

## ARTS & BOOKS

### American literary outlaws and mainstream film directors

By Radan JOVANOVIĆ

**In the last few years, a string of American examples has demonstrated the fact that provocative prose makes good filmscript material.**

*Fight Club*, *American Psycho*, *Requiem for a Dream*, or *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* are widely popular titles among young and not-so-young people alike. The films are now much better known than the books they were adapted from. Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was first published in 1971 and adapted by Terry Gilliam in 1998. Hubert Selby Jr.'s *Requiem for a Dream* came out in 1978 and the movie shot by Darren Aronofsky in 2000. *American Psycho* was adapted by Mary Harron in that same year (2000) but the book by Bret Easton Ellis had been on library shelves since 1991. It did not take long for Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) to reach cult status when the film by David Fincher came out in 1999.

These writers did not emerge out of the blue: there is a long tradition of such "outlaw literature" in America. The Lost Generation with F. Scott Fitzgerald and E. Hemingway as its main heroes, was followed by the Beat Generation embodied by Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. Small literary groups such as the *Hip Generation* and later the Generation X followed in their wake. Generation X's name comes from the title of Douglas Coupland's novel published in 1991. According to Emily Nussbaum, Coupland "captured the embarrassed spiritual yearning in his characters, the refugees of the new economy – rendering meaningful that least sympathetic of emotional breakdowns".<sup>1</sup>

The current streak of literary rebels use literature as a means to protest against globalisation, corporate America, consumer culture, narrow mindedness etc. One could say they are « anti-everything ». When browsing through the anthology entitled *The Outlaw Bible of American Literature*,<sup>2</sup> one cannot fail but notice all they inherited from their predecessors.

Most of the films adapted from these books are high budget block-busters, which is somewhat paradoxical. But however mainstream the films are, the tales they tell still provide us with a provocative outlook on our everyday life. "We need our literary outlaws, if only for the vicarious glimpses they give us of life-on-the-edge experiences — just as they need our humdrum selves in order to have something to rebel against", says journalist Michael Upchurch.<sup>3</sup> It seems we also need the films, even though it would be hard to describe them as « outlaws ».

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Nussbaum, « 'Eleanor Rigby' :All the Lonely People. » *The New York Times* 2 January 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Barney Rosset, Alan Kaufmann, Neil Ortenberg, *The Outlaw Bible of American Literature* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Michael Upchurch, « Literary Rebels Unite ! » *The Seattle Times* 6 March 2005.