichotomy of *Black Swan* represents the opposition between Self and Other, the conflict Nina's is facing is expressed via her psychological disorder. As mentioned in the first chapter, Nina may be characterized as psychotic. Consequently, she is plagued with aural and visual hallucinations, which can be observed in various scenes. In one sequence, for instance, she pulls the skin off her finger down to the middle bone, which, in fact, she never did. In another scene, she is lying in the bathtub. While she is underwater, blood starts to drip into the tub and a strange laugh is heard. When Nina opens her eyes, she sees herself right above herself looking down at her, laughing. When she sits up, no one is there. As mentioned earlier, these breakouts may be interpreted as brief emergences of the Other. In addition, when Nina eventually has sex with Lily, further hallucinations come over her: For a brief moment, Lily turns into Nina. Furthermore, Lily's the black wings of Lily's tattoo seem to be moving while large goose bumps resembling those of poultry become visible on Nina's skin, which suggest that she is turning into the Black Swan. In connection with her psychosis, Nina also becomes continuously paranoid. When she finds out that Lily is her alternate for the Swan Queen, she begs Thomas not to choose her. Her paranoia becomes visible when she desperately

tells Thomas that Lily wants her role, which Thomas does not take seriously, saying: "Every dancer in the world wants your role" (01:14:33). Nina pleadingly answers: "No, this is different. She's after me. She's trying to replace me" (01:14:35).

Nina's hallucinations become more and more intense the closer she gets to her metamorphosis into the Black Swan. When she is alone in the rehearsal room, still practicing after everyone else has left, she dances in front of the mirror, but her reflection does not mirror her movement. Subsequently, she hears strange noises, and laughter, and, suddenly, the lights go off. Nina leaves the rehearsal room, screaming that she is still there, practicing. In the badly lit corridor, a black figure passes by her suddenly. This incident is not only shocking for Nina, but also for the audience. As a reviewer writes, this is a "classic trick designed to keep […] the viewer […] as edgy and frightened as Nina" (Outlaw). Expectant, the audience watches Nina follow the figure, asking if someone could turn on the lights again. She walks across the stage, following the noise of a woman's laughter. In a back room, she finds Lily (whom Thomas previously announced as Lily's alternate) and Thomas undressing and kissing each other. Lily looks at Nina, laughing, and again, her face turns into Nina's. Then, Thomas turns into the Black Swan, which demonstrates that the movie understands the sexual act as belonging to the realm of the Black Swan. This discovery is likely to have increased Nina's presumption that Lily is after her role. Upon the discovery, Nina runs into her changing room, takes her things – among them a nail file – and goes to the hospital to visit Beth, the former prima ballerina whom she replaced, unknowingly setting out to what is to become a journey of various hallucinations.

At the hospital, Nina places all the things she retrieved from Beth's make-up table at the company on the table Beth is sitting at, seemingly sleeping. When Nina puts down the nail file, Beth suddenly grabs her hand. She asks her what she wants, and Nina answers: "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I know how it feels now. She's trying to replace me. What do I do?" (01:18:28). It becomes clear that Nina has decided to pay her a visit because she feels that she is being replaced like Beth was replaced by her. Moreover, the sequence emphasizes that the artistic struggle has intensified the symptoms of her psychological disorder, as she is becoming increasingly paranoid. Beth realizes that Nina stole her things from her table, which Nina then tries to justify by telling her that she "was just trying to be perfect, like" Beth (01:18:42). Beth laughs at this and tells her that she is not perfect. She says that she is nothing, and begins to repeat: "Nothing! Nothing!" taking the nail file and stabbing her cheeks with it (01:19:01). Nina tries to take away the file from Beth, but she

bites her and looks at her, her face having turned into Nina's own face. Thus, Nina sees herself continuing to stab her face, still repeating "Nothing". Shocked, she stumbles backwards and leaves. It has to be noticed that it is not clear to which extent this experience was a hallucination. The audience does not know if Beth even stabbed herself with the nail file at all. In the elevator, Nina looks at her hands which are bloody, and the audience is able to see that she is holding the file in one hand. Apparently shocked, she quickly drops it. Again, it is unclear, what really happened. Leaving the audience in this state in which it does not know what truly occurred contributes to maintaining suspense and the eerie atmosphere in the movie. Again, this visualizes what Outlaw recognized as the technique of keeping the audience as nervous and anxious as Nina (cf. Outlaw). As Nina returns home, her hallucinations continue. The intensity of her continuous hallucinations demonstrates that in her struggle to be perfect, "this unattainable desire is slowly eating away at the walls of her psyche" ("Black Swan Movie Interpretation"). At this point in the movie, the process is, however, no longer a slow one, as Nina stumbles from one hallucination into the next. At home, Nina goes into the kitchen and turns on the light. At the other end of the kitchen, she sees herself, her face covered in blood, corresponding to the state in which she left Beth, turned into Nina, at the hospital. She runs into the bathroom and vomits, which emphasizes that the pressure she is under and the psychological stress she faces affects her physiologically. Lamberti, a psychiatrist, even "suggests that the repeated vomiting and weight loss in the days leading up to her final performance may have caused an electrolyte disturbance that could have contributed to the psychosis" (qutd. in Donaldson James 2). Nina searches the apartment for her mother. As she enters her room, all the portraits her mother has drawn look at her and begin to move their mouths, repeating "sweet girl" and "my turn" over and over again (01:20:30). Nina screams "Stop!" and simultaneously with her the images scream with distorted faces as she starts to tear them off the wall (01:20:41). Behind one of the images is a mirror which is then revealed shows the reflection of Nina's blood-covered double that comes running at her. As she turns around, it is her mother, asking her what she was doing. Nina runs into her room and blocks the door. It seems that in the struggle to be perfect, Nina has lost her mind. In her hallucinations, the violent side of the Black Swan mixes with her mother's oppressiveness. Furthermore, the fact that Nina's hallucinations frequently consist of another person's transformation into her demonstrates what Thomas tells her, namely that "the only person stand in [her] way is" Nina herself (01:24:25). Moreover, the effect of this drastic portrayal of Nina's psychotic hallucinations is to emphasize that the struggle tears

at her nerves and strength to the effect that it seems to destroy her mental health and make her lose touch with reality.

What happens next in *Black Swan* appears to be the climax of Nina's hallucinations. In addition, it symbolizes her metamorphosis into the Black Swan: A cracking noise is heard and Nina exclaims in pain. Then, the white of her eyes changes to red, and black feathers begin to break through the scratches on her back. Eventually, her legs crack backwards, looking like those of a swan. This drastic hallucination demonstrates that the Black Swan has taken control over her, and that, therefore, her metamorphosis is now complete. In addition, it demonstrates the extent of her psychological disorder. Even after Nina's symbolic transformation into the Black Swan her hallucinations continue. During the premier, when she is dancing the White Swan, she hears distorted laughter and discovers herself among the other ballet dancers. Shocked, she falls. The hallucinations follow her into her changing room, where they become so intense that she believes to have stabbed Lily. It becomes clear that the arduousness of the struggle to perform both Swans is expressed by means of Nina's increasing hallucinations. Consequently, the emergence of the Other is closely linked with mental illness. It appears that sexuality is the key to Nina's inner blockade. As Gibson and Wolske write, "Nina's transformation into the Black Swan requires her to lose her inhibitions and explore her sexuality" (88). This will be examined in the next section.

4.2.1. Repressed Sexuality and the Role of the Mother

From the beginning of *Black Swan*, the audience can observe that Nina's mother, Erica, is rather overprotective and treats Nina as if she was still a child. In the first scene of the movie that shows them together, Erica approaches Nina holding her sweater and wanting to dress her like a mother would dress her infant. Before Nina slowly begins to rebel against her mother's way of treating her like a child, Nina seems to simply endure her mother's behavior. Furthermore, Erica takes Nina to bed every night, again, as if Nina was still very young. When Nina lies down in her bed, Erica takes out her earrings for her in a visibly routine way. In an equally routine manner, Erica takes out a musical box and, placing it on Nina's nightstand, turns it on as if for a baby to help her fall asleep. This leads to the assumption that since Nina's infancy, her mother never stopped taking care of her as if she was still little. In addition, Erica constantly calls Nina her "sweet girl," which demonstrates that she internally denies the fact that her daughter is no longer a child, but already a young woman. Moreover, Erica appears as a controlling force: She constantly

calls Nina on her cell phone when she is not at home where Erica is able to observe her and, to some extent, control what she does.

Erica's overprotective and controlling behavior corresponds with a type of mother Beauvoir describes. She writes that many mothers are "especially capricious; what delights them is to dominate; when the baby is tiny, he is a toy: […] if it is a girl, they treat her like a doll; later they only want a little slave who will blindly obey them" (557). Erica clearly tries to dominate Nina and, although she is a young woman, still treats her according to Beauvoir's description. Furthermore, Beauvoir states that "some mothers make themselves slaves of their offspring to compensate for the emptiness in their hearts and to punish themselves for the hostility they do not want to admit" (559). This may be said to apply to Erica as well, which can be seen from the scene in which she tries to find out whether Nina has an affair with Thomas. She tells Nina: "I just don't want you to make the same mistake I did," to which Nina responds by thanking her sarcastically (00:53:56). This leads to the inference that Erica had an affair which resulted in her giving birth to Nina. Erica continues: "Not like that. I just mean as far as my career was concerned" (00:54:01). To this, Nina responds by asking her, again with a sarcastic undertone: "What career?" (00:54:05). Her mother, seemingly hurt, looks at her for a few moments and eventually answers: "The one I gave up to have you" (00:54:10). Accordingly, Erica seems to have given up dancing to take care of Nina. She appears to have devoted her life completely to her daughter. However, since her pregnancy disabled her to continue dancing, she unconsciously developed a feeling of hostility towards her child. This sequence somewhat explains Nina's and Erica's rather abnormal or disturbed relationship: Although Nina seemingly believes that her mother's career would not have gone any further, even if she had not gotten pregnant, as she shakes her head in response to her mother's statement saying that she was already 28 years old, she might have feelings of guilt because her mother gave up her own dreams to care for her. Therefore, she obeys her mother and lets her treat her like a little child. In addition, this might also be the reason why Nina pursues the same career, namely to make her mother happy. Beauvoir states that these mothers "cannot bear to let their child do anything on his own; they give up all pleasure, all personal life, enabling them to assume the role of victim; and from these sacrifices they derive the right to deny the child all independence" (559). This description perfectly fits Erica, as she expects her daughter to meet her expectations and wants to live out her failed dream through her. In addition, because she had to give up her career, she seems to have focused entirely on Nina. As a consequence, she has become overprotective and unable to

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accept that her daughter has grown up into a young woman whom she needs to let go and whose privacy she should respect. Furthermore, Beauvoir writes that the mother's "displays of resignation spur guilt feelings in the child" (ibid). This can be observed in *Black Swan*, as well. Erica seems to manipulate Nina emotionally. When Nina has been casted as the Swan Queen, Erica buys a huge and high-calorie cake. Nina says that she only wants a tiny piece. This visibly upsets her mother, as she reacts by deciding to throw it into the trash. Nina immediately apologizes and stops her from throwing the cake away. Erica scratches a piece off of the cake with her finger and holds it out to her daughter so that she can lick it off, a gesture that appears somewhat strange as well and rather unlike something a grown up woman would usually do.

Although Nina accepts and submits to her mother's dominant and controlling behavior in the beginning, she slowly starts to rebel against it alongside her slowly evolving transformation into the Black Swan. This can be observed in a sequence in which Nina is in the bathroom and looks at herself in the mirror, finding that she scratched herself on her shoulder blade again. Meanwhile, Erica comes home. As Nina hears this, she quickly blocks the door with the laundry basket. This shows that Nina is aware that her mother will not even grant Nina her privacy, and respect it, when she is in the bathroom. In another sequence after the gala night in which she is introduced as the Swan Queen, Erica enters Nina's room, again to undress her, but Nina says that she "can do it" herself (00:36:33). Ignoring this, her mother helps her nevertheless. When Erica sees that Nina has scratched her back again, she ruthlessly pulls down her dress without respecting and considering Nina's privacy and sense of shame which becomes visible as Nina covers her breasts and protests. Erica pulls Nina into the bathroom and starts cutting her nails to prevent her from scratching her back again, telling her to wear shrugs and cover-up to hide the marks. Furthermore, Nina thinks of ways to keep her mother out in order to protect her own privacy. In one sequence, the audience watches her take out the trash. Next to the garbage chute, Nina finds a wooden stick which she takes back inside with her and, later in the movie, uses to block the door of her room. It becomes clear that Erica denies Nina her privacy and independence, controlling her and oppressively taking care of her. While Nina submits to this at first, she begins to rebel against her mother throughout the course of the film, which can be seen as a development that happens alongside with her metamorphosis into the Black Swan.

Moreover, Nina's mother seems to be a decisive factor that prevents Nina from discovering her own sexuality. While it seems problematic that *Black Swan* seems to

equate Nina's sexual potential with her abilities as a dancer, it has to be accepted that sexuality plays a crucial role when it comes to Nina's artistic performance. In order to turn into a more seductive and sensual woman and thus, be able to perform the Black Swan, it seems that Nina has to discover and evolve her own sexuality. It appears that she has repressed her sexual drives and desires, as she feels rather uncomfortable when Thomas tries to talk to her about sex. Moreover, it seems that her dominant mother is preventing her from living out her sexuality. To awaken her sexual side and create a sense of awareness for her own sexuality, Thomas gives Nina a homework assignment, namely to "go home and touch [her]self" and "live a little" (00:35:45). When Nina wakes up the next morning, she follows Thomas's advice, as she touches herself and begins to masturbate, still lying in her bed. It seems that she tries to let go and to enjoy what she is doing just as Thomas told her to, but then she is abruptly interrupted as she turns around in her bed only to face her mother who is sleeping in the chair next to her bed. Once again, this shows that the mother is a constant disruptive element to her privacy. Even in her most intimate and private moment, Erica is there and thus prevents Nina from experiencing sexuality. In addition, this demonstrates once more how overprotective Nina's mother is, as she sits by her daughter's bed during the night only because she scratched herself the night before. There is another scene in which Nina attempts to fulfill Thomas's homework assignment. She is lying in the bathtub and begins to touch herself, but quickly stops and slides further down into the tub until she is completely underwater. Her facial expression leaves the impression that she is somewhat desperate and in a rather helpless position, not knowing how to handle sexuality. As of yet, she is still repressing her sexual drives and cannot succumb to them.

It appears that Nina needs someone to arouse her sexual awareness and support her in freeing herself from her mother's dominance. As Nina is portrayed as a fragile, vulnerable and sexually rather inexperienced young woman, representing the qualities of the White Swan, it is no surprise that it is Lily who comes to her rescue, as she is sexually open and seemingly experienced, passionate, and carefree, representing the Black Swan. After Nina's subliminal argument with her mother about Erica's career, the door bell rings and Lily is at the door, asking for Nina. Erica rudely tells her that Nina is not home, then closes the door and even locks it. Here, one can observe another attribute of the type of mother described by Beauvoir: "She systematically detests the girlfriends in whom her daughter seeks succor against family oppression, friends who 'spur her on' […]. All influence that is not her own is bad" (564). It seems that in order to keep control over her,

Erica wants Nina to live a rather sheltered live, primarily at home with her. As Beauvoir describes: "she keeps her daughter home, watches over her, tyrannizes her" (ibid). Moreover, she makes decisions for Nina as she does not even give her the chance to decide for herself if she wants to see Lily or not. When Nina asks who was at the door, her mother tells her that "[i]t was no one" (00:55:00). However, Nina no longer submits to her mother's dominant behavior. She gets up and goes out into the hallway, where Lily is waiting for the elevator. What is important to note here is that Nina closes the door behind her, explicitly showing that she wants her mother to leave her alone and grant her some privacy. However, Erica is unable to accept and respect this. She opens the door and asks Nina to come in for dinner, once again, as if she was a child. Nina is noticeably annoyed by this. A few moments later, Erica opens the door again and tells Nina that she "need[s] to rest" (00:55:46). This corresponds with a further description by Beauvoir, stating that the mother "tries to humiliate the young girl" (564). Clearly, Erica is embarrassing Nina in front of Lily. This notion is emphasized by the fact that Lily seemingly notices Erica's abnormal behavior, as she exclaims "Jesus!" when Erica intrudes for the second time (00:55:49). Finally, Nina is able to disobey her mother and make her own decision: She takes her shoes and jacket and leaves with Lily, ignoring her mother's protests. During the evening, Erica continuously tries to call Nina on her cell phone, but Nina, noticing the calls, does not pick up the phone. The night out with Lily marks her process of freeing and detaching herself from her mother's control. At the bar, Nina is dancing to an electronic song that features the barely audible voice of a woman singing "sweet girl," the nickname her mother calls her by frequently during the film. In the back of her head, her mother is calling out to Nina. This corresponds with Freud's assumption that the superego may be seen as a rudiment of the parents who told and taught the child right from wrong (*Abriß* der *Psychoanalyse* 70). Now that her mother is absent, Nina's superego takes over her role and tries to hold her back. Nevertheless, Nina is able to resist her mother's force which is symbolized by the woman's voice. When Nina returns back home – as she believes, together with Lily – her mother comes out of the living room, controlling her again and rather chiding her for coming home at this late hour. Nina, like a teenager, laughs and smiles during her mother's interrogation. Although she is already over twenty, probably twenty-one, (as Thomas says she has been dancing at the company for four years which would make her twenty-one if she joined the company after high school), she is experiencing a belated pubertal rebellion against her mother. When Erica asks where she has been, Nina says "[t]o the moon and back" (01:04:38), and while she says this, the

camera moves over to Lily who forms the same words with her mouth. Like in *Fight Club*, where Tyler speaks for the protagonist when he is at the hospital, she seems to speak for Nina. At this point, as she is not truly there, Lily seems to serve as Nina's alter ego who empowers her to do something that she would not have had the courage to do on her own, namely to speak up against her mother. When Erica detects that her daughter is drunk, Nina simply imitates the sound of a bell, smiling carelessly. Intriguing her further, Erica wants to know what Nina has been doing during the night. Nina's response is: "Oh, you wanna know their names?" (01:05:51). Her mother takes her and pulls her towards her room, saying that she "need[s] to sleep this off" (01:05:57). But Nina continues, still smirking: "There were two. There was Tom, there was Jerry. […] And I fucked them both" (01:05:59). Hearing this, her mother slaps her over her mouth screaming "[s]hut your mouth" (01:05:03). Nina runs off into her bedroom; Erica follows her, but Nina succeeds in closing the door and blocking it with the wooden stick she found next to the garbage chute. She tells her mother to stay outside. Erica, not used to this kind of behavior from her daughter, asks: "What's this?" (01:05:18). With Lily's support, as she is standing behind her (even though she is not truly there), Nina is able to speak out against her mother's intrusion, yelling: "It's called privacy! I'm not 12 anymore" (01:05:19).

Having thus succeeded in keeping her mother out, Nina's sexuality finally unfolds. The fact that it is merely a hallucination, possibly an aftereffect of the drugs or a symptom of psychosis, is not of importance, as the fact that she experiences sexuality in some way, even if it is just a fantasy or masturbation including fantasies of Lily, stands in the foreground and marks Nina's sexual initiation. Other than in her previous attempts to satisfy herself sexually, she is able to follow through with the act and reaches a climax. At the end of the sequence, Lily's face turns into Nina's once again, and Lily calls her "sweet girl". As Nina has managed to block her mother out and discover her own sexuality, the fact that Lily uses this nickname may be interpreted as an ironic triumph over the mother, since now, Nina is no longer a "sweet girl". However, it may also be regarded as another incident of the superego's delayed attempt to call out to her, since according to Freud, the parents may be perceived as the origin of the superego (*Abriß* 70).

It becomes clear that Nina's transformation into a ballerina who can dance both the White Swan and the Black Swan also affects her relationship with her mother. The morning of the premier of *Swan Lake*, that is, after the night in which Nina's hallucinations reached their peak as she believes to physically be turning into the Black Swan, Nina wakes up, and her mother tells her that she has "called the theater," informing them that

Nina is sick and cannot make it to the show (01:22:27). Afterwards, Nina discovers that her mother has locked them both inside Nina's room. Again, Erica has made a decision for her, trying to prevent her from participating in the premier, as she believes that she is in no state to dance. This can be seen from Erica's statement: "This role is destroying you" (01:22:39). The scene illustrates that Nina seems to have become ruthless towards her mother and her role as the Swan Queen has become so important to her that she appears obsessive about it. Eventually, Nina attacks her mother to get hold of the hidden door handle that will enable her to leave her room. Shocked, Erica asks her: "What happened to my sweet girl?" (01:22:45). Nina exclaims: "She's gone!" and twists her mother's already damaged wrist to overpower her (01:22:44). This brutal attack and her exclamation demonstrate that Nina's metamorphosis is completed, but they also show that a more violent side has taken control of her. In addition, she is now completely lost in her psychotic state. Simultaneously, Erica is forced to realize that she can no longer control her daughter.

It becomes clear that Nina's struggle is not only an artistic one. Alongside the struggle of performing both the White Swan and the Black Swan, she is also facing the conflict of freeing herself and becoming independent from her dominant and overprotective mother. It appears that this liberation is necessary, as it allows her to experience a sexual awakening which will aid her in turning into a woman who can represent the Black Swan.

4.3. Moment of Recognition and the Ending

The moment of recognition in Black Swan is probably not as drastic as the ones in the other movies examined in this thesis when it comes to its effect on the audience. In *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, and *Fight Club*, the moments of recognition reveal that the protagonists are, in fact, suffering from psychological disorders which typically functions as the explanation for the mysterious events in the movies.[5] As the audience already knows that Nina is mentally ill, the moment of recognition in *Black Swan* may indeed come as a

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[5] The same may be said, for instance, of *Shutter Island* and *The Uninvited*. In *Shutter Island*, the audience is tricked until the climax of the movie into believing that the protagonist's perspective is reliable. In the moment of recognition, it turns out that he suffers from a psychological disorder and that, all along, the psychologist's claim that he is paranoid was true. In *The Uninvited*, the audience is most likely to trust Anna's perspective, as she has just lost her mother. The moment of recognition reveals that she was – although accidentally – responsible for her mother's and her sister's death. Unable to cope with this responsibility, she has repressed the incident which affects her mental health, as she believes that her sister is still alive. As this is presented from Anna's perspective, the audience does not doubt the authenticity of the images it sees, and it also believes that Anna's sister is a living person.

surprise to the audience, but it is not as unexpected as in the other three psychological thrillers in which the audience is kept ignorant of the fact that the protagonists suffer from psychological disorders until the moment of recognition is introduced.

The day of the premier, Nina arrives at the theater, perceivably to everybody's surprise, and begins to get ready for the show. After the night of her metamorphosis, she appears to have changed, as she seems calm, and is more self-confident, telling Thomas that despite the fact that he has asked Lily to take over her part, she will dance the Swan Queen. Thomas smiles, as he seemingly notices and likes the change. He tells her: "The only person standing in your way is you. It's time to let her go. Lose yourself" (01:24:03). The final act of letting herself get out of her own way occurs in a symbolic destruction of herself standing in her way. It happens in the form of a hallucination, during which the not only the audience, but Nina, too, is tricked. When Nina returns to her changing room during the break and finds Lily sitting there, getting ready to perform the Black Swan. Lily tells Nina: "See, I'm just worried about the next act. I'm just not sure you're feeling up to it" (01:29:14). She adds: "How about I dance the Black Swan for you?" and while she says this, she turns around to face Nina, and her face turns into Nina's own face. The suspicious viewer might read this as a hint pointing at the fact that Nina is actually alone in the room, since this would not be the first time that Lily's presence is just a hallucination (01:29:22). Nina attacks her, pushes her against the mirror, and tells her to "leave [her] alone" (01:29:38). This struggle marks the climax of her inner battle against herself. Nina fights against her "double," and it becomes a visible fight between the White Swan and the Black Swan, as Nina is wearing the costume for the former, and Lily, or her double, for the latter. Moreover, it is necessary that this struggle takes place at this specific time, because Nina has to perform as the Black Swan in the next act. Thus, the fight might be considered necessary for the emergence of the Black Swan, and with it, of the Other. Nina's double strangles her, exclaiming: "It's my turn. My turn! My turn!" (01:29:41). Then, Nina's skin changes: Once again, goose bumps appear and it is slowly turning black. This marks her transformation into Black Swan. She takes a piece of the broken mirror and stabs her double with it, screaming "It's my turn" (01:29:52). Thus, Nina has succeeded in getting herself out of her way, and consequently, her internal conflict is solved. As she stabs her double, it turns back into Lily who is spitting blood. Nina appears to return to her senses and is shocked when she realizes what she has done, as Lily is seemingly dying. When the stage manager knocks on the door, telling Nina that she has to be on stage in five minutes, she sets her priorities: Her art is more important to her than what she has just done. She

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pulls Lily's body into the bathroom inside her changing room. Then, her eyes turn into those of the Black Swan, and in the next shot, the audience sees her appearing on stage in that role. While her facial expression was rather vulnerable, insecure and fragile when she performed the White Swan, and thus, more like her former self, it is now seductive, evil, and self-confident. Again, this stresses that she has become the Black Swan. When Nina finishes her first dance as Black Swan, even her co-dancer, who would not have wanted to have sex with her before, is impressed by her performance. Now that she has let the repressed Other within her emerge, Nina moves more smoothly and passionately, moaning and sighing. She finally feels the Black Swan, and no longer fakes it, as Thomas subliminally reproached her for before. Once again, her skin is covered with goose bumps and feathers break through it. This hallucination symbolizes her metamorphosis, and Nina's transformation is further emphasized when she leaves the stage, walks straight to Thomas and kisses him passionately, demonstrating to him that now, she is able to perform the role of the seducer.

As Nina returns to her changing room after having completed the act featuring the Black Swan, she sees a puddle of blood seeping through the slit of the door to the other room where she left Lily's body. She quickly covers it with a towel, but it does not seem to disturb her any further which, again, demonstrates that she has become obsessed with her role as Swan Queen, no longer caring about anything else. She changes her makeup and outfit back into that of the White Swan for the final act when somebody knocks on the door. Surprisingly, it is Lily, praising her for her wonderful performance. Nina is speechless, as she believes to have killed her. As soon as Lily is gone, she goes to the door of the bathroom and picks up the towel, finding that there is no blood on the floor. When she opens the door, the bathroom is empty. This marks Nina's arrival at the moment of recognition. Now, she realizes what truly happened: Looking down at herself, she sees a bloody spot on her abdomen, and pulls a fragment of the mirror out of the wound. Now, she grasps that it was herself and not Lily against whom she has been fighting, and that she has wounded herself. At this moment, the commonly known theme of Swan Lake plays, which emphasizes the climactic function of Nina's realization. She cries, but then sits down at her dressing table in order to finish her makeup. Despite her injury, she continues her performance on stage. The audience sees Nina dance the final act, in which the White Swan commits suicide, and it seems that simultaneously with the White Swan, Nina has done the same. As she stands on the rostrum from which she is supposed to jump into the White Swan's death, her wound becomes clearly visible and blood spreads over her white

costume. Like Thomas instructed, she casts a last look at Rothbart, then at the prince, and, finally, at the audience. Her look at the audience is directed at her crying mother. And then Nina jumps. Her jump is shot in slow motion, which emphasizes that it is not only representing the suicide of the White Swan, but also meaningful for Nina herself. She hits the mattress and sighs, smiling faintly, seemingly relieved that her artistic masterpiece is achieved, and that the pressure is finally lifted from her. The audience cheers loudly and the other ballerinas and Thomas appear to congratulate her. What Lily has predicted comes true, as Thomas calls her his "little princess," adding that he "always knew [Nina] had it in" her (01:38:00). Lily is the first to see her wound, and draws the other's attention to it. Thomas is visibly shocked and exclaims: "What did you do? What did you do?" (01:38:14). This demonstrates that he has not realized how serious the artistic struggle was for Nina. Barely audibly Nina answers: "I felt it" (01:38:18). Moments later she adds: "Perfect. Now it's perfect" (01:38:21). It appears that Nina has finally reached her goal: Perfection. This suggests that she had to claim the Other and use it in order to achieve the goals of the Self. Her last statement supports the notion that she perceived the artistic struggle as a personal struggle, and at the end, was no longer able to differentiate between the roles she played and her own life. Now that she herself is dying, the suicide of the White Swan has become her own suicide, making the ending perfect in her eyes. Nina has become the perfect Swan Queen. As one critic puts it, she has turned into "a martyr to her art" (Dargis). It seems that there is no more differentiation between Self and Other; instead a fusion has taken place, as she has become the perfect White Swan, and an equally perfect Black Swan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have given a detailed insight into manifestations of the Other in contemporary psychological thrillers. The claim I suggested in the introduction was that the repressed Other is represented via psychological disorders in the characters. I have demonstrated that this claim applies to the psychological thrillers examined in this diploma thesis, and moreover, may be said to apply to various other contemporary psychological thrillers. In *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, *Fight Club*, *Black Swan*, and many other movies of the subgenre, the protagonists are facing inner conflicts which are related with their inner process of repressing internal drives, desires or a sense of dissatisfaction. This process of repression results in the creation of alter egos as a symptom of dissociative identity disorder, or, as is the case in *Black Swan*, is connected with and intensifies other forms of psychological disorders, namely psychosis. The development of psychological disorders and their resultant symptoms may be regarded as an expression of the emergence of the repressed and unconscious Other. This Other may be said to have similar characteristics in the majority of contemporary psychological thrillers. It generally represents a 'darker' side of the protagonists, that is, a more violent and dangerous side, and, at least when it comes to *Black Swan*, also a more erotic, sexual, and sensual side. In addition, this darker side frequently seems to contain drives that are socially inacceptable (which is the reason why they have been repressed), for instance, the wish to murder someone or actual murder. The Other typically stands in contrast to the Self: in *Hide and Seek*, Charlie compensates for David's shortcomings (particularly concerning his relationship to his daughter Emily); in *Secret Window*, John Shooter is able to do what Morton Rainey could not do, that is, to commit murder and exact revenge on his wife. In *Fight Club*, Tyler Durden represents everything the protagonist desires to be, namely his idea of what a 'real' man should be like. In *Black Swan*, Nina is represented as a fragile, naïve and vulnerable young woman who strives for perfection before she turns into the complete opposite, taking up the characteristics of the Black Swan by finally being able to let go and thus, becoming self-assured, brutal and aware of her own sexual radiance.

Furthermore, my analysis has shown that, as Kristeva and Freud claim, the repressed Other cannot remain hidden, but will find a way to surface in our consciousness. In various psychological thrillers – *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window*, and *Fight Club* being among them while *Black Swan* is different in that the audience learns from the beginning that Nina's perspective is unreliable – this return of the repressed Other to the realm of the Conscious typically marks the climax of the movies. It is in these climactic sequences that

the protagonists experience a moment of recognition in which they realize that they themselves have caused the events that seemed unexplainable to them throughout the narratives. For instance, the climax in *Hide and Seek* is marked by David Callaway's sudden realization that he himself is Charlie and that it was also himself who murdered his wife. This sudden realization that their antagonists are in fact alter egos is similarly climactic for Morton Rainey in *Secret Window*, and Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*. In *Black Swan*, Nina does not have a real alter ego. However, her moment of recognition is somewhat similar and also includes a second personality to some extent as she believes to have killed Lily, but then realizes that she has, in fact, stabbed herself.

To return to the function of the Other in psychological thrillers, I want to point out that film scholars are convinced that "the relationship between the pleasure and reality principles inherent in each of us plays out on American movie screens every day, and we watch movies to mitigate this tension in our daily lives" (Ott and Mack 158). Thus, employing the Other in psychological thrillers does not only correspond with common cultural practices of signifying someone or something as Other. Moreover, the psychoanalytic aspect to the movies is that it responds to the audience's own psychological tension between the reality and the pleasure principles (ibid). In any case, the function psychological thrillers fulfill as postmodern texts – that is, to challenge the audience to think about the reliability of the presented perspectives and images – is, at least, of equal importance. I have demonstrated that (especially) *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window* and *Fight Club* display a strategy that is commonly used in contemporary psychological thrillers, namely that of throwing the audience off the scent. This technique is employed to prompt the audience to actively reflect on and evaluate the images it is presented with in order to make inferences about the possible solution behind the events in the movies and their potential outcome. Thus, contemporary psychological thrillers are set in a postmodern context in which the audience is challenged to think about what it perceives without simply accepting the presented images as the truths. A probable side effect of applying this strategy that might be regarded as fulfilling a socio-cultural function – provided that the audience is understood as a group and not single individuals who watch these movies on their own – is that the viewers might talk about these movies and discuss them. Thus, they also have an effect on the viewership's social and cultural activities.

I hope that in writing this thesis, I have contributed to the process of raising awareness of manifestations of the Other in popular culture. As it appears to me that not much has been written about the emergence of the Other in connection with psychological

disorders yet. Although my idea is by no means a completely new one, I feel that I have offered an approach to interpret psychological thrillers from a deconstructive perspective, that is, by viewing the protagonists as entities that have to face the internal struggle between Self and Other. In this struggle the repressed Other appears in the shape of or stands in close connection to psychological disorders.

41.292 words

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Zusammenfassung der Diplomarbeit in deutscher Sprache

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit Erscheinungsformen des ‚Anderen' in zeitgenössischen Psychothrillern. Als repräsentative Beispiele für eine große Anzahl an Filmen dieses Genres, die diese Erscheinungsformen des ‚Anderen' veranschaulichen, habe ich die Folgenden ausgewählt: *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window* (deutscher Titel: *Das geheime Fenster*), *Fight Club* und *Black Swan*. Jeder dieser Filme wurde im 21. Jahrhundert, oder, wie im Fall von *Fight Club*, unmittelbar vor der Jahrhundertwende veröffentlicht und spiegelt als Psychothriller das große öffentliche Interesse an psychologischen Themen, wie es im letzten Jahrzehnt verstärkt wahrgenommen wurde, wider.

Die Protagonisten leiden an psychologischen Krankheiten, die dem Anschein nach als Folge von Verdrängung entstehen. Es handelt sich hierbei zum Beispiel um die Verdrängung schmerzhafter Erinnerungen, wie etwa die Erinnerung daran, die eigene Ehefrau in flagranti mit einem anderen Mann gesehen zu haben. In *Hide and Seek* bringt die Wut über diese Erinnerung den Protagonisten dazu, seine Frau zu töten; eine Tat, die abermals verdrängt wird. In *Secret Window* unterdrückt, bzw. verdrängt der Protagonist den Drang, seine Frau aus Rache zu töten. In *Fight Club* scheint der Verdrängung eine andere Ursache zugrunde zu liegen, nämlich die Unzufriedenheit des Protagonisten mit seinem eigenen, durch Kapitalismus, Materialismus und Konsum geprägten Leben. Er verdrängt die Frustration über die bürokratische Gesellschaft in der er lebt. *Black Swan* unterscheidet sich von den anderen drei Filmen, da die Protagonistin keine zweite Persönlichkeit entwickelt. Nichtsdestotrotz leidet sie an psychologischen Problemen, die von Essstörungen bis hin zu drastischen Psychosen und Halluzinationen reichen. Nachdem die Protagonistin ihre Traumrolle erhält, nämlich die der Schwanenkönigin in Tschaikowskys *Schwanensee*, sieht sie sich vor der Herausforderung, beide Schwäne, den schwarzen und den weißen, überzeugend zu verkörpern. Während ihr die Rolle des weißen Schwans keine Probleme bereitet, scheint es, als müsse sie zunächst ihre verdrängte Sexualität zum Leben erwecken, um auch den schwarzen Schwan verkörpern zu können. Die künstlerische Herausforderung wird zunehmend zu einer Persönlichen, in der sich die Protagonistin immer weiter in ihren Psychosen und Halluzinationen verliert.

Die Tatsache, dass das Verdrängte in den Protagonisten weiterhin bestehen bleibt, äußert sich häufig in Form von Alter Egos. In *Hide and Seek*, *Secret Window* und *Fight Club* ist dies der Fall. Diese zweiten Persönlichkeiten erscheinen den Protagonisten als reale Personen, was zeigt, dass sie sich deren wahrer Natur nicht bewusst sind. Zudem symbolisieren die Alter Egos das ‚Andere', das dem Unbewussten entspringt und weitestgehend verdrängt wird.

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Dieses ‚Andere' repräsentiert charakteristischerweise eine ‚dunklere', gewaltbereite, brutale und bösartigere Seite, die sich darin äußert, dass die Protagonisten zumeist dann Morde begehen, wenn die zweite Persönlichkeit ihre Psyche dominiert. Im Fall von *Black Swan* wird das ‚Andere' durch den Kontrast zwischen dem weißen und dem schwarzen Schwan dargestellt. Die ‚Andere' Seite der Protagonistin in *Black Swan* ist ebenfalls eine ‚dunklere' und zudem eine Leidenschaftlichere und Sexuellere.

Während das ‚Andere' nun in den Alter Egos oder in anderen psychologischen Störungen seinen Ausdruck gefunden hat, müssen die Protagonisten in Psychothrillern dennoch erkennen, dass das ‚Andere' in Wahrheit ein Teil von ihnen selbst ist. Der Moment, in dem dies geschieht, kennzeichnet für gewöhnlich den Höhepunkt des Films. Typisch für Psychothriller ist hier, dass die Protagonisten, und die Zuschauer gemeinsam mit ihnen, eben zu diesem Zeitpunkt herausfinden, dass die Protagonisten an einer psychischen Krankheit leiden. Außerdem erkennen sie ihre Alter Egos als solche und somit auch das ‚Andere' in sich selbst.

Zum Schluss ist es wichtig festzuhalten, dass die Wirkung von Psychothrillern, wie den in meiner Diplomarbeit analysierten, von großer Bedeutung ist. Als postmoderne Texte fordern zeitgenössische Psychothriller die Zuschauer dazu auf, aktiv mitzudenken. Sie müssen sich stets fragen, ob die Bilder, die sie sehen, auch der Wahrheit entsprechen und diese nicht lediglich als solche akzeptieren. Nicht selten fallen die Zuschauer jedoch auf die falschen Fährten herein, die die Filme absichtlich für sie legen. Grade dies ist es, was Psychothriller so spannend macht: Die Protagonisten sind häufig unzuverlässig, in der Regel wird dies jedoch erst beim Höhepunkt des Films deutlich (*Black Swan* darf als Ausnahme betrachtet werden). Die Konsequenz dessen ist, dass die Zuschauer den Wendepunkt im Film zumeist gemeinsam mit den Protagonisten erleben.

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