Tri-Svabhava-Vada
-Yogacara Buddhist theory applied on film-
1.0 INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................................................... 2

1.1 PURPOSE ....................................................................................................................................................... 2
1.2 METHOD........................................................................................................................................................ 2

2.0 THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA...................................................................................................................... 2

2.1 THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE OF THE BUDDHA ............................................................................................... 3
2.2 THE FOUR SIGNS AND THE GREAT RENUNCIATION ......................................................................................... 4
2.3 THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH......................................................................................................................... 4
2.4 THE GREAT ENLIGHTENMENT ........................................................................................................................ 5
2.5 HIS SPREADING OF THE DHARMA ................................................................................................................... 6
2.6 THE DEATH OF THE BUDDHA ........................................................................................................................ 6
2.7 THE CHARACTER OF SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA (THE BUDDHA) ...................................................................... 7
2.8 THE YOGACARA SCHOOL .............................................................................................................................. 7

3.0 BUDDHIST THEORY FROM A YOGACARA PERSPECTIVE ........................................................................... 8

3.1 THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS ............................................................................................................................. 9
3.2 DUKKHA FROM A BUDDHIST YOGACARA SCHOOL POINT OF VIEW .............................................................. 10
3.3 DEPENDENT ORIGINATION (PATICCASAMUPPADA), ALAYAVIJNANA, DHARMA AND KARMA ................. 10
3.4 THE DOCTRINE OF NO-SELF (ANATMAN) ...................................................................................................... 11
3.5 THE TRIPLE NATURE OF REALITY (TRI-SVABHAVA-VADA) ......................................................................... 14
3.6 THE EIGHTFOLD NOBLE PATH (ARIYA ATTHANGIKA MAGGA) ....................................................................... 16

4.0 YOGACARA BUDDHIST THEORY APPLIED ON FIGHT CLUB............................................................... 17

4.1 INTERNET MOVIE DATA BASE SYNOPSIS FOR FIGHT CLUB ................................................................. 17
4.2 FILM ANALYSIS ........................................................................................................................................... 19

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .............................................................................................................. 27

5.1 THE THEORIES ............................................................................................................................................. 27
5.2 THE FILM ANALYSIS .................................................................................................................................. 28

6.0 SOURCES ...................................................................................................................................................... 29

6.1 BOOKS......................................................................................................................................................... 29
6.2 INTERNET .................................................................................................................................................... 30
6.3 FILMS .......................................................................................................................................................... 30
1.0 Introduction

I grew up in Sweden, a country where one automatically used to be born into the church, having the consequence of most Swedish people, including myself, on paper being protestant Christian. In reality the society is highly secular with strong liberal, socialist views though, and going to church for most people means that someone has passed away or is getting married. I have never felt or seen myself as religious in any way, in a large respect due to the fact that religion for me meant Christianity and the bible. The ‘religion means Christianity’ equivalence seem to be predominant within the academic publications on religion and film as well. If a ‘philosophical’ film does not fit within the Christian doctrine, secular philosophies are usually applied to it. This area of scholarly discourse, religion and film, rarely takes a viewpoint from a non-Christian religious doctrine of though, unless the film plot explicitly revolves around it.

1.1 Purpose

I will in this paper try to do a Buddhist analysis of the film *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999). I have chosen *Fight Club* because it is a blockbuster movie not explicitly dealing with Buddhism. I will use the Yogacara Buddhist doctrine as a base for the thematic analysis, and apply its vocabulary on the narrative progression of the film's protagonist.

1.2 Method

I will start by introducing how Buddhism came about through the life story of the Buddha, and then go deeper into the Buddhist doctrine of thought. Finally I will use its theories and vocabulary to do a thematic analysis of the film *Fight Club*.

2.0 The life of the Buddha

To start off it is important to realize that the extent versions of the complete life of the Buddha were composed four hundred or more years after his death.¹ When it comes to the actual life story and details of it, it is hard to determine what actually has taken place. Most accounts describe the same phases of his life, but when it comes to the details some stress the

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miraculous acts of the Buddha, while others focus more on his personal qualities as a model for Buddhists to emulate. The term Buddha means “awakened one” or “enlightened one” and is not a proper name but rather a title, his real name was Siddhartha Gautama. The story of his life that I am presenting here is a summery of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* version that is based on the texts of the *Tipitaka* (the “Three baskets”), which is recognized by scholars as the earliest extant record of the Buddha’s discourses. The style and technique of these ancient texts provide a record sometimes symbolical and sometimes legendary.

### 2.1 The Birth and early life of the Buddha

Gautama was born in a park about the year 563 BC on the border of present day Nepal and India. His father was a king which meant that the Buddha belonged to the ruling class/caste. Five days after his birth, for the name giving ceremony, 108 Brahmins were invited; eight of these were specialists in interpreting bodily marks. Seven of them predicted two possibilities: if the child remained at home, he would become a universal monarch; if he left home, he would become a buddha. But Kondanna, the youngest of the eight, predicted that he definitely would become a buddha. Seven days after his birth his mother died, and he was brought up by her sister Mahaprajapati Gautami, his father’s second consort. As a young prince he was surrounded by great luxury, but his father always worried that his son would leave home to become a homeless ascetic as the Brahmins had predicted. Therefore he tried his utmost to make Siddhartha content by providing him with luxury and comfort within three palaces; one for winter, one for summer and one for the rainy season. At the age of 16 Gautama married his cousin, a princess named Yasodhara. But by that time he started to become discontent with his situation, his thoughts were often elsewhere, occupied with other concerns.

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Ⅱ This is the more common Sanskrit spelling of his name. In Pali (a language that later became more popular) it is *Siddhattha Gotama*. If not otherwise proclaimed, all future terms under headings 2.0 to 2.8 will be in Pali, apart from the Buddha’s name.


Ⅳ Brahmins are Hindu priests, a caste or social group found in all Indian states and in the new world as well. They constitute about 2-5% of the population in India.

Ⅴ *A buddha* is someone who has awoken to the “truth” and become enlightened. *The Buddha* is Siddhartha Gautama.

Ⅵ Kondanna later became one of the Buddha’s first five disciples.
2.2 The four signs and the great renunciation

The turning point in his life came when he was 29 years old. One day when he was out
driving with his charioteer, Gautama saw a decrepit old man. He asked his charioteer what
had happened to the man and had explained to him that he was old and that all men were
subject to old age if they lived long enough. This troubled Gautama greatly. Another day,
when again out driving with his charioteer, he saw a sick suffering man weltering in his own
excreta. He was troubled and the charioteer explained that this was a sick man and that all
men are subject to sickness. On a third occasion Gautama saw a dead body and again the
charioteer provided the explanation. Finally, he saw a wanderer with a shaved head wearing a
yellow robe. Impressed with this man’s peaceful and serene demeanour, Gautama decided that
he must leave home and go out into the world to discover how one can have such
peacefulness in the midst of misery. On his way back to the palace he received the news of the
birth of his son. Upon hearing this he decided to make what is known as the great
renunciation: giving up his luxury life completely to become a wandering ascetic. Later on, in
the middle of the night, he took a last look at his sleeping wife and their son and left the
palace, the city and his princely life behind. VII

2.3 The search for the truth

Gautama went looking for teachers to instruct him in the way of truth. He first went to Alara
Kalama, a renowned sage who taught him his teachings and practice, which made Gautama
reach the mystical state sphere of no-thing (akincannayatana). That did not satisfy him, even
though this was a very high mystical state. He was looking for absolute truth, Nirvana. He
then went to Udduka Ramaputta, another great teacher, who taught him to attain the sphere of
neither-perception-neither-nonperception (nevasanna-nasannayatana), a higher mystical
state than the former. This however did not satisfy him either, so he searched further for the
truth. Eventually in his travels he found a beautiful stretch of land where he settled down
together with a group of five ascetics. Here, for nearly six years, he practiced various forms of
severe austerities and extreme self-mortifications. These austerities were described by the
Buddha himself in several discourses;

VII I here just want to stress the fact that one should probably not take the text literally, in this specific case that
this 29 year old prince never had seen an old or sick man before. Old age, sickness and death should probably be
seen to represent human suffering in general. Gautama, touched by the suffering of humanity, decided to leave
home and go in search for a solution to the problem of suffering.
As a consequence of all these severe bodily austerities, Gautama became so weak that he once fainted and fell down and was believed by some to be dead. By these experiences he realized that such mortifications could not lead him to what he sought; so he changed his way of life and again began to eat proper amounts of food. His five companions were disappointed about this and left him in disgust. Gautama remained there alone and regained his health, and then followed his own path to enlightenment.

2.4 The great enlightenment

One evening he sat down under a assattha tree, now known as bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*), cross-legged and determined not to rise without attaining enlightenment. Then Mara, the evil tempter who is the lord of the world of passion, approached Gautama with his demonic hordes. Gautama however sat unmoved in meditation and did not fall in this (inner) struggle/battle. He supposedly uttered the following words:

Lust is your first army; the second is dislike for higher life; the third is hunger and thirst; the fourth is craving; the fifth is torpor and sloth; the sixth is fear (cowardice); the seventh is doubt; the eighth is hypocrisy and obduracy; the ninth is gains, praise, honour [sic!], false glory; the tenth is exalting self and despising others. Mara, these are your armies. No feeble man can conquer them, yet only by conquering them one wins bliss. I challenge you!\textsuperscript{IX}

This eventually led Mara to flee headlong with his armies of evil spirits. Gautama then spent the rest of the night in deep meditation under the tree. In this meditation he gained the knowledge of his former existences and the power to see the passing away and rebirth of beings. In the last four hours of the night he directed his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of all cankers and defilements and realized the four noble truths.\textsuperscript{X} In the Buddha’s


\textsuperscript{X} I will later on in this essay discuss the four noble truths, their meaning and importance in Buddhist thought.
own recorded words: “My mind was emancipated, [...] Ignorance was dispelled, science (knowledge) arose; darkness was dispelled, light arose.” XI So at the age of 35 Gautama was awakened, he had reached enlightenment and become the Buddha. After this he spent several weeks in the city of Uruvela, meditating on various aspects of the dhamma (“truth”) that he had realized, particularly on the most important and difficult doctrine of causal relations, known as the dependent origination (paticcasamuppada). XII

2.5 His spreading of the dharma

The Buddha’s first sermon after his enlightenment, he held to the five ascetics that previously had accompanied him. It is his most famous one and known as the Setting in motion the wheel of truth (Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta) sermon. He there outlines the core of his teaching with an emphasis on the four noble truths, that I will discuss later on in this essay, and the middle path (majjhima pattipada) that stresses the importance of avoiding two extremes (namely self-indulgence and self-mortification). A few days later this sermon was followed by the Anattalakkhana-sutta, dealing with the doctrine of no-self, which I will be discussing later on as well. After these two sermons all five ascetics became arahants (“perfected ones”) as well as the first members of the sangha (the Buddhist community/order). The Buddha then spent years spreading his teaching and sending out enlightened disciples to further spread the dhamma. Both ordinary people as well as kings decided to do what is called ‘taking refuge in the triple jewel’: the Buddha, the dhamma (truth/Buddhist doctrine) and the sangha (the Buddhist community/order). Eventually he also instituted the order of nuns (bhikkuni-sangha) something quite controversial at the time.

2.6 The Death of the Buddha

A man by the name of Devadatta, one of the Buddha’s cousins, became popular and influential with some people within the sangha. He tried to convince the Buddha that he should be his successor and suggested that the leadership of the sangha should be handed over to him in view of the Master’s approaching old age. The Buddha however rejected this and said that he would not pass on the leadership to anyone. On a later occasion when close to death the Buddha stressed that it should be the teachings/dhamma that people ought to take

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XII I will later on in this essay discuss and try to explain this doctrine.
refuge in, not some great leader. So no one was named the future leader of the sangha, which was established on democratic principles, and everything was (and is) decided by majority vote. Devadatta vowed vengeance due to the rejection and designed three different attempts on the Buddha’s life, all of which failed. The Buddha eventually died at the age of 80 years old from (accidental) food poisoning.

2.7 The character of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha)

Records from the time of Buddha’s life by people who met him and heard him speak, talk of him as being a great teacher. A person recognized as knowing how and what to teach each individual for his own benefit according to the level of his capabilities. As a social reformer the Buddha condemned the caste system that was a long-established and respected institution in India, and recognized the equality of man. He also perceived the connection between economic welfare and moral development. Trying to suppress crime through punishment, he said, was ineffective. Poverty (dalidiya), according to the Buddha, was a cause of immorality and crime; therefore the economic condition of people should be improved. All in all the ancient texts portray the Buddha as a man of both great wisdom (mahapanna) and great compassion (mahakaruna), moved by human suffering and determined to free people from this by a rational system of thought and a way of life.

2.8 The Yogacara school

As I mentioned under 2.7, the Buddha was seen as a great teacher, using a variety of strategies to induce his listeners to a realization of Nirvana (the possible escape from suffering). He mentioned at one point in his career that the knowledge that he gained in his awakening could be compared to the leaves of a forest; the teaching he had imparted were as a mere handful of leaves. He had chosen to teach only those points that would lead to the end of suffering. The rest of his knowledge would not have been useful for that purpose. In a famous sermon known as the Fire Sermon (the Adittapariyaya-sutta) he says that all man’s existence is burning with the fire of lust, the fire of hate, and the fire of delusion. If we see our house

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XIII These are records of, apart from ‘ordinary people’, persons like Canki, a highly respected Brahmin leader of the time, debate opponents of the Buddha, and the king of Kosala etc. that are talking about him; people who frequently met and dealt with him. I have compiled these records from Encyclopedia Britannica, page 273f.


(our existence) as to be on fire, then the Buddha’s teachings does not draw up full plans for the house, but simply mark out the escape routes. After his death he left behind, apart from the memory of his discourses, a series of mātrka (lists) of the major topics of his teachings, but they were not organized in any systematic way. Thus after the Buddha’s death a council, consisting of the 500 most prominent monks within the Buddhist community, was held with the purpose of standardizing the Buddha’s words into tradition. As a result of this a standard of two, and eventually three, Pitakas (baskets, collections in an oral tradition) came to comprise the Buddhist canon. This canon was then memorized and passed down orally for several centuries. During the two centuries from 100 B.C.E. (before the Christian era) to 100 C.E. India switched from an oral to a written culture. The early canons were written down and a fixed standardized version of the teachings came about. Some parts of the community though, felt that the third basket, texts known as the Abhidharma, had missed the point of the Buddha’s teachings. This eventually led to a major split within the Buddhist community, dividing it into two traditions of Buddhist thought; Theravada (consisting of the traditionalists) and Mahayana (the reformers). From the Mahayana tradition sprung a school of thought by the name of Yogacara, also known as the Mind Only (Cittamatra) school. It put a strong emphasis on the consciousness/minds role in forming (the experience of) our existence. It systematized the Buddhist doctrine and tried to make everything implicit explicit.

3.0 Buddhist theory from a Yogacara perspective

The Yogacara school of Buddhism has attracted the attention of western scholars since the early twentieth century due to its comprehensive and complex nature. I will try and explain some of the most basic theories within Buddhist thought in this essay, and I will do this from a Yogacara perspective. The Yogacara Buddhist doctrine, however, is enormous and very complex, so by no means am I trying to give an all-inclusive explanation of it. I am merely using it as a base when I am trying to explain some of the basic Buddhist theories, to create a fundamental understanding of it, when I later do a thematic analysis of the film Fight Club.

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XVII Theravada is often known as Hinayana (the Inferior Course) because the Mahayanists referred to them by that name. Hinayanists refer to them self as Theravadin though, so that is the name I am using here.

XVIII From this point onwards all non-English terms/vocabulary introduced will be in Sanskrit rather than Pali.

3.1 The four noble truths

The four noble truths is at the core of the Buddha’s teachings, they comprise the structural framework for all the more advanced theories.

1. Life is dukkha (suffering)
2. The origin/cause of dukkha is desire/craving (and ignorance)
3. There is a way to cease the suffering
4. The way

It could be seen in the following way;

1. A diagnose of the disease
2. Identification of its cause
3. A determination whether it is curable, and
4. Outlining a course of treatment to cure it.

The first noble truth is a very strong statement; it does not say that life sometimes can be hard, it says that life is dukkha. In his first sermon, the Setting in motion the wheel of truth (Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta) that I have previously mentioned, the Buddha formulated the first truth as follows:

(i) Birth is dukkha, ageing is dukkha, sickness is dukkha, death is dukkha; (ii) sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are dukkha, (iii) association with what one dislikes is dukkha, separation from what one likes is dukkha, not to get what one wants is dukkha; (iv) in short, the five groups (as objects) of grasping (which make up a person) are dukkha.

[numbers added]

The Buddha here uses the word dukkha for everything which is unpleasant, imperfect, and which we would like to be otherwise. It is suffering as well as the general ‘unsatisfactoriness’ of life. Life is dukkha. Why these five groups are dukkha, how desire craving and ignorance can cause that, and what it is that constitutes the way that liberates one from dukkha, I will now discuss from a Yogacara perspective.

XX Peter Harvey, Buddhism - World Religions, Themes and Issues, Ch. 2 The Human Predicament and its Resolution, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001, page 76
3.2 Dukkha from a Buddhist Yogacara school point of view

The first noble truth of Buddhism declares that; life is dukkha. That does not necessarily mean that one suffers all the time, but that dukkha is an inherent part of life. Moments when one is feeling happy, is dukkha, because they will pass. Trying to hold on to the moment and not except that everything is in constant change, will lead to suffering, dukkha as separation from what one likes (iii). Just this simple realization, that dukkha is an inherent part of life, is paradoxically meant to change ones outlook on life in a positive direction. If one accepts the first noble truth, then moments of happiness is more thoroughly enjoyed, and when they pass it is OK, because one has accepted that it is an inherent part of life. Also when life is hard and one suffers, it is not life going against you, it is just life, since life is dukkha. The main point of this understanding though that the first noble truth brings forth, is to take one onwards to the second noble truth which state that; the origin/cause of suffering is desire/craving (and ignorance).

3.3 Dependent origination (patīcasamuppada), Alayavijnana, Dharma and Karma

The world is in constant change and is built up by interacting processes. Things/phenomena interact to create something new that in turn effect and interact with other things/phenomena that create new things etc. (essentially cause and effect). This build up the web that creates our existence, and the building blocks of these processes of interaction is dharma, the essence of our existence. This means that since everything is in constant change and conditioned/dependent upon other things, all is thereby ultimately empty of an inherent essence (dharma as the truth of our existence). Our failure to see this truth, to see the world as it is, is the ignorance that the second noble truth indirectly refers to.

According to Yogacara a person consists of different forms of consciousness. The six senses (the sixth being cognition), the Manas (could be seen as the ego or thinking consciousness) and Alayavijnana also known as the store-consciousness (could be seen as the unconscious). Through the volition of our actions, we gather “seeds” in Alayavijnana. These “seeds” are latent potentialities that get activated when the right circumstances are brought forth, and affect our behaviour (create desires etc.). They also functions as a filter for how we

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Xxi All my Yogacara theory presentation in 3.2 in its entirety, unless otherwise noted, is based on the text Trimsīka (The thirty Verses) written by Vasubandhu. I have used the translation presented in: Thomas A. Kochumuttom, A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience: A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandhu the Yogacarīn, Delhi-Varanasi-Patna, Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, page 127-183.
“construct” our world. Our volition in relation to external events perceived through the sense organs, create the “seeds”. But the already present “seeds” effect the interpretation of the perceived ones before they are stored as new “seeds”. Some of them functions in other words as karma. Cultivation of “bad” behaviour effects future interpretations just as “good” behaviour does, hence good and bad karma. So as an example; if one cheats on a test, that will produce bad karma. Not in the sense that there is a higher power keeping track of your actions, and will strike you with bad luck in a future event. Though rather that you are cultivating yourself with a negative behaviour, planting a certain “seed”, that will make you more likely to do the same thing when a similar future event will present itself, and make it more natural to do it, in this case cheat, when it comes to something even more serious. These “seeds” that are stored (in Alavijnana) and effect your future interpretations and behaviour, are what continues on in the process of rebirth. Alayavijnana is therefore the matrix of our human existence/development, meaning that if these “seeds” are cleared, there is nothing to be reborn, no matrix to build from. This is what the third noble truth refers to; there is a way to clear the “seeds”, which keep us from seeing things as they really are, seeing the world as it is. Their filtering and creation of desire make us try to grasp and hold on to things, and not see that the world is in constant change (the essence of our existence) and the emptiness of it (the truth of our existence). This grasping/desire/craving (and ignorance towards reality) is what the second noble truth reefers to.

3.4 The doctrine of no-self (anatman)

As I mentioned above the Alavijnana could be likened to the unconscious, we are in other words not aware of these latent potentialities and karma until they are brought forth/activated when a specific situation relating to the specific “seed” presents itself. We see them (in Manas, the thinking consciousness) as personality traits and falsely identify with them as our “true self”, which create a subject-object split in consciousness. As we discussed above, the theory of dependent origination sees everything as to be in constant change and conditioned/dependent upon other things, all is thereby ultimately empty of an independent essence, which also means that no “true self” can exist. Only this web of interacting dharma that constitute our existence, as well as a consciousness-as-such-awareness (the state of seeing things as they are) is all that exists. Clearing the “seeds” of Alayavijnana is the process of eradicating the attachment and illusion of the separation between an experiencing subject and an experienced object. We identify with the constant stream of Alavijnana, thinking that it is
us, but ultimately there is no self. Buddhism is not a nihilistic view though, it is not saying that nothing exists, but rather that no true autonomous/independent essence can be found in anything. On a conventional level things exist, the chair you are sitting on exist. On an ultimate level, however, there is no true autonomous essence that constitutes that chair. You can break it down to the level of atoms, and then further break the atoms down until you reach the subtle “energies” of dharma without finding a true independent essence or self. So on a conventional level things exist, we exist, but ultimately everything is interdependent (paticcasamuppada) and therefore empty, without an autonomous self (anatman). Grasping/clinging to things as if they had an independent essence and identifying with a non-existing self creates a subject-object split in consciousness which leads to dukkha.

There is an old well known Buddhist story called The Questions of King Melinda, which I now will recite in order to cast some further light on the theory of no-self.\textsuperscript{XXII} There was a king by the name of Melinda, who had a discussion with the enlightened Buddhist monk Nagasena, regarding the doctrine of no-self. The king says:

“ [--] this Nagasena tells me that he is not a real person! How can I be expected to agree with that? ” ‘If, most reverend Nagasena, no person can be apprehended in reality, who then, I ask you, gives you what you require by way of robes, food, lodging, and medicines? Who is it that consumes them? [--] Who is it that kills living beings, takes what is not given to him, commits sexual misconduct, tells lies, drinks intoxicants? [--] You just told me that your fellow religious habitually address you as “Nagasena”. What then is this “Nagasena”? Are perhaps the hairs of the head “Nagasena”? ’ ‘No great king!’ [replied Nagasena] ‘Or perhaps the nails, teeth, skin, muscles, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, serous membranes, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, the bile, phlegm, pus, blood, grease, fat, tears, sweat, spittle, snot, fluid of the joints, urine, or the brain in the skull – are they this “Nagasena”? ’ ‘No great king!’ – ‘Or is form this “Nagasena”, or feeling, or perception, or impulses, or consciousness?’ – ‘No great king!’ – ‘Then is it the combination of form, feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness?’ – ‘No great king!’ – ‘Then is it outside the combination of form, feeling, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness?’ – ‘No great king!’ – ‘Then, ask as I may, I can discover no “Nagasena” at all. Just a mere

\textsuperscript{XXII} I recite the story because I think it gives a good image of the no-self doctrine, and to be able to reference it later on when I do my thematic analysis of Fight Club.
sound is this “Nagasena”, but who is the real Nagasena? Your Reverence has told a lie, has spoken a falsehood! There really is no Nagasena!'

Nagasena then replied by asking the king by what mode of transportation he had come to their meeting, and the king told him he had come on a chariot. Nagasena then continued;

– ‘If you have come on a chariot, then please explain to me what a chariot is. Is the pole the chariot?’ – ‘No, reverend Sir!’ [replied king Melinda] - ‘Is then the axle the chariot?’ – ‘No, reverend Sir!’ – ‘Is it then the wheels, or the framework, or the flag-staff, or the yoke, or the reins, or the goad-stick?’ – ‘No. reverend Sir!’ – ‘Then is it the combination of pole, axle, wheels, framework, flag-staff, yoke, reins, and goad which is the “chariot”?’ – ‘No, reverend Sir!’ – ‘Then is this “chariot” outside the combination of pole, axle, wheels, framework, flag-staff, yoke, reins, and goad?’ – ‘No, reverend Sir!’ – ‘Then, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot at all. Just a mere sound is this “chariot”. But what is the real chariot? Your Majesty has told a lie, has spoken a falsehood! There really is no chariot! […] this king Melinda tells me that he has come on a chariot. But when asked to explain to me what a chariot is, he cannot establish its existence. […] But king Melinda said to Nagasena: ‘I have not, Nagasena, spoken a falsehood. For it is in dependence on the pole, the axle, the wheels, the framework, the flag-staff, etc., that there takes place this denomination “chariot”, this designation, this conceptual term, a current appellation and a mere name’. – ‘Your Majesty has spoken well about the chariot. It is just so with me. In dependence on the thirty-two parts of the body and the five Skandhas there takes place this denomination “Nagasena”, this designation, this conceptual term, a current appellation and a mere name. In ultimate reality, however, this person cannot be apprehended.’

Yogacara would say that in dependence on the six senses (the sixth being cognition), the Manas (could be seen as the thinking consciousness) and the constant stream of Alavijnana (could be seen as the unconscious) with its “seeds”, takes place this denomination of a “self”. But in ultimate reality this “true self” can not be apprehended. The karmic-energies referred to as the “seeds” in Alavijnana are what continue on in the process of rebirth, but they constitute no “true self”.

3.5 The triple nature of reality (tri-svabhava-vada)

The realization and transformation of consciousness that would result in seeing reality as it is, as such, is described in The triple nature of reality (tri-svabhava-vada) theory. It says that reality can take on three different natures; The imagined nature (parikalpita-svabhava), the other-dependent nature (para-tantra-svabhava), and the absolutely accomplished nature (parinispanna-svabhava). The state/nature we experience, with a strong self and cognition as well as perception that is filtered/affected by the “seeds”, is the imagined nature. We become attached to this imagined world, and think that it is real/reality. The state/nature an enlightened person would experience, emptied of delusion/”seeds” and a subject-object consciousness, is the absolutely accomplished nature. This is not a different world separate from the imagined nature, we all exist in the same world, but an enlightened person experiences reality directly, while a person in the imagined nature/state experiences reality filtered through imaginary projections and attachments to them. The “link” between them, the state/nature that is the transformation process of consciousness from imagined nature to absolutely accomplished nature, is the other-dependent nature, its existence depend upon the former two. To illustrate the theory further, I will now discuss a simile commonly known as the magic show (maya):XXIV There used to be travelling magicians in India that performed magic shows. They took pieces of wood and other materials and used it with chemical compounds, incantations etc. to create illusions such as a tiger or an elephant on stage. The audience was often astonished and even frightened of the magically created form. But when the magic show was over, there was no tiger on stage, only wood and other materials that were hidden from the audience throughout the performance. Even though the audience is frightened by the magically created tiger, the magician is not; he remains calm and unmoved the whole time, because he knows the truth about the magic and the skilful deception he is performing. To summarize: a tiger form appears (other-dependent nature), but this magically created tiger (imagined nature) is not real; what really exists is the wood and other material (other-dependent nature as well as the absolutely accomplished nature). The unenlightened becomes scared because they imagine the tiger to be real, imagined nature. That the tiger form exists though is a fact, it is seen by both unenlightened as well as enlightened people (other-dependent nature). The difference, however, is that for the unenlightened person the other-dependent nature gets projected with imagination (created by the perception/cognition filtering of the “seeds”) which makes the event only lead to an expansion of their imagined

world, whereas for the enlightened person it is a mere form. The *other-dependent nature* is in other words the basis for the *imagined nature*, but it is also the basis for the *absolutely accomplished nature*, neither could exist without the *other-dependent nature*. The whole process of creating the tiger form, is done through *dependent origination* (*paticcasamuppada*) using different materials, chemical compounds etc. The realization of the parts and the whole process is both the *other-dependent nature* as well as the *absolutely accomplished nature*. When a person has eradicated the “seeds”/the imaginary projection upon the *other-dependent nature* completely, one has realized the *absolutely accomplished nature*, thus the latter is realized indirectly via the former. In the magic show simile the *absolutely accomplished nature* is the knowledge that the world is a magic show, it is an understanding that there is no tiger despite its form, it is only an illusion whose nature is other-dependent. Verses 20 to 22 in *Trimsika (The thirty Verses)* written by *Vasubandhu*, describes the *triple nature of reality* (*tri-svabhava-vada*) as follows:

The subject-matter that is liable to [subject-object] distinction by whatsoever sort of [subject-object] discrimination, is all just imagined nature; it does not exist.\(^{XXV}\)

The other-dependent nature, however, is the [act of graspable-grasper] discrimination; it depends for its origin on conditions.\(^{XXVI}\)

The [absolutely] accomplished [nature] is the latter’s [i.e. the other dependent nature’s] perpetual devoidness of the former [i.e. the imagined-nature].\(^{XXVII}\)

For that reason, indeed, it is said to be neither different, nor non-different from the other-dependent nature. It is like impermanence etc.\(^{XXVIII}\)

As long as this [absolute accomplished nature] is not seen, that [other-dependent nature], too, is not seen.\(^{XXIX}\)


\(^{XXVI}\) Thomas A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, verse 21, page 153

\(^{XXVII}\) Thomas A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, verse 21 (continued), page 154

\(^{XXVIII}\) Thomas A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, verse 22, page 155

\(^{XXIX}\) Thomas A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, verse 22 (continued), page 156
So to summarize: A realization that the imagined nature is not reality but just that, imagined nature, is also a realization of the other-dependent nature and the absolutely accomplished nature’s existence. With this realization one starts to let go off the attachments of the Imagined nature, and this gradual (could also be sudden) “letting go” takes one towards the absolutely accomplished nature, and the ability to see the world “as it is/as such”. So when the Other-dependent nature is free from the attachments of the Imagined-nature, it has become the absolutely accomplished nature. The other-dependent nature is therefore also to be seen as the basis of both the imagined nature as well as the absolutely accomplished nature.

3.6 The Eightfold Noble Path (ariya atthangika magga)

The basis of this transformation of consciousness, the way that the fourth noble truth refers to, is known in traditional Buddhism as the Eightfold Noble Path (ariya atthangika magga). It is eight factors that take one towards the absolutely accomplished nature, each described as right or perfect (samma);

Wisdom (prajna)
1. Right view/understanding
2. Right directed thought

Morality (sila)
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood

Mental Discipline (samadhi)
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration/unification

The wisdom part focuses on gaining a good understanding of the four noble truths. The morality part stresses the importance of ones actions, being good to your fellow human/sentient beings. The part concerning mental discipline focuses on meditation and contemplation to gain a more subtle understanding of the path and its theories. To gain insight into the truth of reality and what truly constitutes one’s self, makes one understand the four noble truths better at the same time as it refines one’s understanding of the morality
part. This in turn further deepens one’s understanding of reality, which makes one understand the four noble truths further as well as why right speech, action and livelihood is so important. As an example: If one gain insights into dependent origination (paticcasa\textit{m}uppada) it will also make one further understand how attachment/clinging creates \textit{dukkha} at the same time as to why one’s actions play an important role because it in turn effects other things etc. This may then lead to an understanding of the doctrine of no-self (\textit{anatman}) since everything is dependent upon other things, which further will make one’s understanding of the four noble truths more subtle etc. The \textit{Eightfold Noble Path} works as a spiral that deepens one’s understanding, and the more subtle it gets the more “seeds”/desires/cravings and ignorance (towards the truth of reality) can be eradicated. The \textit{Yogacara} tradition puts emphasize on the mental discipline part because they see it as the key to overcome the grasping and cravings of the imagined nature, and thereby take you towards the \textit{absolutely accomplished nature}. It is a hard inner process or battle, if you so will, with oneself/Mara, but at the same time it is an important and fruitful one. It is a mind shift that makes one see things clearly, see the world as it is.

4.0 Yogacara Buddhist theory applied on Fight Club

The Yogacara school is known as the mind-only-school (\textit{cittamatra}). The shift from the \textit{imagined nature} to the \textit{absolutely accomplished nature} is an inner mental process, a shift in ones way of looking at/perceiving life. I will now try to show that the fight club narrative is a manifestation of the Norton characters inner journey/mind shift, from \textit{imagined nature} thru the \textit{other-dependent nature}, to reach an enlightened stage of the \textit{absolutely accomplished nature}.

4.1 \textit{Internet Movie Data Base synopsis for Fight Club}xxx

The following is a synopsis of the film Fight Club, taken from imdb.com, to give a plot overview of the film.

The narrator (Edward Norton) is a nameless automobile company employee who travels to accident sites for the purposes of calculating whether or not to issue product recalls based

\footnote{xxx This synopsis in its entirety is copied from \url{http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0137523/synopsis} It is written by Internet Movie Database user doubleobenny. (2007-09-01)}
on the likely cost of lawsuits that would be incurred otherwise. His doctor refuses to write a prescription for his insomnia, and instead recommends that he visits a support group for testicular cancer sufferers to appreciate real suffering. The narrator attends the group and is able to find catharsis, sleeping soundly without a problem. [...] 

During a flight for a business trip, the narrator meets Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), a flamboyant soap salesman. When the narrator arrives home, he finds that his apartment has been destroyed by an explosion. He calls Tyler and meets him at a bar, where Tyler permits the narrator to stay at his place. Leaving the bar, Tyler asks the narrator to hit him. The narrator reluctantly complies, and the two end up enjoying a fist fight. The narrator moves in with Tyler at an abandoned house, and they continue fighting outside the bar, attracting a crowd and eventually establishing a 'fight club' in the basement. More clubs spring up around the country.

Meanwhile, the narrator's routine is again disrupted when he notices another faker, Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter), whose presence at his support groups again disrupts his ability to sleep. Marla overdoses on Xanax and is rescued by Tyler Durden. The two begin a sexual relationship, and Tyler forbids the narrator from talking to Marla about him.

Eventually, Tyler's fight club grows to become Project Mayhem, which commits acts of anti-corporate vandalism in the city. The fight clubs become a network for Project Mayhem, and the narrator is left out of Tyler's activities with the project, feeling disillusioned and disturbed about their actions. Tyler and the narrator have an argument and Tyler disappears from the narrator's life.

When a member of Project Mayhem, Bob (Meat Loaf), dies on a mission, the narrator decides to take action to shut down the project. He tries to trace Tyler's steps, traveling all over the country and feeling a sense of déjà vu wherever he travels. Puzzled, he calls Marla Singer, and asks her to say his name. When she responds "Tyler Durden," he realizes the truth.

Tyler is an aspect of his own split personality. Tyler appears in his room and explains that he is in control of the narrator's body whenever he is asleep. The narrator falls unconscious, and he wakes to find phone calls made during his blackout. He tracks Tyler's plans to the downtown headquarters of major credit card companies, which Tyler plans to destroy to collapse the consumerist financial system. The narrator, attempting to disarm the explosives in the building basement, is confronted by Tyler, knocked unconscious, and
taken to the upper floor of another building to witness the impending destruction.

The narrator, who is held by Tyler at gunpoint, realizes that, sharing the same body with Tyler, he really holds the gun. He finds himself holding the gun and fires it into his mouth, shooting through the cheek without killing himself. The illusion of Tyler collapses, with an exit wound to the back of his head. Members of Project Mayhem, who still see the narrator as Tyler, bring Marla Singer to him and leave them alone, despite being shocked by his wound. Marla, who was warned to leave the city by the narrator, concernedly asks what happened. The narrator explains that he shot himself and tells her, "You met me at a very strange time in my life." They watch as the buildings explode in a collapsing skyline outside the windows, standing side-by-side and holding hands.

4.2 Film analysis

4.2.1

Right at the beginning of the film we get to see how the Norton character defines who he is by his material possessions, namely his condo with Scandinavian furniture etc. This all gets destroyed in an explosion. While discussing this over the phone with a police officer later in the movie, he says; "That condo was my life, OK? I loved every stick of furniture in that place. That was not just a bunch of stuff that got destroyed; it was me!" The movie constantly uses outer/physical struggles, destruction and action as manifestations of the inner/mental events/processes. The physical “stuff” that he identifies with are different seeds in the stream of Alayavijnana that he sees as his self, the explosion/destruction is the start of eradicating those seeds, i.e. the discovery of the other-dependent nature’s (and thereby also the absolutely accomplished nature’s) existence. What he has seen as his self has not been a true self, rather an imagined self created thru false identification with the constant stream of Alayavijnana. While speaking to Tyler in the bar after his condo got destroyed, he says: "I had it all. I had a stereo that was very decent. A wardrobe that was getting very respectable. I was so close to being complete." This shows of his ignorance and complete absorption in the imagined nature. Tyler becomes a physical manifestation of the other-dependent nature that takes him towards the absolutely accomplished nature. Tyler: "I say; never be complete. I say; stop

XXXI The character referred to as “The narrator” in the synopsis I will from this point onwards refer to as “the Norton character” due to the fact that he is played by the actor Edward Norton.

XXXII Fight Club. Ch. 17 time: 0:55:06 (h:m:s)

XXXIII Fight Club. Ch. 11 time: 0:28:18
being perfect. I say; let’s evolve. Let the chips fall where they may.” XXXIV “The things you own end up owning you.” XXXV Things/phenomena is in constant change (see 3.3 dependent origination), trying to fixate something (the state of perfection) grasping at it and believing that it is permanent, is an illusion and a behaviour of ignorance towards reality. Accepting reality and letting go, non-attachment, makes you evolve. Identifying with objects and being in an illusory belief as of them being permanent, only brings dukkha and an imagined self-image. This shows that the Norton character is at the start of the movie deeply rooted in the imagined nature, but has started to see that it just brings dukkha, and begins his mind shift/journey with the discovery of the other-dependent nature (Tyler).

4.2.2

The film in itself seem to represent the Norton characters imagined nature, which Tyler (the other-dependent nature) breaks through just for a few frames from time to time before they actually connect. We get to see that Tyler works as a cinema projectionist at night. He cuts in frames from pornographic movies into family films; he disturbs the illusion/the imagined nature just as in Norton’s life. Now that he has blown up his condo/blown up the barrier/started to get away from the imagined nature and realized the other-dependent nature (Tyler), he voluntarily starts to fight. The fighting is an outer manifestation of the inner battle/struggle (with Mara). Tyler says: “How much can you really know about yourself if you have never been in a fight!” XXXVI i.e: How much can you really know about yourself if you have never faced yourself/reality/dukkha? He becomes fascinated with the pain that the fighting brings. Dukkha is pain but, according to the first noble truth, dukkha is also life. In a sequence later on in the film Tyler holds down his hand and gives him a chemical burn, and the Norton character thinks: “Guided mediation worked for cancer, it could work for this.” Tyler tells him to stay with the pain, not to shut it out. “...without pain, without sacrifice we would have nothing.” The Norton character tries to escape and shut the pain out but Tyler brings him back: “Stop it! This is your pain, this is your burning hand.” Norton character: “I get the point, I feel the pain.” Tyler: “No! What you’re feeling is premature enlightenment.” XXXVII To handle the inner pain/obstructions/desires by facing reality is hard; it brings mental hardship/pain. Tyler wants him to face it though, to enable its

XXXIV Fight Club. Ch. 11 time: 0:29:22
XXXV Fight Club. Ch. 11 time: 0:29:58
XXXVI Fight Club. Ch. 13 time: 0:32:55
XXXVII Fight Club. Ch. 17 time: 1:00:25
eradication/overcoming, taking him closer to enlightenment. Eventually the Norton character focuses on the pain holding still without Tyler forcing him. Tyler then pours vinegar on his hand and he falls to the floor relieved.

4.2.3

His new lifestyle in the house with Tyler makes him stop craving things, like television. He has renounced his old life where he was caught in the imagined nature, and is now starting to let go. The destruction of the condo was the first step, as Tyler puts it when the Norton character is talking with the police on the phone regarding the incident: “Tell him; the liberator who destroyed my property realigned my perceptions.” It was an initial face in the mind shift from imagined nature to absolutely accomplished nature. The narrative is a gradual journey towards enlightenment, filled with physical manifestations of insights. In the house they find books/articles written by organs in first person entitled; “I am Jack’s colon”, “I am Jill’s nipples” etc. The books/articles show the bizarre in seeing our organs and body parts as to have some true autonomous essence that constitutes them, and then identifying with them as parts of one’s self (see the King Melinda story under 3.4). If we get Cancer in a part and remove it, are we not still “Jack”? As Tyler puts it: “’I am Jack’s colon.’ Shit, I get cancer I kill Jack.” The Norton character is evolving and he says that he does not miss his old condo-lifestyle and material possessions that he used to identify with anymore.

4.2.4

They start Fight Club i.e. organized meditative practise (the mental discipline part of the eightfold noble path). The Norton character in voice over: “The guy who came to Fight Club for the first time, he’s ass was a wad of cookie dough. After a few weeks he was carved out of wood.” Facing oneself and seeing through the illusions of the imagined nature, makes one stronger and more equipped in handling life. In the beginning of the movie, when he was full of cravings and clinging to things, he went to crisis groups that he got addicted to. He found brief satisfaction in being with people whose life view had been chattered by reality; sickness and possible death (dukkha). But he himself was clinging to it and started using it as another escape from reality rather than to use it as to see the reality of life. He was “fake” escaping

XXXVIII Fight Club. Ch. 17 time: 0:54:30
XXXIX Fight Club. Ch. 14 time: 0:37:30
Xl Fight Club. Ch. 17 time: 0:42:44
reality, rather than “real”, facing life. There he also met Marla, another “faker”, who now comes back into his life. Tyler and Marla are having sex in the house. The Norton character does not like it, but the situation makes him focus. He describes it in the following way: “I became the calm little centre of the world, I was the Zen master.”

At work he writes Haiku-poems that he e-mails to co-workers: “Worker bees can leave, even drones can fly away. The queen is their slave.” The latter brings in another aspect that becomes more and more prominent in the movie as it progresses. At the beginning of the film the Norton character, while travelling on an aircraft, explains to another passenger how cynical the corporation he works for is. Throughout the movie major corporations and the established society get to represent the dukkha-bringing norm of the imagined nature that one has to rebel against/cut loose from. In the poem he is trying to change the perspective of the norm for his co-workers. In his actions he is also rebelling: “I got right in everyone’s hostile little face ‘yes, these are bruises from fighting’ ‘yes I’m comfortable with that’ I am enlightened.”

The rebellion against the norm of the imagined nature later takes its form as Project Mayhem.

### 4.2.5

Tyler holds several speeches/teachings where he goes deeper into the philosophy behind Fight Club and later Project Mayhem. Tyler holding an inspirational talk in front of Fight Club members:

> I see in Fight Club the strongest and smartest men who’ve ever lived. I see all this potential. And I see it squandered. Goddamn it, an entire generation pumping gas. Waiting tables. Slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes. Working jobs that 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 all 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.”

[Italics added by me]
Here he is talking about the necessity to face reality and see through the illusions that the norm of the *imagined nature* has entangled us in. It is natural to feel frustrated/”pissed off” and necessary to rebel against it, to engage in the spiritual war/inner battle. Later on Tyler is talking straight into the camera, braking through the illusionary world of the film (*imagined nature*) addressing us viewers saying: “You are not your job. You’re not how much money you have in the bank. You’re not the car you drive. You’re not the contents of your wallet. You’re not your fucking khakis. You’re the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world.” In this statement he is addressing the doctrine of no-self (*anatman*) as well as dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*). In the first part he stresses not to see things as having a true autonomous essence which can define who you are/your self. The same point as Nagasena is trying to get through to King Melinda (in the story of King Melinda under 3.4). What he means by “You’re the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world.” becomes clearer in another speech that he gives to the *sangha*/*the community that is living in the house:* “Listen up maggots. You are not special. You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everything else. We are the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world. We are all part of the same compost heap.” He is saying that ultimately there is no subject-object differentiation. We are all dependent-arisen out of the same source. We are not an autonomous, unique separate self.

### 4.2.6

Fight Club has become Project Mayhem. The Norton character has come a long way through the *other-dependent nature* and is now starting to cut loose completely from the norms of the *imagined nature*. He has a hard time, however, letting go. An argument is taking place in a car between the Norton character and Tyler, whilst driving down a freeway:

**N:** I wanna know what you’re thinking.

**T:** Fuck what you know! That’s your problem. Forget about what you think you know about life, about friendship, and especially about you and me.

*Tyler let’s go of the wheel:*
T: Why do you think I blew up your condo? Hitting bottom isn’t a weekend retreat. It’s not a goddamned seminar. Stop trying to control everything and just let go! Let go!

_The car crashes:_

N: (thinking) I’d never been in a car accident. This must have been what all those people felt like before I filed them as statistics in my reports.

T: We just had a near-life experience!^XLVIII

After the car incident when he let go, he wakes up the following morning and Tyler is not there anymore. He starts to see through things, he starts to see reality as it is. He finds plane tickets in the house, and goes to all the places where Fight Clubs has been started. During this he asks himself on several occasions: “Was I asleep? Had I slept? Is Tyler my bad dream, or am I Tyler’s?”^XLIX As I have mentioned under 2.1, the Buddha means the awakened one. The Norton character is now starting to awake from the deluded state of the _imagined nature_, but he is not yet truly awake in the _absolutely accomplished nature_ and able to see things as they are. He has now, however, after a discussion with Tyler started to accept Tyler as to be apart of himself. He has started to eradicate the subject-object split in consciousness (see 3.2.2 The doctrine of _no-self–anatman_). Now seeing what Tyler truly is, what the other-dependent nature truly is, he is a bit confused and not sure of what to trust. As shown in verses 20 to 22 in _Trimsika (The thirty Verses)_ written by Vasubandhu, the _other-dependent nature_ is the basis of both the _imagined nature_ as well as the _absolutely accomplished nature_.^L He can therefore not be sure of what aspects of Tyler that are the _imagined nature_ and which are real (the _absolutely accomplished nature_). He is not sure that Project Mayhem, truly cutting loose from the norm of the _imagined nature_, is just that, or if he is deluded. He goes to a police station where the following conversation takes place:

N: I believe the plan is to blow up the headquarters of these credit card companies and the TRW building.

_Police:_ Why these buildings? Why credit card companies?

N: If you erase the debt record, then we all go back to zero. You’ll create total chaos.\(^L^1\)

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^XLVIII_ Fight Club. Ch. 27 time: 1:34:40  
^XLIX_ Fight Club. Ch. 30 time: 1:45:09  
^L_ See 3.5 The triple nature of reality (tri-svabhava-vada)  
\(^L^1_ Fight Club. Ch. 33 time: 1:56:28
If you eradicate all the seeds in *Alayavijnana* you go back to zero, there is nothing to be born; you have reached the *absolutely accomplished nature*. The movie constantly uses outer/physical struggles, destruction and action as manifestations of the inner/mental events/processes. The material destruction represents the eradication of his “self”. The condo was just the realization of the *other-dependent nature*, the destruction of the credit card companies and the TRW building is the final eradication of the seeds. Tyler tries to get this through to him later in an argument they are having in a van full of explosives:

**N**: I’m stopping this.

**T**: Why? The greatest thing you’ve ever done man.

**N**: Nah, I can’t let this happen.

**T**: You know, there are ten other bombs in ten other buildings.

**N**: Goddamn it! Since when is Project Mayhem about murder?

**T**: The buildings are empty. Security, maintenance are all our people. We’re not killing anyone man, we’re setting them free!

The Norton character is trying to stop it all, he is fighting Tyler. The security camera (an objective view that sees things as they are) shows that he is fighting himself. Since the Norton character is not fully awakened he still has a dualistic (subject-object) consciousness, and in his mind he is fighting Tyler, a separate entity. He has not truly realized yet that he has to accept the truth and let things go, open his eyes and truly awaken to the reality of things, which would create the mind shift of the *other-dependent nature* becoming the *absolutely accomplished nature*.

### 4.2.7

In the final scene of the movie Tyler is aiming a gun to the Norton character’s face while they await the destruction of the credit card companies. They are in other words awaiting the Norton characters final eradication of “seeds” that will come through his awakening. The following dialog takes place:

**N**: I beg you, please don’t do this.

**T**: I’m not doing this. We are doing this. This is what we want.

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LIII See 3.3 Dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*), Alayavijnana, Dharma and Karma.

LIII **Fight Club**, Ch. 34 time: 2:01:02
N: No! I don’t want this.
T: Right. Except you is meaningless now. We have to forget about you.
N: You’re a voice in my head.
T: You’re a voice in mine!
N: You’re a fucking hallucination! Why can’t I get rid of you?
T: You need me.
N: No, I don’t. I really don’t anymore.
T: Hey! You created me. I didn’t create some loser alter ego to make me feel better. Take some responsibility.
N: I do. I am responsible for all of it and I accept that. So please, I’m begging you, please call this off.
T: Have I ever let us down? How far have you come because of me?! I will bring us through this. As always, I will carry you kicking and screaming and in the end you will thank me.
N: Tyler. Tyler. I’m grateful to you, for everything that you have done for me. But this is too much. I don’t want this.
N: This can’t be happening.
T: It’s already done, so shut up! 60 seconds till CRI
N: No, I can figure this out. This isn’t even real. You’re not real, that gun… That gun’s in my hand.
The gun appears in Norton’s hand instead of Tyler’s:
T: Hey good for you. It doesn’t change a thing.
Norton puts the gun to his chin:
T: Why do you wanna put a gun to your head?
N: Not my head, Tyler. Our head.
T: Interesting. Where are you going with this, IKEA boy? Hey, it’s you and me. Friends?
N: Tyler, I want you to really listen to me.
T: OK.
N: My eyes are open.
He shoots himself in the mouth.
T: What’s that smell?
Tyler then falls down and disappears.\textsuperscript{LIV}

\textsuperscript{LIV} Fight Club. Ch. 35 time: 2:05:24
His eyes are open/he has awakened, the mind shift has taken place and the other-dependent nature (Tyler) is now gone. Marla is brought to him, and they stand together watching the buildings fall down outside the window. His seeds are eradicated and the afflictions/defilements are torn down. The inner battle/struggle is over, his eyes are open; he sees reality as it is.

5.0 Summary and conclusion

5.1 The theories

In this paper I have given a brief background of how Buddhism came about, and its basic theories. The Yogacara school of Buddhism tried to make as much as possible of what was implicit in the Buddha’s theories, explicit. They talked of “seeds”, created by our volitions preceding our actions, gathered in a subconscious stream of consciousness called Alayavijnana. These “seeds”/latent potentialities effect our perception processing and thereby our behaviour/actions. Their occurrence to our conscious mind, the manas, also make us identify with them as personality traits and thereby our self. This creates a split in our consciousness between I (my autonomous self) and other (other independent autonomous selves and objects with an autonomous essence). Buddhism says this is erroneous because, despite the fact that we exist and other objects exist, no true autonomous/independent essence can be found in anything (anatman). Rather everything is in constant change and dependent upon other things/phenomena for its existence, dependent origination (paticcasamuppada). Not realizing this creates suffering, dukkha, which becomes an inherent part of life. So to rid this suffering a mind shift is necessary. The mind shift is a shift between a mental state referred to as the imagined nature, a state/nature where we are effected by the “seeds” and constantly expand our illusory beliefs, and a state where we see reality as it is, the absolutely accomplished nature. The “link” between them, the state/nature that is the transformation process of consciousness from imagined nature to absolutely accomplished nature, is the other-dependent nature, its existence depend upon the former two. When the Other-dependent nature is free from the attachments of the Imagined-nature, it has become the absolutely accomplished nature. This theory is known as The triple nature of reality (tri-svabhava-vada). The mind shift is achieved by eradicating the “seeds” in Alayavijnana, by means of
contemplation and meditation upon the “truth” of reality, as well as facing oneself and life with its dukkha, with “open eyes”.

5.2 The film analysis

I have tried to show that the fight club narrative is an outer manifestation of the Norton characters inner journey/mind shift, from the imagined nature through the other-dependent nature, to reach an enlightened stage of the absolutely accomplished nature. The movie constantly uses outer/physical struggles, destruction and action as manifestations of the inner/mental events/processes. At the beginning of the movie the Norton character identifies with his condo, furniture, clothing etc. as to what/who he is, his “self”. He is entangled in the illusions of the imagined nature, and its normative belief of what reality is and what thereby is expected of him to be like. He rejects his lifestyle and starts the inner journey/mind shift, manifested by blowing up his condo. In relation to this Tyler comes into his life, a manifestation of the other-dependent nature. Fighting becomes a manifestation of the inner struggle giving insights, with Fight Club being the organized meditation for this inner battle. The mind shift/journey brings insight into the doctrine of no-self (anatman) through books/articles written by organs in first person. Tyler also gives speeches about this as well as on dependent origination (paticcasamuppada), facing life/dukkha with “open eyes” (burning the hand incident etc.) and the necessity of renunciation and rebellion/cutting loose from the norm of the imagined nature (Project Mayhem). This takes the Norton character to the point where he has to reject the final attachments of the imagined nature, and thereby also the other-dependent nature (Tyler), for the complete mind shift into the absolutely accomplished nature to take place. With the final insight into what/who he is and the reality of life (the gun against his head scene), the seeds get eradicated and the afflictions/defilements are torn down. This is manifested through the destruction of the credit card company buildings as well as the TRW building. This also means that the other-dependent nature has become the absolutely accomplished nature, and Tyler therefore exists no more. The inner battle/struggle is over, the mind shift has taken place and his eyes are open; he sees reality as it is.

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**6.3 Films**

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Cast: Edward Norton (Narrator) Brad Pitt (Tyler Durden) Helena Bonham Carter (Marla)