



Distorted Reflections: Identity and the Fact/Fiction Divide in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club 2* (2015)

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Graphic biographical fiction often blurs the lines between fact and fiction, which renders it a powerful medium for exploring the fluidity of identity. Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club 2* (2015), the graphic novel sequel to the novel *Fight Club* (1996), which features the author himself as a character within his story brings forth complex questions regarding self-representation, identity, and the author's legacy. Drawing on theories of graphic and literary narratology and, identity, this article discusses identity as well as how the genre's blend of image and text uniquely challenges readers to reconsider the separation between an author's fictionalized persona and his "true" self as well as the implications of fictionalized self-portrayal in the realm of graphic biographical fiction.



Introduction

Graphic narratives have long demonstrated a capacity for self-reflexivity, frequently drawing attention to their own constructedness in how they are assembled, edited, and arranged to produce a specific effect or message, and to the conditions of their production. Within comics studies, such works are often described as metacomics, that is, comics that foreground their own status as comics and interrogate the processes of authorship, narration, and visual storytelling (Inge, 2001). Rather than merely telling a story, metacomics expose the mechanisms of storytelling itself, destabilizing the boundaries between creator, character, and reader. In this context, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club 2* (2015), illustrated by Cameron Stewart, emerges as a striking example of a contemporary metacomical work that stages a confrontation between authorial identity, cultural commodification, and narrative control.

As the graphic sequel to the novel *Fight Club* (1996), a novel that itself critiques consumer capitalism and the erosion of individuality, *Fight Club 2* extends its predecessor's concerns into the realm of authorship and adaptation. The comic not only revisits Sebastian (formerly the nameless narrator) and Tyler Durden, but also introduces "Chuck Palahniuk" as a character within the narrative. This self-insertion transforms the sequel into a reflexive meditation on the cultural afterlife of *Fight Club* and on the commodification of its creator. The comic thereby functions as what Jesús González terms a "discursive metacomical," foregrounding the material, commercial, and authorial conditions of its own production while simultaneously unfolding its narrative (González, 2013).

While elements of biographical self-inscription are clearly present, *Fight Club 2* does not conform neatly to the conventions of graphic biographical fiction in the tradition of Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor* (1976–2008), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) and *Are You My Mother?* (2012), or Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* (1996). Rather than offering a sustained autobiographical account, the comic deploys the author's image strategically within a larger metafictional architecture. In doing so, it mobilizes self-representation not to document a life, but to interrogate authorship as a commodified cultural function. The figure of "Palahniuk" operates less as a stable autobiographical subject than as a destabilized author-function embedded within the diegesis.

Moreover, the sequel exists within a complex network of adaptations and commercial extensions, including David Fincher's 1999 film adaptation and subsequent franchise expansions. As adaptation scholars have noted, contemporary literary works often circulate within transmedial economies in which authorship becomes intertwined with branding, market forces, and audience expectations. The cultural industry surrounding

Fight Club, from film to video game to sequel comics,¹ forms the commercial backdrop against which *Fight Club 2* stages its metanarrative drama. The comic's reflexivity is therefore inseparable from the pressures of adaptation and commodification that shape its production and reception.

This article argues that *Fight Club 2* operates as a metacomic that dramatizes the instability of authorship within a commodified cultural landscape. Through layered focalization, visual disruptions, panel bleeds, and intrusive graphic elements such as the recurring pills, the comic destabilizes spatial and narrative hierarchies, collapsing distinctions between diegetic space, page surface, and readerly interpretation. By inserting the author into this unstable structure, the work interrogates the boundaries between creator and creation, fiction and industry, control and surrender. Ultimately, *Fight Club 2* transforms its sequel status into a self-reflexive exploration of how identity, both personal and authorial, is constructed, consumed, and fragmented within the contemporary cultural marketplace.

1. Metacomics, Graphic Biographical Fiction and *Fight Club 2*: A Sequel on the Author's Identity Commodification

In *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk's decision to insert himself into the narrative does not function as straightforward graphic biographical gesture, but as a metacomical strategy that destabilizes authorship from within. Rather than presenting a sustained autobiographical account, the comic stages "Chuck Palahniuk" as a figure who competes for narrative authority alongside Sebastian and Tyler Durden. This multiplication of authorial presence foregrounds what metacomic theory identifies as a key feature of self-reflexive comics: the exposure of the narrative apparatus and the interrogation of who controls it (Inge, 2001; González, 2013). The author-character openly acknowledges his uneasy relationship with his own creation. In interviews surrounding the comic's publication, Palahniuk noted that Tyler Durden "kept coming back to me in different ways over the years," and that writing the sequel in comic form allowed him to "work through a lot of the emotions and experiences I'd gone through since the original book" (Palahniuk, 2015a). Within the comic itself, this tension becomes dramatized as a struggle over narrative control. The author-character attempts to intervene in the

¹ Palahniuk and Cameron Stewart continued this reflexive trajectory in *Fight Club 3* (2019), which further complicates the boundaries between creator, character, and reader through additional layers of narrative framing and metafictional self-awareness. While a full analysis of the third installment falls beyond the scope of this article, its continued emphasis on narrative instability and franchise proliferation reinforces the argument that the *Fight Club* comics operate less as conventional sequels than as metacomical explorations of authorship within an expanding transmedial and commercial framework.

story, only to find himself resisted, undermined, and ultimately overpowered by Tyler. What emerges is not an assertion of autobiographical authenticity but a theatricalization of authorial vulnerability.

Michael Lackey's work on biofiction remains useful here, though not as a generic label but as a conceptual lens. Graphic biographical fiction operates in the space between reality and fiction, which allows authors to portray themselves or real-life figures through a blending of objective biography and subjective and symbolic storytelling, "drawing attention to the way in which historical truth is always mediated by narrative construction" (Lackey, 2021, p.64). Indeed, scholars have recognized the genre's unique ability to "conflate author and character, creating a mirror in which both fact and fiction appear intertwined" (Stephen, 2018, p.110). This conflation is evident in Palahniuk's *Fight Club 2*, which exemplifies the blending of fact and fiction as the author comments on the consumer society through the author-character Palahniuk. Interestingly, in his examination of graphic biographical comics, M. D. Smith details how by "inserting the authorial self as both creator and subject" (Smith, 2016, p.75), authors can "test the limits of authorship" (Smith, 2016, p.75). This testing occurs when the boundaries between creator and creation blur, challenging traditional notions of authorial control through metafiction, transmedial collaboration, and the destabilization of identity within the narrative. Lackey further expands on this in his examination of bio-fiction, noting that "the genre of bio-fiction allows for the conflation of author and character, a maneuver that forces readers to question the boundaries between fact and fiction, the real and the imagined" (Lackey, 2021, p.60). Because bio-fiction inhabits fictional storyworlds with figures and facts from the real world, questions regarding the relation between authorial intent, authorship, and identity arise. Consequently, presenting himself as an authorial self within *Fight Club 2*, while simultaneously discussing *Fight Club* within it, Palahniuk creates a graphic biographical metanarrative that comments on the commodification of his initial novel, *Fight Club*, reflects on authorship and the commodification of himself as an author.

Fight Club's main theme revolves around the loss of individuality in the consumer world of the modern century. The story follows the life of a white-collar worker who is also the novel's nameless narrator. Lost amidst a world of advertising and pervasive consumerism, this homodiegetic narrator comments on consumer society and the commodification process of human beings through an alter ego, Tyler Durden, whom he hallucinates into existence. Tyler Durden is portrayed as the narrator's complete opposite: he is handsome, uninterested in consumerism, and seeks to deliver the world from the cult of ownership (**Figure 1**).

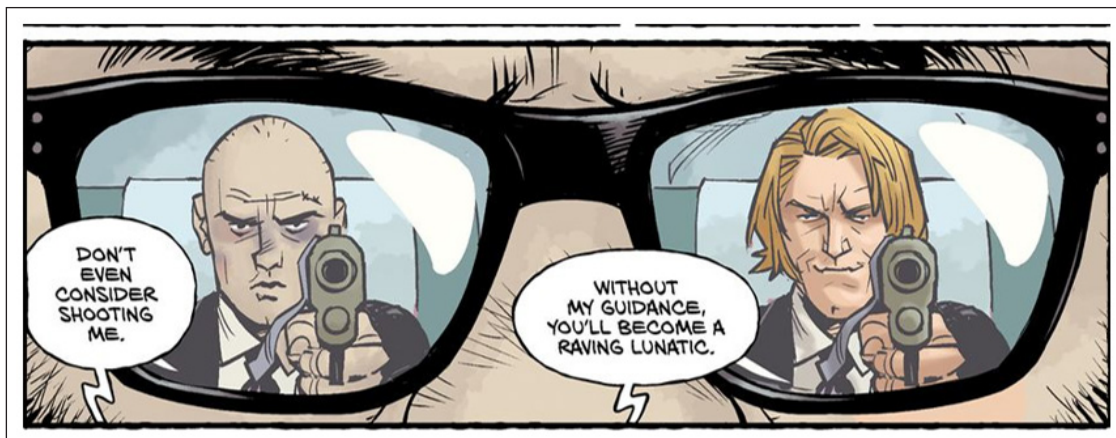


Figure 1: Sebastian and Tyler Durden. *Fight Club 2™* © 2015 Chuck Palahniuk. Dark Horse Books®.

For example, as he browses the catalogue striving for a “self” through objects and the power to acquire them, the narrator barely notices how consumerism objectifies him, thus rendering him a mere commodity. Then, Tyler Durden comes forth to remind him that “the things you own end up owning you” (Palahniuk, 1996, p.48). This assertion triggers an epiphany in the narrator that makes him aware of his objectified state and the extent to which consumerism had enslaved him and leads him to reflect on his consumer identity. Readers are granted access to the narrator’s thinking on consumerism and its impact on his sense of self in a lengthy monologue:

Like so many others, while sitting in their bathroom with their IKEA catalogue, I had become a slave to the IKEA nest. If I saw something clever like the shape of a Ying Yang table, I had to have it. The Johanneshov-armchair in the Strinne green stripes pattern. The Rislampa/Har paper lamps made from wire and environmentally friendly unbleached paper. I have flipped the catalogues many times wondering, what kind of dining set defines me as a person (Palahniuk, 1996, p.43).

As the monologue suggests, the narrator defines himself through objects, engaging in buying practices that render him one of the many objects, which leads him to experience what Baudrillard describes as “the fall into the commodity sphere” (Baudrillard, 2017, p.190), that is, a commodity realm where self-objectified individuals dwell. This act of self-commodification or “thinghood” (Marx, 1887, p.80), as Karl Marx calls it, hints at a paradoxical connection between two words: “thing” and “personhood” wherein “person” is replaced with “thing” through the process of being commodified. Through

this, Marx sheds light on the objectification of the individual who exists in a consumer society: rendered a mere commodity, they are no longer a person.

Tyler Durden embodies the narrator's desperate need to break free from the dehumanizing grip of consumerism and to reclaim his identity by transforming himself from a commodified "thing" back into a fully realized "person". In contrast to the narrator who remains nameless throughout the narrative, symbolizing his erasure in a world dominated by consumer culture, Tyler Durden possesses a name that grants him a distinct identity and, with it, the power to act. This status as an independent entity enables Tyler to resist societal norms and to instigate radical change, which offers the narrator an outlet for his repressed anger and a pathway toward self-liberation. Indeed, as Tyler takes control, the narrator begins to explore a life untethered from material possessions, embracing chaos and rebellion as means to rediscover meaning. However, this newfound freedom comes at a cost. Tyler's radicalism grows increasingly destructive and forces the narrator to confront the consequences of surrendering his agency to an alter ego. In the end, Tyler Durden becomes a violent force of destruction, orchestrating chaos through the creation of Fight Club and Project Mayhem.² The extent of the chaos ultimately compels the narrator to attempt suicide in his attempt to reclaim control and banish his hallucination.

This process of self-commodification is particularly resonant in the graphic narrative form. Indeed, the interplay of text and image in *Fight Club 2* amplifies the commodification theme as it emphasizes how the narrator's identity, his alter ego, and the writer's character persona are fragmented and refracted through consumer goods. The interplay between narrator and character thus parallels the fragmented visual representation of the graphic biographical novel format itself. The ability of the graphic narrative medium to present readers with this complex identity formulation, at times across one page or in one scene, renders the comics' medium a fitting vehicle for exploring the dehumanizing effects of consumerism on the author through his characters.

In *Fight Club 2*, readers learn that the narrator survives the gunshot he fired at himself, leaving only a wound on his cheek. In biofictional narratives, physical markers such as wounds often "become emblematic of the subject's internal struggles and transformation" (Lackey, 2017a, p.12). Indeed, the narrator himself reflects on the wound's significance, recognizing it as a constant reminder of the identity hole he

² Fight Club and Project Mayhem are groups invented by the nameless narrator's alter ego, Tyler Durden. Fight Club is a place where people meet after work to fight and Project Mayhem is a mischief terrorist organization that attempts to destroy anything pertaining to capitalism and consumerism. Both act as means to "purge" individuals from their consumer needs in the novel and its sequel.

sought to fill through Tyler Durden. He notes, “The scar on my face, a reminder of all that’s been lost, stays with me” (Palahniuk, 2015, p.28), framing the wound not only as a trace of physical injury but also as an enduring symbol of his fractured identity. As Lackey points out, “biofiction invites a reader to confront the blurred line between the author’s lived experience and their fictional creation” (Lackey, 2017a, p.21), and in *Fight Club 2*, the narrator’s wound further presents as a bio-fictional reflection of Chuck Palahniuk’s own relationship with his creation. Just like the wound, his novel, *Fight Club*, is a scar that constantly reminds Palahniuk of the consequences of his work, that is, its widespread misinterpretation, its cultural influence, and the way it has shaped his public identity and legacy. As Palahniuk inserts his authorial self into the story, the bio-fictional elements and the graphical form become so intertwined that the boundaries between fiction and reality dissolve even further, ultimately rendering *Fight Club 2* a graphic biographical fiction.

Hillary Chute claims that in graphic narratives, “scars and wounds are not just personal; they are narrative markers, exposing how identity is inscribed on the body itself” (Chute, 2010, p.22). In *Fight Club 2*, the narrator’s gunshot wound is such a marker, symbolizing his struggle to reclaim his identity from Tyler Durden. On a deeper level, this wound reflects the bio-fictional themes at play in the story: it points to the blending of Palahniuk’s real self with his fictional character by addressing the author’s larger battle of shaping an authorial identity. Through this narrative device, Palahniuk as both author and character grapples with the intersection of fiction and reality, blurring the lines between them in his ongoing search for self through graphic biographical fiction.

Through a series of adaptations, *Fight Club* evolved into a product of consumerism, which obscures the distinction between the fictional story-world and the commodification of both its characters and its author. The 1999 film adaptation directed by David Fincher, which is referenced within the graphic novel, serves as a prime example of how the story was recontextualized for mass consumption. Its commodification was further compounded by the release of the 2006 *Fight Club* video game on PlayStation 2, developed by Vivendi Games, which extended the franchise into the interactive entertainment world. As Palahniuk’s fame grew, his creation morphed into a commodity, and the demand for a sequel led to what can be seen as a form of harassment from his fans, ultimately compelling the author to revisit his work and respond to his readers. In *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk responds to his audience by inserting himself into the narrative as a character who communicates directly with his creations and his fans, further blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. This self-insertion highlights the commodification not only of the fictional characters, but also

of Palahniuk himself, hence positioning him as at once both author and product. As he reflects, “I wanted to be in the book. I wanted to be the one held accountable for the culture this story helped to foster” (Palahniuk, 2015b). His appearance in the narrative is not a mere metafictional experiment; it is an act of accountability, a self-critical gesture that places him at the center of the story’s thematic exploration of identity, legacy, and cultural co-option. Through this metanarrative strategy, Palahniuk critiques the ways in which his identity, much like his characters’, has become a consumable entity. In doing so, *Fight Club 2* becomes the place where Palahniuk confronts his legacy. He engages with the very commodification he once critiqued by using graphic biographical fiction to offer a reflection on the consequences of artistic success and the commodification of authorship.

For instance, Palahniuk’s character-author muses on his legacy as an author, noting how the audience has co-opted his original vision with their own versions of *Fight Club*, as with Bite Club, Pint Club, Raw Fuck Club, Film Club (Figure 2).

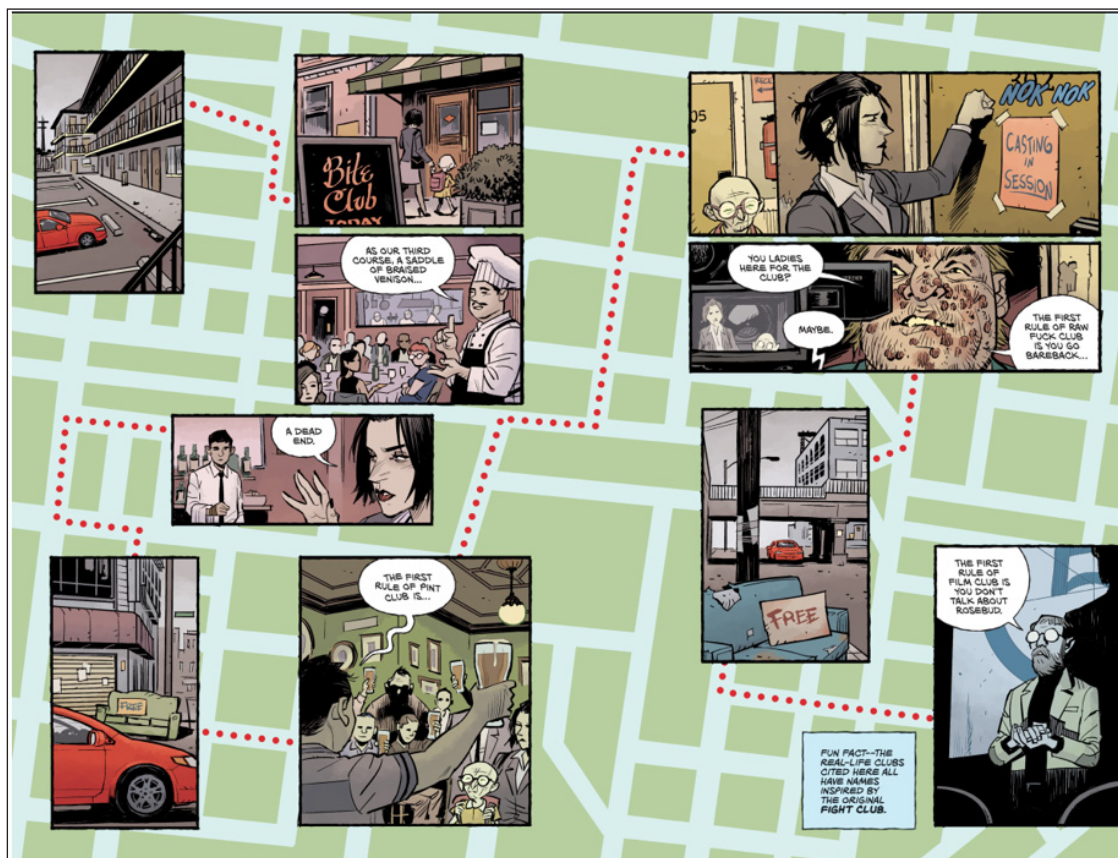


Figure 2: The road map of the different clubs. *Fight Club 2*™ © 2015, 2016, 2018 Chuck Palahniuk. Dark Horse Books®.

Referring to these clubs in blue squared word balloons, Palahniuk claims, “Fun fact: the real-life clubs cited here all have names inspired by the original *Fight Club*” (Palahniuk and Stewart, 2015, p.101). In an intra-medial move, these clubs are shown on a road map as Marla Singer (the narrator’s wife) walks from one club to the other, which calls to mind a quote from *Fight Club* when the nameless narrator claims, “There was a Fight Club at every corner” (Palahniuk and Stewart, 2015, p.125). Similarly, through this double page, Palahniuk strongly asserts that there is indeed a co-opted version of *Fight Club* on every corner of the real world, which breaks once again the wall between fiction and reality. “They think they own me. They think they know me... but they don’t see what it’s cost me” (Palahniuk and Stewart, 2015, p.102), he says while reflecting on the complex relationship between an author and his readers, and the invasive nature of celebrity culture.

The claim Palahniuk makes in *Fight Club 2* mirrors real-life frustrations he has expressed in interviews about how *Fight Club*’s cultural legacy has often overshadowed his original intentions. Here, the metacomic structure intersects with adaptation and commercialization. Palahniuk’s public statements reinforce this dynamic. “Let me show you how it affects my real life,” he remarked in an interview. “Let me show you the real-world consequences” (Palahniuk, 2015b). The sequel thus becomes a staged reckoning with the cultural industry that transformed *Fight Club* into a brand. However, instead of offering confessional autobiography, the comic refracts these “real-world consequences” through its formal experimentation. The author-character’s struggle with Tyler mirrors Sebastian’s struggle with his alter ego, collapsing distinctions between character psychology and industrial authorship. The graphic novel showcases how the character of Tyler Durden, central to both *Fight Club* and *Fight Club 2*, becomes a symbol of the cultural impact Palahniuk did not fully anticipate. One of Palahniuk’s editors refers in the graphic novel to Tyler as an “infectious mental virus” (Palahniuk and Stewart, 2015, p.202), and Palahniuk himself adds to this notion, replying, “Try removing Santa Claus from the cultural landscape” (Palahniuk and Stewart, 2015, p.202). This response underscores both the profound cultural influence of *Fight Club* and also Palahniuk’s frustration with how his creation has become more than just a story. It is a cultural product that eclipses his original authorial intent. Hence, Palahniuk critiques the commodification of his identity by illustrating how his characters, once symbols of resistance and individuality, have been transformed into commodified cultural icons. Ultimately, this biographical metanarrative exploration in *Fight Club 2* allows Palahniuk to confront the paradox of being both the creator and the consumed product, offering a reflection on the complexities of authorship in a commodified cultural landscape.

Importantly, this reflexivity is realized not only narratively but visually. Cameron Stewart's artwork plays a decisive role in rendering the author's presence unstable. The author-character does not appear as a stable organizing center; he is frequently displaced, interrupted, or visually subordinated within the page's architecture. The collaborative nature of comics authorship thus becomes part of the metacomical inquiry: the script may insert the author, but the visual field refuses to grant him unchallenged dominance. The comic's formal composition enacts the very erosion of authorial sovereignty it thematizes.

2. Blurring the Fact/Fiction Divide through Self-Representation

In *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk transcends the role of a traditional omniscient author-narrator by inserting himself into the story as a character who grapples with the consequences of his work's cultural impact, specifically the commodification of both *Fight Club* and his own identity as its creator. This hybrid state, where Palahniuk exists simultaneously as the author of and a subject within his fictional world, exemplifies what Lackey identifies as the core of bio-fiction, that is, "the process by which an author uses their own life or persona as raw material to explore broader truths about the self, creativity, and cultural identity" (Lackey, 2017b, p.10). By becoming both the architect of and a participant in the story-world, Palahniuk critically engages with the cult status of *Fight Club*, interrogating how his creation has evolved beyond his intentions and control. Hillary Chute argues that "transforming the author into a hybrid figure, both within and outside their narrative, grants them a complex form of self-awareness" (Chute, 2018, p.85). This self-awareness is evident in Palahniuk's interactions with his characters, who openly challenge and critique him as their creator. Through this metanarrative device, Palahniuk not only demonstrates his frustration with how *Fight Club* has been co-opted by consumer culture, but also underscores his own complicity in the commodification process. In this respect, Tyler has indeed become an "infectious mental virus" and an unremovable "Santa Claus" icon from the landscape as the author-character suggests, which once again emphasizes Tyler's transformation into a cultural icon that has concealed the author's original intentions.

Indeed, placing himself within the narrative, Palahniuk explores the boundaries between authorial authority and artistic autonomy, which leads him to question whether he can reclaim his identity from the commodified legacy of *Fight Club*. This approach aligns with contemporary theories of bio-fiction that argue that self-insertion enables authors to "probe the unstable line between fact and fiction, complicating traditional

notions of identity and authorship” (Lackey, 2017b, p.15). *Fight Club 2* thus presents as much more than a sequel; it is a self-reflective exploration of the author’s relationship with his work and the broader implications of identity commodification.

To showcase this identity quest to the reader, Palahniuk uses the graphic novel medium’s unique tools, including frame breaks and panel breakouts to emphasize his self-representation. For instance, the wine drops we see on some of the pages are reminiscent of the wine cups in a scene where he (in his role as author) is portrayed drinking with his editors at his office table. Moreover, some speech within word balloons is interrupted and hidden by the onomatopoeic sound “Bark”, which refers to the barking of his dogs at his work office. In addition of underscoring self-representation, the barking sound that integrates with and invades the fictional world of Palahniuk also quite literally breaks the frames to blur the lines between fact and fiction. Indeed, by blending elements of his real-life experiences with the fictional world of *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk invites readers to consider how much of an author’s identity is embedded in their work and how much is a performance shaped by external expectations. These external expectations come from both the audience and the commodification of the authorial persona in popular culture.

In *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk seems to grapple with the tension between staying true to his creative identity and fulfilling the demands of his cult status as the creator of *Fight Club*. This struggle manifests visually through the chaotic blending of real and fictional elements that symbolize his fractured sense of self. By weaving his personal reality into the narrative, Palahniuk reflects on the burden of performing an authorial identity that is not just his own but is shaped, consumed, and perpetuated by readers, publishers, and the cultural legacy of his work. This dynamic emphasizes how the creative process and the author’s public persona are inevitably intertwined, forming a hybrid identity that exists in a liminal space between fiction and reality.

One of the most recurrent panel breakouts throughout the comic brought to life by Cameron Stewart portrays pills, which appear on various pages throughout the graphic novel. Ostensibly representing Sebastian’s medication, the pills repeatedly intrude upon panel borders, speech balloons, and character bodies. They occupy a liminal spatial register, neither fully diegetic nor entirely extradiegetic, hovering above the page as graphic elements that disrupt reading. In doing so, they visually perform what Lackey describes conceptually: the collapse of stable boundaries between fictional world and authorial frame. The pills obscure faces and text, interrupting narrative clarity and destabilizing focalization. Their spatial ambiguity reinforces the comic’s

metacomic logic: reality and hallucination, author and character, story and page surface are layered rather than hierarchically ordered. In one instance, pills are scattered in panel breakouts during a scene in which the narrator, now calling himself Sebastian, throws out his medication in a possible state of intoxication (Figure 3). This act signals Sebastian’s mental instability and in so doing, destabilizes his reliability as a narrator, which nudges readers to question the authenticity of his perspective.

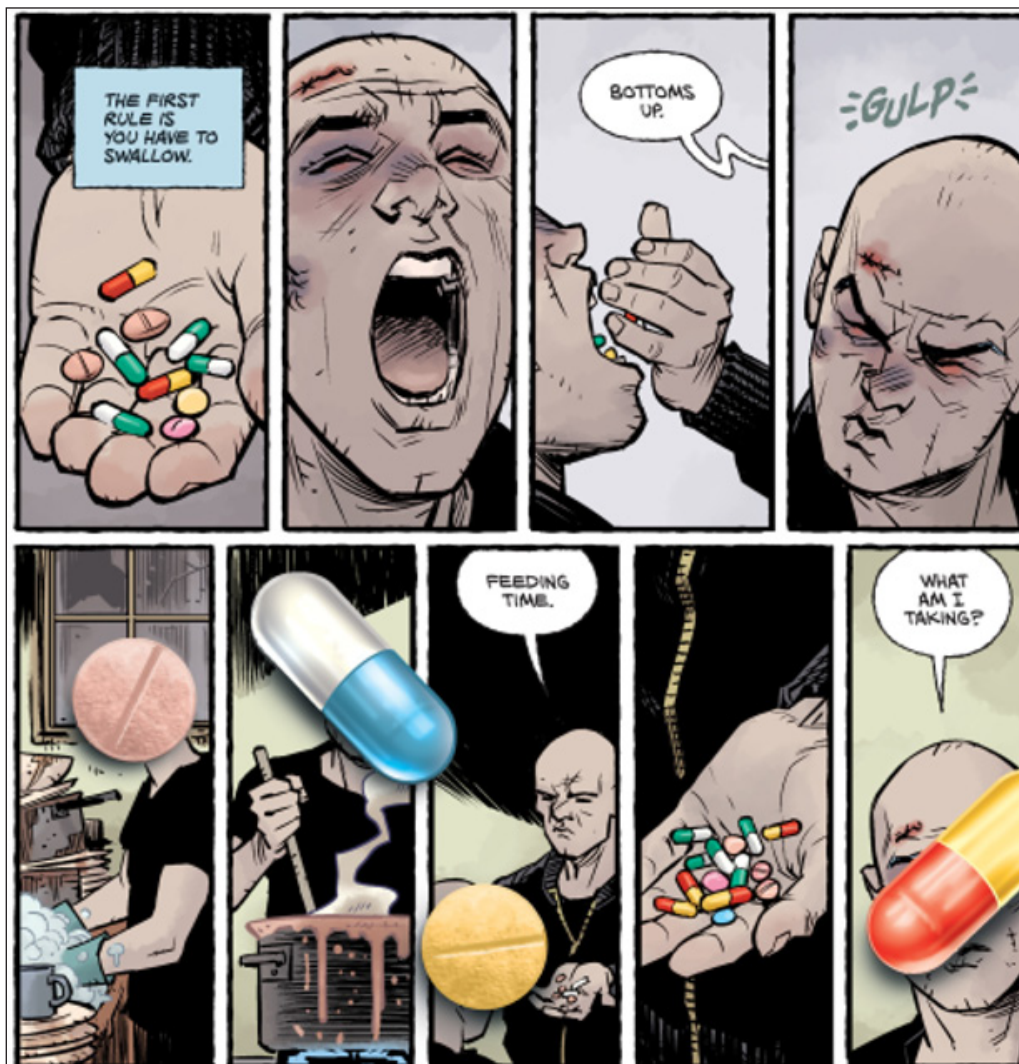


Figure 3: The scattered pills. *Fight Club 2*™ © 2015, 2016, 2018 Chuck Palahniuk. Dark Horse Books®.

Thierry Groensteen’s conception of comics as a “spatio-topical system” is useful here. For Groensteen, meaning in comics emerges not only from sequential

progression but from the relational network that binds panels across the page. Panels exist within a structured grid that governs reading order and spatial containment. *Fight Club 2* systematically unsettles this containment. Rather than functioning as discrete narrative windows, panels are fractured, overlapped, and pierced by elements that refuse to remain within their assigned frames. The pills provide the clearest example of this spatial ambiguity. Representing Sebastian's schizophrenia medication, they recur throughout the comic not simply as objects within the story-world, but as graphic intrusions that hover across panels. They obscure faces, interrupt speech balloons, and spill across borders. Crucially, they do not occupy a stable diegetic position. They are neither consistently embedded within depicted scenes nor confined to a symbolic overlay. Instead, they operate on what might be described as a hypersurface layer: a plane that sits simultaneously above and within the narrative.

This hypersurface destabilizes the hierarchy between image and page. The pills appear to rest on top of the comic itself, as though scattered across the physical paper, while also functioning as part of Sebastian's mental and narrative state. Their ambiguous placement produces a metacomical effect: the reader becomes acutely aware of the page as material object. The pills interrupt the illusion of transparent storytelling and draw attention to the constructedness of the medium. In this sense, they enact visually what the narrative performs conceptually, an erosion of stable boundaries between fiction, authorship, and material form. At the same time, the pills embody another layer of reflexivity. They obscure not only characters but text itself, interfering with legibility. Speech balloons and narrative boxes are partially covered, suggesting a breakdown in communicative authority. This visual interference parallels the fragmentation of focalization: Sebastian's perspective is compromised, Tyler's interventions destabilize narrative control, and the author-character's commentary further complicates hierarchy. The pills become spatial manifestations of this layered instability, externalizing schizophrenia not merely as psychological condition but as a structural principle governing the comic's organization.

This creates an unreliable narration that directly ties into Palahniuk's broader exploration of the blurred lines between fact and fiction. Rendering Sebastian's version of events questionable, Palahniuk invites the audience to reflect on the narrative's layers of reality. Readers may ask: is the narrative grounded in Sebastian's subjective experience, Tyler's anarchic vision, or Palahniuk's own self-representation as an authorial figure within the text? As Lackey explains, biofiction frequently "plays with the boundaries of historical truth and imaginative invention" (Lackey, 2017b, p.8), creating a hybrid space where the reader must actively engage with reality and imagination. In the case of *Fight Club 2*, the "historical truth" is *Fight Club*'s cultural impact and legacy,

and the “imaginative invention” is Palahniuk’s reflection on this legacy through *Fight Club 2*. This meta-level engagement postulates the graphic novel as a place where Palahniuk examines his own fragmented identity as both a real-world author and a character within his fictional world, which reinforces the complex interplay between biography, fiction, and identity. By intertwining Sebastian’s unreliable perspective with the metanarrative tools of the graphic novel medium, Palahniuk challenges the reader to navigate the fluid and often ambiguous boundaries between fact and fiction, hence, mirroring the uncertainties of self-representation in both life and art.

At the beginning of the graphic novel, readers assume that Sebastian is the narrator of *Fight Club 2*, just as he was the homodiegetic nameless narrator of *Fight Club*. However, the comments of what seems to be Palahniuk himself in squared blue balloons, mixed with the narrator’s hallucinations, suggest a jumbled and layered focalization. This narrative complexity invites readers to question who is truly in control of the story, Sebastian, Tyler Durden, or Palahniuk as the character-author. In this regard, one may argue that the commodification of the writer compelled Palahniuk to create a metanarrative commentary on himself, which led him to portray himself simultaneously as a character-author, a character-narrator, and a character-focalizer. By doing so, Palahniuk uses the graphic novel as a platform to dissect the layers of identity not only within his characters but also within himself. This act of self-representation through multiple roles underscores his struggle to grapple with the legacy of *Fight Club* and the cultural phenomenon it has become. In this respect, Lackey argues that bio-fiction often allows authors to explore the blurred boundaries between their personal identities and their public personas by transforming their works into “a laboratory for exploring the self as both creator and creation” (Lackey, 2017a, p.12). Similarly, Chute highlights the unique affordances of graphic narratives in portraying this duality by noting how the interplay of image and text creates “a fragmented but deeply introspective portrait of the author’s confrontation with their own narrative” (Chute, 2018, p.85). Through this multifaceted self-portrayal, Palahniuk engages in a complex dialogue with his audience and examines not only his own commodification but also the broader relationship between authorship, identity, and cultural legacy.

3. Visual Focalization through the Graphic Medium and its Fact/Fiction Divide Implications

The instability of the graphic novel is intensified through layered focalization. At the outset, readers assume that Sebastian, formerly the nameless narrator, remains the primary internal focalizer. His thoughts are rendered directly, and his perspective

appears to anchor the narrative. Yet this focal stability quickly fractures. Squared blue balloons attributed to the author-character interrupt Sebastian's narration, while Tyler Durden intrudes unpredictably into both image and text. The resulting structure produces what Gérard Genette terms competing focal lenses: internal focalization through Sebastian, parasitic focalization through Tyler, and extradiegetic commentary through the author-character. These layers do not resolve into hierarchy but coexist in tension, destabilizing the assumption that the author stands outside the narrative as its controlling intelligence.

As Chute explains, "in graphic novels, visual focalization allows for layered interpretations of perspective, letting readers feel the instability of a character's mind through the medium itself" (Chute, 2018, p.97). The graphic format of *Fight Club 2* enhances focalization by making visual cues represent shifts between Sebastian's, Tyler's, and the character-author's perspectives. *Fight Club 2* often uses contrasting colors, panel arrangements, and stylistic changes to signal shifts in character perspective or moments when Tyler assumes narratorial control. For example, when Tyler is in control of the narrative, the colors and visual styling become darker or more chaotic, signaling to readers that Tyler's influence is dominating Sebastian's psyche. This dual-layered focalization, that is, textual and visual, deepens the sense of conflict between these two identities. In this regard, the darker tones and chaotic panel layouts that often accompany Tyler's appearance suggest his chaotic influence and instability visually. At one point, the panels visually "crack" as Tyler's presence takes over, illustrating Tyler's dominance over Sebastian as well as his disruptive influence.

Moreover, Palahniuk's presence is often marked by non-sequitur panels that are somewhat disconnected from the primary storyline, but reflect on themes of creation, fame, and audience expectations. For instance, scenes in which Palahniuk appears may jump from direct commentary on his writing process to more symbolic or reflective imagery, which creates a collage of perspectives that both inform and disrupt the main narrative. His interjections force readers to consider how his actual real-world identity, and struggle with *Fight Club's* legacy complicate the relationship between fiction and reality.

The use of non-sequitur panels also highlights the layered visual focalization that establishes a fractured, disorienting narrative that mirrors the instability within Sebastian's mind and Tyler's invasive presence. The sudden break from immediate sequences interrupts the flow of the narrative, therefore disrupting the reader's sense of continuity and coherence. These sudden shifts serve to visually signal Tyler's growing control over Sebastian's psyche and the blurring of his reality. Scott McCloud ponders on non-sequitur panels saying that,

The last category [non-sequitur panels] suggests an interesting question. Is it possible for any sequence of panels to be totally unrelated to each other? Personally, I don't think so. No matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of alchemy at work in the space between panels which can help us find meaning or resonance in even the most jarring of combinations (McCloud, 1993, p.73).

Here, McCloud suggests that non-sequitur panels may initially seem disjointed, depicting scenes that feel unrelated to the main action, but ultimately exist in relation to the main story. Indeed, in *Fight Club 2*, these panels serve a deliberate purpose in relation to the story's characters. They reflect the chaos and fragmentation of Sebastian's mind under Tyler's influence. For example, the image of President Kennedy's fake death functions as a metaphor for Sebastian's father abandoning him (Figure 4).

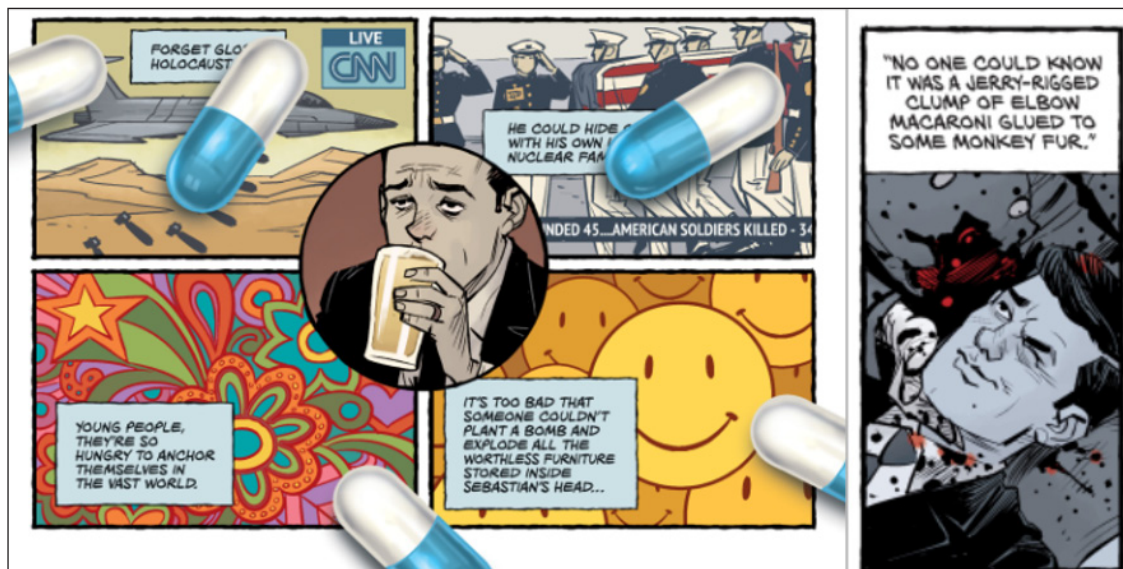


Figure 4: Blurred boundaries. *Fight Club 2*™ © 2015, 2016, 2018 Chuck Palahniuk. Dark Horse Books®.

Similarly, the colorful, psychedelic imagery in other panels evoke the disorientation tied to Sebastian's heavy medication that blurs the boundaries between reality and hallucination. As with all visual features in the graphic novel, these visual disruptions are not random: they invite readers to interpret Sebastian's unstable psyche. Hillary Chute argues that "non-sequiturs in graphic narratives create a cognitive dissonance that forces readers to actively question the perspective they're viewing" (Chute, 2018, p.98). Palahniuk uses non-sequiturs not only to grant readers access to an unstable mind, but also to urge them to engage with the text and find meaning in its disarray, echoing McCloud's idea of an "alchemy" between seemingly unrelated images.

The non-sequitur panels are significant in the depiction of the destabilizing effects of Tyler's influence over the narrative because they emphasize the narrative's fragmented focalization. As Gérard Genette describes it, focalization is the narrative perspective or "visual lens" through which events are filtered (Genette, 1980, p.25). In *Fight Club 2*, focalization is far from being straightforward. It intertwines the perspectives of Sebastian, Tyler, and even Palahniuk himself. This multiplicity of viewpoints deepens the ambiguity between fiction and reality, and complicates how readers understand identity and narrative control. By layering these focalizing techniques, the graphic novel disrupts traditional storytelling, and invites readers to question who holds narrative authority and how truth is constructed within the chaotic interplay of voices and perspectives.

Sebastian initially appears to be the story's primary focal lens. His inner thoughts, to which readers have direct access, classify him as an "internal focalizer" (Genette, 1980, p.36) who narrates the story from a homodiegetic perspective. However, his ongoing struggle with Tyler's influence and his fragmented sense of identity complicate this notion. Sebastian admits, "I thought I was done with Tyler. I thought I was in control. But he's always there, hiding in the background" (Palahniuk and Stewart, 2015, p.110). This moment of self-reflection not only reflects Sebastian's emotional turmoil but also portrays Tyler as an invasive, almost monstrous presence that constantly undermines his agency. As Tyler's dominance seeps into Sebastian's perspective, the narrative becomes increasingly disorienting, leaving both Sebastian and the reader questioning who truly controls the focal lens. In this context, the non-sequitur panels that Palahniuk strategically incorporates take on new significance. These panels at once disrupt the narrative flow and also serve as a meta-commentary on the fractured identities of both the characters and the author himself. In blending fiction with graphic biographical elements, Palahniuk explores the boundaries of selfhood and authorship, aligning *Fight Club 2* with the bio-fictional tradition of interrogating the author's role in their creation.

In this regard, one can argue that the narrative holds two internal focalizers, namely, Sebastian and Tyler. Tyler functions as an autonomous focalizer who takes control of the narrative when he manipulates other characters and begins to reshape the plot from his own perspective. However, his ability to alter the story's trajectory without Sebastian's awareness creates an unsettling effect because it shifts focalization to an even more unreliable perspective. This manipulation of narrative authority emphasizes the duality of identity and control, where Tyler's focalization leads readers to question whether Sebastian can truly distinguish himself from Tyler. The panels where we see Sebastian becoming aware of Tyler's plans at the psychiatrist's office showcase this

lack of agency and leave the reader once again confused and disoriented. In this respect, Tyler acts as a kind of parasitic focalizer, a “virus” as previously claimed by one of the editors within the story who intrudes in Sebastian’s inner narrative.

Most strikingly, Chuck Palahniuk makes an appearance in *Fight Club 2*, inserting himself as a meta-focalizer who comments on the unfolding story and reflects on his own role as its creator. This self-insertion blurs the lines of focalization, adding a layer of authorial commentary that intertwines the fictional world with its real-world architect. In this context, Palahniuk assumes the role of an “external focalizer” (Genette, 1980, p.68), functioning as an extradiegetic narrator who observes, comments on, and subtly shapes the narrative from outside its constructed world. By exposing himself as a focalizer of the story, Palahniuk calls attention to the artificiality of both the narrative and the identities within it. This self-aware focalization transforms the narrative into a metanarrative that prompts readers to question not only who controls the storyline but also who defines the identities of its characters.

4. The Author’s Symbolic Death Through Panel “Bleeds”

In graphic narratives, comic panels are integral to the medium’s language. They combine text and image within defined spaces and order them sequentially to convey themes and ideas. Traditionally, panels serve as rigid frames that “contain the reader’s view” (Eisner, 2008, p.44). But what happens when a comic’s panelization defies convention, as Chuck Palahniuk’s does in *Fight Club 2*? Here, panels are fractured, chaotically arranged and “bleed” beyond the page. Such unconventional panelization disrupts reader expectations inviting readers to consider how these visual ruptures reflect deeper thematic concerns.

McCloud explains that “when ‘bleeds’ are used, i.e. when a panel runs off the edge of the page, time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the closed panel, but instead, hemorrhages and escapes into timeless space” (McCloud, 1993, p.103). In *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk embodies this concept quite literally through Sebastian’s act of piercing his arm to splash his blood onto the paintings in an art gallery (**Figure 5**). Here, the panel bleed is not just metaphorical; it is visceral and literal. The rigid frames of the portraits, initially containing closed perspectives, shift abruptly to implicate the reader. We are no longer mere observers as we take the place of the paintings. We find ourselves confronted by Sebastian’s act of rebellion as the panels themselves bleed before us.

This rupture culminates in the following full-page panel, where the phrase “Approved by the Comics Code Authority” (CCA) appears in bleeds (**Figure 5**). This striking image critiques the rigid constraints once imposed by the CCA, a regulatory



Figure 5: Panel bleeds and the Comic Code Authority. *Fight Club 2*™ © 2015, 2016, 2018 Chuck Palahniuk. Dark Horse Books®.

body infamous for its censorship of graphic violence and provocative themes in comics. By juxtaposing this anachronistic symbol of censorship with the chaotic imagery of blood and rebellion, Palahniuk creates a metanarrative commentary on the evolution of comics as a medium. Through these fractured panels and literal bleeds, Palahniuk not only subverts traditional panel structures but also symbolically “kills” the authorial authority of imposed narratives and storytelling techniques, transforming the text into an open, interpretative space for the reader. According to Will Eisner,

A frame’s shape (or the absence of one) gives it the ability to become more than just a proscenium through which a comic’s action is seen: it can become a part of the story itself, it can be used to convey something of the dimension of sound and emotional climate in which the action occurs, as well as contributing to the atmosphere of the page as a whole. The intent of the frame here is not so much to provide a stage as to heighten the reader’s involvement with the narrative, much like a play in which actors interact with the audience, rather than merely performing in front of it (Eisner, 2008, p.45).

This observation underscores how the physical design of panels can transcend their function as mere containers for action, instead becoming integral to the narrative's emotional and thematic resonance. Palahniuk harnesses this potential to rupture the boundaries between creator and creation by using unconventional panel structures to directly address his audience.

At the end of *Fight Club 2*, Palahniuk depicts himself as facing an angry mob of readers dissatisfied with the graphic novel's ending. While he intended to resolve the story by killing off his characters, the mob insists on rewriting the ending themselves. This interaction is a vivid enactment of Eisner's concept as it transforms the frame into an interactive stage where Palahniuk blurs the line between his role as the author and his portrayal as a character.

Through the frequent use of panel bleeds, Palahniuk's self-referential presence extends beyond conventional narrative boundaries. These visual techniques not only suggest his pervasive influence but also emphasize his entanglement within the story's world. The bleeds act as a metaphor for how Palahniuk's own life and identity "bleed" into the narrative, which symbolically collapses the separation between author, text, and audience. This aligns with Roland Barthes' argument in his essay, "The Death of the Author" (1967) that an author's intent and identity become subordinated to the audience's interpretations. Here, however, Palahniuk challenges Barthes' notion by inserting himself so overtly into the text that his presence complicates any straightforward death of authorship.

Moreover, this technique visually reinforces Palahniuk's dual role as both the story's creator and as a character ensnared within its confines. Thus, the panel bleeds serve as a representation of fractured identities and, at the same time, as a critique of authorial control. Palahniuk's inability to "contain" his creation echoes Sebastian's struggle to control Tyler, suggesting that both creator and character are at the mercy of forces they cannot fully govern. This metanarrative device turns the story into an exploration of the fragmented, often chaotic interplay between creator, creation, and audience expectations, ultimately reinforcing the bio-fictional entanglement of Palahniuk's own identity with his work.

By not only observing but also actively interacting with the story-world characters and commenting on his role as their creator through panel bleeds, Palahniuk renders porous the boundary between creator and creation. This metanarrative focalization challenges readers to reconsider the distinctions between fiction and reality. Barthes' claim that "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's utility lies not in its origin but

in its destination” (Barthes, 1977, p.148) resonates here, emphasizing the shift from authorial intention to reader-driven interpretation. Palahniuk’s physical appearance in *Fight Club 2* complicates his role as an author by presenting him paradoxically as both a presence within the narrative and, metaphorically, “dead” as an author in Barthes’ terms.

The climax of the graphic novel, where Palahniuk’s head is graphically blown off by Tyler Durden (Figure 6), serves as a literal and symbolic nod to Barthes’ concept of



Figure 6: The death of the author. *Fight Club 2*™ © 2015, 2016, 2018 Chuck Palahniuk. Dark Horse Books®.

authorial death. This moment signals Palahniuk's acknowledgment that his authorial intent no longer dictates the story's meaning; instead, it is the interpretations of readers, particularly their fascination with Tyler's anarchic persona, that dominate. Depicting himself as merely another character within the story and one that can get his head blown off, Palahniuk relinquishes control over the narrative, aligning with Barthes' assertion that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes, 1977, p.148).

Through his symbolic authorial death (**Figure 6**), Palahniuk explores the entanglement of creators with their work, highlighting the inevitable "bleed" of self into fiction. This act underscores the pressures of fame, reader expectations, and the inherent instability of authorship in the context of modern storytelling, making *Fight Club 2* both a deconstruction of narrative control and a meditation on the enduring tension between author, text, and audience.

The pills and bleeds thus operate as complementary mechanisms. The pills hover above narrative space, creating a meta-aware hypersurface that disrupts legibility and stability. The bleeds dissolve boundaries outward, collapsing the frame that separates fiction from page and reader. Together, they construct a visual rhetoric of instability. The comic does not merely depict schizophrenia or fractured identity; it spatializes them. Narrative levels, diegetic action, authorial commentary, graphic surface, and readerly space, interpenetrate one another.

Importantly, these effects depend on the collaborative interplay between script and art. Cameron Stewart's visual design orchestrates the intrusion of pills, the fracture of panels, and the destabilization of layout. The metacomical inquiry into authorship is therefore materially enacted through visual composition. The erosion of authorial sovereignty is mirrored by the erosion of panel sovereignty. The page becomes a contested territory where no single level of meaning remains securely bounded.

In this way, *Fight Club 2* transforms the comic page into a site of theoretical experimentation. The spatial logic of the medium itself becomes the arena in which questions of authorship, commodification, and identity are negotiated. The hypersurface of pills and the outward thrust of bleeds collapse the distinction between story and substrate, reinforcing the work's central concern: that identity, whether personal, narrative, or authorial, is never contained, but always already spilling beyond its supposed frame.

*

Ultimately, in *Fight Club 2*, Chuck Palahniuk and Cameron Stewart construct a metacomic that persistently interrogates the conditions of its own existence that blurs

the boundaries between fiction and reality through a graphic biographical metafictional narrative. By inserting himself into the narrative as both an authorial figure and a character subjected to his own creation, Palahniuk transforms his personal experiences with fame, creative exhaustion, and the expectations of his audience into thematic elements of the graphic novel. His use of unconventional panelization, particularly non-sequiturs and bleeds, visually embodies the fracturing of his identity and its “bleeding” into the text, therefore creating a fragmented and multilayered exploration of control, authorship, and identity. Moreover, the meta-focalization and symbolic depiction of his “authorial death” reflect the tensions inherent in being both the architect of a story and a participant in its reception.

Therefore, as a metacomic and a graphic biographical work, *Fight Club 2* reveals glimpses of Palahniuk’s struggles as an author navigating the pressures of fame and creative ownership. As critic Douglas Wolk observes, “By having the author himself appear in the story, *Fight Club 2* blurs the lines between fiction and reality, positioning Palahniuk as both creator and casualty of Tyler Durden’s cultural legacy” (Wolk, 2015). This dual positioning reflects the core paradox of the graphic novel: it is both an extension of the original story and a critique of the cultural forces that consumed it. Simultaneously, as a bio-fictional piece, it fictionalizes and dramatizes these struggles by weaving them into the larger narrative of Sebastian and Tyler’s fractured identities. Palahniuk’s symbolic death as an author resonates with Roland Barthes’ concept of the “death of the author,” but it also evokes a broader visual rhetoric which is akin to what Roland Barthes had previously addressed in “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1964). Barthes argues that an image can carry multiple layers of meaning, where the signifiers (such as a photograph, a panel, or an illustration) function not merely as representations of reality, but also as carriers of ideological and cultural discourse (Barthes, 1964). In *Fight Club 2*, the non-sequitur and bleeding panels take on a similar rhetorical role by functioning as more than just visual representations of violence and fragmented identity. They become metanarrative devices that disrupt the traditional reader-viewer relationship and allow Palahniuk’s fragmented identity, both as a creator and as a character, to “bleed” into the narrative itself. This technique reinforces the interconnectedness of creator and creation, where the boundaries between fiction and reality, author and character, are collapsed, revealing the underlying instability of both identity and narrative control.

Finally, *Fight Club 2* stands as a testament to the evolving role of the author in contemporary literature and graphic narratives, where personal and fictional worlds collide to create a space for profound critique and introspection. By incorporating the visual and thematic elements of bio-fiction and graphic biographical self-representation,

Palahniuk invites readers to reflect on the identity of his characters as well as on the very nature of authorship and its role in shaping narrative meaning. Through this, *Fight Club 2* exemplifies how the comics medium allows for the seamless intersection of the real and the imagined, where both the author's death and his ongoing presence become central to the meaning-making process.

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