



LUND UNIVERSITY  
Humanities and Theology

## **The Will to Appear**

Dante's Infernal Vision in Bret Eason Ellis's *American Psycho*

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LIVR07, LIVR71

Spring 2012

English Literature

Centre for Languages and Literature

Lund University

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## Abstract

This paper presents an opportunity for the uncertainty that has plagued the novel's criticism to appear as absences in the body of historical knowledge, particularly regarding the notion of life after death. Taking *appearance* (eg. proof of existence), as opposed to disappearance, as a universally accepted value allows this analysis to interrogate the novel's logic in relation to a variety of conventional systems whose very existence depends on the reproduction of their system. The ineffectuality of Foucauldian *disciplinary* institutions in the novel establishes the threat of nonexistence. A significant relationship to Dante's *Inferno* is rendered, lending the appearance of language an 'enchanted' value through allusions to Dante's intentional invocation of Augustinian corporeal vision. The novel's metalanguage appears enchanted by the body of historical knowledge, particularly as the product of capitalism, *discipline* and Judeo-Christianity, and programmed by literary precursors William S. Burroughs, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway. Foregrounded by this complex network, an analysis of the novel's first chapter demonstrates how an attention to appearance brings the language to life and draws the narrator, equally invested in appearance, into its realm of representation.

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## 1. Ellis and Controversy of *American Psycho*

Of the seven novels that author Brett Easton Ellis has published, it was his third work, *American Psycho* that solidified his reputation as one of America's most controversial authors. The most infamous aspect of the author's controversial reputation stems primarily out of the novel's extraordinarily-detailed descriptions of the narrator's misogynistic violence. The majority of *American Psycho* is narrated in the first-person voice of a character, described in Ellis's later novel, *Lunar Park*, as “a young, wealthy, alienated Wall Street yuppie named Patrick Bateman who also appeared to be a serial killer filled with vast apathy during the height of the Reagan eighties”(Ellis *Lunar* 12). As many readers failed to distinguish between the author of the work and the narrator in the novel, Ellis himself was widely demonized.<sup>1</sup>

Ellis's new novel would, in itself, be something of an anticipated event as he was already a recognized celebrity of popular culture, a voice for “twentysomething” Generation X-ers and an author who could demand a \$300K advance; but, it was the novel's highly-offensive, misogynistic violence that would be most responsible for the novel's publicity and mark the occasion of it's publication as one of the rare controversial moments in recent literary history. The controversy began before the novel was published, when female employees at Simon and Schuster – the publishing house that paid Ellis's advance – complained about its depictions of violence against women. Despite these complaints, the publishing house advertised the book, listed it in the catalogs of forthcoming releases, distributed press packets including advanced copies and made plans for a publicity tour. After *Time* and *Spy* magazines published excerpts taken from the advanced copies that exemplified its violence along with articles criticizing Simon and Schuster's decision to publish the novel, the publishing house withdrew their offer to publish (Cohen). Within days, however, Random House acquired the publication rights, published *American Psycho* under their Vintage series and began distributing the novel at the end of February 1991. Subsequently, two divisions of Random House became the political targets of Tammy Bruce, the president of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), who “called for a nationwide boycott of all Vintage and Knopf books, with the exception of those by feminist authors” (O'Brien).

Incidentally, by speaking out against the depictions of misogyny in the novel, reactionaries became

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<sup>1</sup>In an article adapted from an interview with Bret Easton Ellis that was published in *The New York Times* shortly after *American Psycho* was published, Roger Cohen writes “Mr. Ellis said he had received 13 anonymous death threats, including several with photographs of him in which his eyes have been poked out or an axe drawn through his face. 'It's a little dismaying,' [Ellis] commented. 'Bateman Is The Monster' [Ellis] went on: 'Bateman is a misogynist. In fact, he's beyond that, he is just barbarous. But I think most Americans learn in junior high to differentiate between the writer and the character he is writing about. People seem to insist I'm a monster. Bateman is the monster. I am not on the side of that creep’” (qtd. in Cohen).

somewhat responsible for generating a spike in publicity for the novel, leading a long list of periodicals and journals, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Nation*, *Commentary* and *New Statesman & Society*, to publish reactions, many of which were written by well-known writers and commentators such as Norman Mailer, Fay Weldon, Roger Rosenblatt and George Will.

Ellis's depictions of ultra-violence in a misogynistic context debuted a flagrant disregard for the conventions and limits of Westernized political correctness, which may be deemed forgivable offenses, particularly in the realm of artistic practices if the work can be shown to have the merit warranting such an offense. Writing fifteen years after the novel's publication, Donna Lee Brien recalls that the book was “almost universally vilified and denigrated by the critical establishment. The work was criticized on both moral and aesthetic/literary/artistic grounds; that is, in terms of both what Ellis wrote and how he wrote it” (Brien). Political commentator and critic Naomi Wolf addressed the novel's failure on both grounds more acutely than many of her fellow commentators who denounced the novel. Wolf perceived the problem of its immorality, not so much in terms of obscenity, which was a common accusation, but more effectually as a “violation [...] of women's civil rights, insofar as it results in conditioning male sexual response to female suffering or degradation” (Wolf 34). Wolf's metaphor, describing Ellis as “a maladjusted 11-year-old draw[ing] on his desk,” reflects a widely-held opinion that the novel is a product of an underdeveloped writer. (Wolf 34; cf. Lehmann-Haupt; Leo). While a majority of political and social commentators were unable to find any redeeming value that could justify overlooking its sadistic content, even “liberal 'freedom of expression' intellectuals” generally refused to defend the text, reproaching the author for failing to provide an etiology or origin for the narrator's psychological illness (cf. Brien; C. Freccero). Ellis, in effect, alienated himself by refusing to adhere to socio-political conventions on the one hand and literary conventions on the other.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Introduction to Two Critical Approaches

Today, with more than twenty years separating readers from *American Psycho*'s debut, the interpreting lens produced by initial responses appears inadequate. Criticism has advanced beyond responding to the cries for censorship and has begun to build a tradition of literary critical analysis. What began as a populist and largely feminist critique shifted as scholars accepted the idea that the narrator's identity appears to be a construct reflecting the social-economic circumstance of an upper-class, financier at the global economic center of Wall Street in Manhattan at the height of advanced capitalism, rather than a mere reflection of Ellis's psyche.

This thesis contends that the findings in recent criticism may be divided into two categories: one that is interested in what subjects (eg. the author, the novel, the narrator, character, et al.) *are* and another which is concerned with what subjects *can do* (cf. Ruffolo §10). In the following subsections specific criticism is referenced and shown to be motivated by these different perspectives. Importantly, each of these perspectives is discussed in relation to the differing social modes which is shown to inform them: specifically a Foucauldian *disciplinary society* and a Deleuzian *society of control*, respectively.

By way of introducing the different consequences of these modes, this thesis turns to the critic Mark Storey's conclusion as an exemplary instance that involves both modes and, through a failure to account for their difference, arguably gives rise to an ethical concern. He writes: "In the nightmare world of *American Psycho*, Ellis critiques traditional masculinity in the most intense way possible, creating a character who, in his chaotic, hysterical perception of the world, lives out the final expression of a masculinity in its death throes" (71). Firstly, it should be noted that Storey conflates the disparate subjects of the author and the narrative. Ellis, the author-subject, *can do* something that the narrative-subject alone cannot do, that is "creat[e] a character" and "[critique] traditional masculinity." What the "character" (i.e. the novel's first person narrator or the narrative-subject) *can do*, as Storey suggests, is offer "his chaotic, hysterical perception of the world." While addressing the author, Storey reflects an interest in what *the subject can do*, yet in describing the character as "chaotic, hysterical" he expresses an interest in *what the subject is*.

As a result of his conflating the two qualitatively different perspectives on the subject(s), an ethical concern arises. On one hand, by describing the narrative with an interest in what the *it is*, Storey, in

effect, renders the narrative-subject docile.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the author's ability *to do something*, to “[critique] traditional masculinity,” becomes invested in the docile narrative-subject at the phrase “the final expression of a masculinity.” Reinvesting the narrative with the ability *to do something* disrupts its former docile state, enabling it to evidence a new meaning. In one sense, this is merely 'interpretation,' but in another sense this is an 'imposition.' The ethical concern follows as readers who may have been previously inclined to read 'misogyny' may instead read: “the final expression of masculinity.” In other words, the absolute negative value associated with 'misogyny' is challenged, and at least partially displaced by the more positive term “masculinity,” which is shown, furthermore, in the positive light of its being an implicit critique of the traditionally oppressive character of masculinity.

Importantly, an interest in *what a subject can do* allows for a subject to be conceived in terms of its own inherent capabilities. In contrast, an interest in *what a subject is* is succeeded by a conception of the subject that is constituted by a 'description' (or meaning and so forth) that is imposed on it. In the example provided, Storey implicitly conceives of the critic as the subject that can do something and what the critic does is render the text docile and impose a meaning on it. Given the absolute terms of the language in “*what the subject is*,” it should come as no surprise that findings in this strain of criticism are characteristically asserted with a relatively higher degree of certitude than the strain of criticism that follows an interest in *what the subject can do*: where this language seems to allow the subject a capacity of freedom, the limits of which are determined by its own capacity in relation to some recognized objective. In this light, this thesis echoes the sentiment of other critics in considering the criticism that is interested in *what the subject is* as issuing a form of violence: the narrator's “tendency to disembowel is contagious – just as he extracts organs from his victims, critics attempt to extract truth from the novel” (Serpell 64; cf. C. Freccero 52; Abel 142).

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<sup>2</sup>For a study of the docile subject see Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault maintains that the body, which is the subject of power, is *docile*. The docile body may be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (136).

## 2.2. What the Subject Is

### 2.2.1. Theory and Practice: Criticism with an Interest in What the Subject Is

Amongst the varied critical approaches to the novel, the majority reflects an interest in *what the subject is*. Moreover, a significant number of critics representing this interest regularly evoke one of two frameworks: one positing *American Psycho* in the literary Gothic tradition (cf. Helyer; Söderlind; Cojocaru et al) and another that perceives it as a critique of the social conditions related to consumer capitalism (cf. Weinreich; Godden; Heise et al). Storey's examination of the novel as representative of masculinity in crisis does not fall in either of category, nevertheless, all of the critics mentioned below seem to be in agreement with him when he writes “the form of the novel suggests that the central character is merely an illustration of a particular identity type” (60). Again, it should be noted that Storey invests the critic's ability to do something in the subjection of the docile text: it is not novel's form (what it is) that is able to illustrate a “particular identity type,” but rather the critic who is able to perceive this aspect in the novel. The critic's presence is betrayed by the word “merely,” which is a value judgment belonging to the critic, not the novel.

The following is intended to illustrate the quality of certitude that appears in criticism that, while involving different analytical frameworks, remains concerned with naming *what Bateman is*. In the Gothic strain of criticism, Ruth Helyer says that “Gothic characters are typically highly stereotyped and Patrick is no exception” (728); Daniel Cojocaru describes the central character as a mimetic construct, “imitat[ing] the very ideal of the 'Everyyuppie’” (187); and Sylvia Söderlind argues that “Patrick Bateman's only desire is to 'fit in’” (66). Turning to the discussions of the novel as a critique of consumer capitalism, Bateman's efforts reflecting a “desire to 'fit in’” to an exclusive yuppie identity are coupled with his violence, leading the critic Richard Godden to “[take] the financier Bateman's preferred activities, brand display, torture, and the serial liquefaction of 'hardbodies' as quasi-allegorical representations of the working of finance capital during the Reagan presidency” (853). Thomas Heise has gone so far as to write that Bateman is “Ellis's fantasy of the quintessential neoliberal subject” (144). Eschewing the allegorical lenses of his predecessors, the critic Adam Szetala recalled the “lifestyle format,” pervasive in 1980s advertising, that transmuted “commodities [into] sign vehicles for status and personal identity” (37). Szetala explains that “[in] the lifestyle format” the meaning of signs are “always embedded within the social context of a 'lifestyle group' [which is] structured by 'self-administered codes of authority for dress, appearance ... customary places of assembly, and behavior rituals’” (37). As a result, Szetala argues, “Bateman has internalized the lifestyle appeal to such an extent that *his entire sense of self* is derived from the

exchange of pricey clothing and Wall Street business accounts, whose value as status signifiers and identity vehicles is defined by [...] his lifestyle group” (emphasis added; 37).

As the critics attempt to impose certain meanings on the subject, to effectively 'imprison' the subject within a framework of knowledge, the critical mode seems to act as a surrogate for the novel's absent juridical system. Since this thesis also approaches the narrator's identity through a framework of advertising, Szetala's conclusion appears to be the most relevant while also being representative of these critics' conclusive posturing – problematized by the narrator's unreliability, critics often resort to paraphrasis to muster certitude: “As a writer, Ellis offers his readers no alternative to Bateman’s ad-induced conception of the world; he simply provides a symptom – violence – without a cure” (43). It could be argued that the absence of a “cure,” a metaphor for an effective juridical and prison system, precipitates the critics' interest in the *what the subject is*.

The critical mode interested in *what the subject is* inherits its approach from what is widely recognized as a *disciplinary society*. The eruption of disciplinary practices has a vastly complex history involving profound social effects that appear to result from such rearrangements in political and economic structures as the rise of scientific rationality (eg. The Enlightenment) against a background of declining sovereign dominance; the rise in the factory system as the dominant mode of production (eg. Industrial Revolution; Taylorism) effecting the demise of the domestic system of manufacturing; and the “calculable man,” known through measured assessments of his activities in relation to 'norms,' displacing the “memorable man” whose status is inherited through ancestral lineage (O'Neil 53).

Beginning with Karl Marx's interest in the “rise of factory discipline,” major theorists such as Max Weber, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault have produced significant conceptualizations of modern disciplinary power, which may be thought of as responses to the question: “*what are the techniques by which man has subjected himself to the rational discipline of the applied human sciences* (law, medicine, economics, education and administration)?” (O'Neil 42). One concise and valuable response is provided by Antonio Negri's and Michael Hardt's summary of a Foucauldian disciplinary society as:

a diffuse network of *dispositifs* or apparatuses that produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices. Putting this society to work and ensuring obedience to its rule and its mechanisms of inclusion and/or exclusion are accomplished through the disciplinary institutions (the prison, the factory, the asylum, the hospital, the university, the school and so forth) that structure the social terrain and present logics adequate to the “reason” of

discipline. Disciplinary power rules in effect by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviors. Foucault generally refers to the ancien régime and the classical age of French civilization to illustrate the emergence of disciplinarity, but more generally we could say that the entire first phase of capitalist accumulation (in Europe and elsewhere) was conducted under this paradigm of power. (23)<sup>3</sup>

The absence of an effective juridical and carceral system (ie. the prison) in *American Psycho* is particularly significant since the novel's renown – or rather, infamy – is largely founded on its depictions of ultraviolence and other forms of deviancy: in terms of ethics, morality, legality, political correctness, etc., see instances of racism (5; 36; 125; 185 ... ), drug use (125; 180; 234 ... ), misogyny (41; 57; 65; 74 ... ) narcissism (10; 56; 65; 147 ... ). Further investigation of the novel discovers that references to traditional institutions are few and where they do appear, they appear completely incapable of reproducing disciplinary power. There are references to the narrator having attended a school, specifically Harvard (196, 215, 216 ...). However the school seems to have little or no impact on his present circumstance other than enabling the narrator to represent a specific period of past time. He is occasionally 'at work,' yet is never depicted as 'performing work' (60, 72, 100, 133 ... ), nor is he the subject of any of the disciplinary measures typically found in a workplace (eg. time-clock, scheduling, task-reward system, supervision, etc.). His mother resides in a private room at “Sandstone” – a recognizable metaphor of mortality as a sign for material found in a structure prone to erosion and appropriated for measurement in an hourglass – a long-term care facility that is distinctly not a hospital and she does not appear to be receiving any treatment against disease (341). Bateman apparently commits murder (112; 114; 124; 154; et al) and confesses (330; 362), yet is never imprisoned. The notable absence of disciplinary institutions in the novel provides the cue for this thesis to discover a different, more relevant system for reproducing values.

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<sup>3</sup>For an early, hypothetical explanation of how the apparatuses of disciplinary institutions become a “diffuse network” see Foucault's “Of Other Spaces” (“Des Espace Autres” 1967) wherein he coins and describes the term *heterotopias* as “privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (4). In the section titled “*The swarming of disciplinary mechanisms*” of his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault recasts and more concretely discusses this earlier term, *heterotopias*. As “the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become 'de-institutionalized', to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a 'free' state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted.” As an illustration, Foucault offers the early Christian school, which did not restrict their “train[ing]” to the students enrolled in the school: “the bad behavior of the child, or his absence, is a legitimate pretext [...] for [the school's administrators] to question the neighbors [and] the parents themselves, to find out whether they know their catechism and the prayers, whether they are determined to root out the vices of their children, how many beds are in the house and what the sleeping arrangements are [...]” (211).

### 2.2.2. Biopower of Communications and Advertising

Gilles Deleuze published “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (hereafter “Postscript”) in Paris in 1990: the same year Bret Easton Ellis, living and writing in New York City, submitted the manuscript for *American Psycho*. In terms of their shared historicity, the temporal proximity between the philosophical and fictional publications is significant, but no less so than the experiences of the common social forces in their respective geographical locations. In “Postscript” Deleuze proposes to construct a *History, Logic and Program* that follows the circumstance where traditional institutions have lost their power:

We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure – prison, hospital, factory, school, family. The family is an 'interior' in crisis like all other interiors – scholarly, professional, etc. The administration in charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary reforms [...] But everyone knows that these institutions are finished, whatever the length of their expiration periods. (4)

In the short essay, Deleuze offers considerable speculation on how the effects of the new forces of “control” differ from the effects of discipline. While elements of his text related to communication are presented here, the concept is formally introduced in a later section (“What a Subject Can Do”) and illustrated through a brief discussion on the “Algebra of Need,” a concept in William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, the writer whom Deleuze credits for coining the term “control” (“Postscript” 4).

Subjects of a society framed by the geography of major, western metropolises at the height of advanced capitalism, such as Paris and New York, are compelled to internalize a model of production, which has succeeded that of the factory and is explored by both Deleuze's philosophical essay and Ellis's novel. Their respective environments of Paris and New York are considerably saturated in aural and visual communication designed to target subjects, namely consumers. The fact that *American Psycho* is so thoroughly-saturated with references to forms of communications on the diegetic level (newspapers, magazines, posters, labels, signs, films, books, music, artworks, etc.) is likely what led the critic Thomas Heise to describe the novel as “nothing more than a pastiche of discourses spoken *without affect*, a Barthesian tissue of quotations from advertising” (emphasis added; 151). Moreover it is significant that in most cases these communications have been appropriated from the communications industries in the 'real world' (i.e. Zagan's, Armani, New York Post, *Les Misérables*, etc.): a factor that has likely contributed to the perceivable veracity of the paratext appearing on the back cover of the Vintage edition which describes the novel as representing “a world ... recognizably our own.”

Contrary to what Heise suggests, the discourses of advertisement messaging must be considered in their affective character. The American historian, David M. Potter commented that in order to understand modern popular writers one must understand advertising, just as one must understand the cult of chivalry to understand a medieval troubadour or evangelical religion to understand a nineteenth century revivalist (Bell 68). In an interview with Deleuze, published shortly before “Postscript,” Negri prefaces a question by recalling his attention to a series of pleas he had made for analysts to “look in more detail at three kinds of power: sovereign power, disciplinary power, and above all the control of 'communication' [...].” Deleuze responds: “We're definitely moving toward 'control' societies that are no longer exactly disciplinary. [...] that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication” (Deleuze *Negotiations* 174). Within months, Deleuze publishes “Postscript,” specifically targeting corporate advertising:

[I]n the present situation, capitalism is no longer involved in production, which it often relegates to the Third World [...] it buys the finished products or assembles parts. What it wants to sell is services and what it wants to buy are stocks. This is no longer a capitalism for production but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed. [...] Marketing has become the center or [« âme »] of the corporation. We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world. (5-7)

Following Deleuze's concern, Negri and Hardt, theorists who collaborated with Deleuze in developing the concepts of control societies, emphasize the importance of considering the production of social order through analyses of “language, communication and the symbolic that are developed by communications industries” (32). More recently David V. Ruffolo, echoing the concern Deleuze raised in his interview with Negri, conceives of the emerging control of “bodies through *the flows* of communication and information” (Ruffolo §4). The adequacy of the novel form, in terms representing the flows of both visual (sign) and aural (verbal) communication, finds its preeminence in the language technology of *American Psycho*: “language technology” being a reference to the features of the ontological language discussed above, wielded as a tool.

It could be argued that the contemporary communications industries, specifically, marketing departments and advertising agencies, subjectivate the notion of 'identity,' transforming it into vehicular biopower<sup>4</sup> to carry the load of its message, driving and qualifying it further than the limits of its original source material (word-of-mouth gone viral). Hardt and Negri conceive the

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<sup>4</sup>Biopower is a term coined by Foucault. For his discussion see *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*.

contemporary post-disciplinary biopolitical context as a society that has fully realized itself as the “realm of biopower,” a term they define as:

the form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it. Power can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord. (24)

The disciplinary institutions, with their relatively closed spaces and logic (including ethics and naming), constantly produce the occasion for resistance and thus fail “to reach the point of permeating entirely the consciousnesses and bodies of individuals, the point of treating and organizing them in the totality of their activities” (24).

In giving voices to brand name commodities from shampoo to shoes, from celebrities to political policies, the communications industries fashion Patrick Bateman as their subject: his 'identity' belongs to the realm of biopower. For example, the early chapter titled “Morning” is ostensibly an introduction to the setting of the narrator's apartment and morning routine, but appears, essentially, as a list of brand name high-tech entertainment equipment (Toshiba, NEC, Wurlitzer, Baldwin, Sansui, Duntech, et al) followed by a series of marketing appeals or corporate value propositions related to hygiene products:

Then I use the Probright tooth polisher and next the Interplak tooth polisher (this in addition to the toothbrush) which has a speed of 4200 rpm and reverses direction forty-six times per second [...] first a water-activated gel cleanser, then a honey-almond body scrub and on the face an exfoliating gel scrub. Vidal Sassoon shampoo is especially good at getting rid of the coating of dried perspiration, salts, oils, airborne pollutants [...] (23-24)

The novel's relationship to advertising could not be more essential in terms of the relational framework that involves the narrator as the subject of communication and subsequently, the novel as vehicle to communicate the advertising message. While the term 'communication,' is conspicuously absent from “Postscript,” its concepts appear prevalently throughout in two forms: describing the *position of the subject* and the *mode of subjectivation*. In other words, appearing as a language sign in the novel, Bateman is literally rendered as the subject of the flow of communication, perpetually in transit (or in a state of transition) between two positions without having actually departed from one position nor with the possibility of actually arriving at the subsequent position. While significant critical attention has been paid to the novel's last words, THIS IS NOT AN EXIT – in both relying on and refuting its allusion to Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* – like many of the questions raised by the text, it remains unresolved. Although, considering the

flows of communication (i.e. the discourses of advertising, literary theory and philosophy) that enter the novel, along with the subjectivation of the reader, these final words could arguably be considered as an indication that the novel has only provided a temporary modulation in the subjectivation of the reader who is otherwise, in continuous flow of communication and information in the 'real world.'

### 2.2.3. Contingency of Values in Advertising and the Literary Work

*American Psycho* acts as a vehicle, echoing the model of advertising and representing advertising's values, virtually without any qualification by the novel's intermediary, the narrator. In effect, the reader of literature is transformed into the subject of advertising. Bateman's identity – like subject of 'identities' for literary analysis in general – is essentially assessed through a qualitative analysis of his relations with other objects in the narrative. Bateman appears to others in the story as a *model-type*. The narrator uses the term “model type” (39; 58) to describe women, while 'others' in the text perceive him as a “model” (“an old queer,” 153; “the young faggot,” 165; and an English girl, 191) and on one occasion, when a taxi driver recognizes him from somewhere, the narrator suggests that he is recognizable, being “[a] model” (364). In being perceived as a “model type,” the presence of his figure in relation to commodities lends credibility to the perception of these scenes as representations of advertisements: the natural habitat of the model.

In the following exemplary, yet representative, excerpt, Bateman exhibits the significance of physical appearance: rendered in the details of exercise routine, the details of dress-code and his consideration of how he will appear in relation to his date.

a hundred and fifty push-ups, and then I run in place for twenty minutes while listening to the new Huey Lewis CD. I take a hot shower and afterwards use a new facial scrub by Caswell-Massey and a body wash by Greune, then a body moisturizer by Lubriderm and a Neutrogena facial cream. I debate between two outfits. One is a wool-crepe suit by Bill Robinson I bought at Saks with this cotton jacquard shirt from Charivari and an Armani tie. Or a wool and cashmere sport coat with blue plaid, a cotton shirt and pleated wool trousers by Alexander Julian, with a polka-dot tie by Bill Blass. The Julian might be a little too warm for May but if Patricia's wearing this outfit by Karl Lagerfeld that I think she's going to, then maybe I will go with the Julian, because it would go well with her suit. The shoes are crocodile loafers by A. Testoni. (72)

While exercise and dress code reflect his appearance as a model, the consideration given to his date, demonstrates his interest in composition, the process where values are transposed through relations, in associations, on the basis of contingency. The name brand, designer clothing in Bateman's wardrobe represent products whose value is not found in relation to the cost of raw materials. Rather, brand names, similar to character names, represent conceptual, abstract values that vary relative to how they are perceived by their subject. Attaching an Armani label to a jacket increases its perceivable value, which, in effect increases the cost of consumer acquisition, but only if the consumer is aware that the name Armani is capable of doing that: otherwise, the jacket is merely a jacket.

Importantly, through the interest he shows toward his own appearance, particularly in terms of his seemingly excessive physical fitness routine and his strict fashion code, the reader-subject (in relation to Bateman's 'identity') and the advertisement-subject (in relation to Bateman as a model-type) may ascertain a notion of the conceptual values that are attached to the brand names. As is common in advertisements that include human models, the values of these brand names are contingent upon their relation to Bateman as an emulative model-type: an identity with an excessive interest in maintaining personal health and judgment guided by a strict code. The advertised message 'reads,' *if you think of yourself as someone interested in good health and good judgment, listen to "the new Huey Lewis CD."*

If the excerpt above may be considered as an instance of advertising *assemblage* – a text "built primarily and explicitly from existing texts to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context" (Selber and Johnson 381) – the novel's repeated instantiations of names may be considered as a serial advertising. Consider that Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, the then-current, Broadway performance is mentioned eighteen times in the novel attached to various communicative media represented in the diegesis: on posters (3, 108, 116, 141); in dialogue (80, 116, 168, 229, 262); in reference to its soundtrack (89, 110, 129, 147, 158, 168, 204, 327); its playbill (121, 212, 229). The first two instances where *Les Misérables* are found in the novel are exemplary in their introduction of advertising's presence in the novel as an element within the flow of communication. The absence of the play's performance in the novel's diegesis reflects the logic of advertising which only appear on the basis of their object's absence and its appearance in name only follows the advertising's aim to appear by interrupting, disrupting or obstructing vision. Posters communicating *Les Misérables* appear on the sides of buses, presumably filled with commuters, to interrupt Price's vision of a sign criticizing capitalism and in the second instance, to obstruct a question uttered by Price, which

effectively transmutes what the narrator hears Price say: becoming question that lends support to the capitalist critique. The first instance occurs within the action of the novel's first sentence:

ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE is scrawled in blood red lettering on the side of the Chemical Bank near Eleventh and First and is in print large enough to be seen from the backseat of the cab as it lurches forward in the traffic leaving Wall Street and just as Timothy Price notices the words, a bus pulls up, the advertisement for *Les Misérables* on its side blocking his view [...] (3)

This leaves the reader to suppose that Price is not allowed the time to read John Ciardi's translation of Dante's words, while the privilege of the reader to revisit them as often as wished remains. The particular significance of this effect in relation to the reader is discussed in a section below (“Corporeal Vision of *Inferno* and *American Psycho*”).

In the following paragraph, “*Les Misérables*,” appears again: explicitly qualified by serialization, found in terms of plain repetition (eg. the word “another” in “another bus”; “another poster”) and in representational media (eg. “[I]like in a movie”; “another poster”). Significantly, the lines of communication in the pair of sentences – between words in terms of syntax, between characters in the scene, between the text and the analysis – revolve around the word “money,” the preeminent representation of value. Timothy Price asks:

“I mean am I alone in thinking we're not making enough money?” Like in a movie another bus appears, another poster for *Les Misérables* replaces the *word* – not the same bus because someone has written the word DYKE over Eponine's face. (emphasis added; 3)

In terms of syntax, “word” seems to refer to the last word in the previous sentence: “money?” (3): conflating *Les Misérables* with absence of money. Considering Price's question without this last word, transforms the object in question. In its entirety, Price's personal concern reflects capitalism's fundamental concern: the production of money; Price's cab is leaving the epicenter of advanced capitalism, Wall St. Without “money,” the narrator hears “am I alone in thinking we're not making enough[?]”: an implicit allusion to a factory system of production which, recalling Deleuze, is “often relegate[d] to the Third World” (“Postscript” 5).

In a sense, the narrator literally hears the 'object' of “Price” without the term of 'money,' which may be considered in relation to the novel's first sentence. Dante's phrase, inscribed with a severe sense of foreboding on the gates of hell becomes appropriated in the novel by a graffiti artist, attaching a similar sense of foreboding to the private banking system: financing its operations through capitalization; money producing money. It might be suggested that the graffiti artist's concern is

explicitly heard in the voice of Price by the narrator: “am I alone in thinking we're not making enough[?]” material goods.

Ascertaining the meaning of the graffiti artist's critique of capitalism is problematized by its appearance in a criminal, deviant act. From a *discipline* perspective, the deviant graffiti is problematic insofar as it reflects a perspective outside, not reproducing traditional codes of law and capitalist economics. However, Price is arguably capitalism's biggest proponent in the novel: representing the fully-disciplined, “perfectly normalized being,” the “ABNORMAL individual today” (Baudrillard 67). The text may be considered as recovering a critique of the dominant economic system present in the novel as this character of Price is heard, giving voice to the concern in the artist's critique of capitalism. Significantly, the relationship between the graffiti and Price's voice has not been noted in the criticism: this fact credits Ellis's accomplishment in his allusion to Dante as is discussed in the later section “Corporeal Vision of *Inferno* and *American Psycho*.”

Not only does this value – attributed to an object as the result of its relation to other elements in a composition – reflect the value assigned to name brands in advertisements (as discussed above), it furthermore reflects the notion of *value* “relate[d] to floating rates of exchange” (Deleuze “Postscript” 5). Deleuze explains:

Perhaps it is money that expresses the distinction between the two societies [i.e. *discipline* with its factories and *control* with its corporations] best, since discipline always referred back to minted money that locks gold in as numerical standard, while control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a rate established by a set of standard currencies. (“Postscript” 5)

Economic values that are arrived at through processes involved in “floating rates of exchange” – as opposed to a numerical value related to gold – may find a parallel process involved in the assignment of meaning to the novel's language here, suggesting, in other words, that the text is hermetic, self-referential. In other words, the meaning of Dante's text is shown to maintain a particular floating value (an immanent meaning) despite its having been detached from its origin: a value or meaning that may be applied elsewhere to other objects, such as the banking system and as the opening line appearing *American Psycho*.

Attributing values or meanings according to the system of “floating rates of exchange” put the original value or meaning at risk of reappearing in a circumstance that does not allow it to regain the value that it had as it was attached to the original. Specifically, Dante's text, reproduced in the deviant act of a criminal – from the perspective of a “normalized being” – appears to be valued by

a lower rate of exchange than, for instance, the headlines from *USA Today* which Price enthusiastically reads aloud in the backseat of the taxi: “in one issue – let's see here... strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out, Nazis” (5). In contrast to Dante's text, many of the meanings or values alluded to in these headlines remain “floating”: the significance that Price, alone, seems to attribute to them are not supported in a relation to another aspect of the text. Readers do not encounter a Communist rally or Nazis explicitly in any other place in the novel. However, “kids killed in the subway,” for instance, gains significance in its relation to an explicit echo one hundred pages later when the narrator says, “All I can think about is this poster I saw in the subway station the other night before I killed those two black kids [...]” (114). In a similar way, as the concern implied in the graffiti is heard to echo in the voice of a one of the novel's more significant characters, it gains a value in excess of the significance awarded to it in its first appearance, prior to a hermeneutic reading. That said, when significance is shown to be contingent – the values of signs are determined through their relation to other signs – the sign is at risk of appearing to have no significance, yet the reverse is also true: appearing in particularly value-laden relations, a sign may also be awarded a significance of exponentially greater value than the meaning originally attributed to it.

The excerpt is not only involved in an economic discourse. For instance, it also illustrates a particular hierarchy in the realm of representative media. Recalling that “word” in the excerpt above refers to *money* in a vocal or voiced form suggests that the visual appearance of language as a sign has the capacity to “replace” its verbal appearance as orally reproduced: reflective of the act of silently reading, likewise the transformation of oral cultures through chirography. The sentence that immediately follows further distinguishes what might be considered the novel's visual hierarchy: “DYKE,” a visual sign in language literally appears “over,” while certainly qualifying the visual image of “Eponine's face” (3).

### 2.3. Toward an Ontology of Language

Marking the distinction between the realms of praxis (of the apparatus of language) and of ontology is particularly relevant in conceiving the notion of identity in works of literature, and perhaps even more so when charges related to superficiality are leveled against the literary character, as in the case of *American Psycho*. This thesis attempts an analysis that considers identity as a value-laden subject that offers the opportunity for language to 'exist' and in this section considers, what might be called, the ontological aspects of language. In other words, it accepts the charge that the novel is “nothing more than a pastiche of discourses” (Heise 151) and attempts to 'pull open' (this thesis's suggested homonym of “Paul Owen”) various discourses in an effort to expose the potentialities and limitations in the figures and characteristics of the novel's language: an approach unburdened of the tasks assigned by literary conventions associated with realism and portrayals of human character.

In general terms, recalling Walter J. Ong, “names do give human beings power over what they name” (33)<sup>5</sup>. If, in naming Patrick Bateman “the very ideal of the 'Everyyuppie’” (Cojocaru 187) or “the quintessential neoliberal subject” (Heise 144) these critics betray an interest in wielding power, it should be carefully considered in its *positive* character, which is a notion that marks their *act in language* as being in a distinctly separate realm from that of the critic's *being*. *Positivity* is:

the name that, according to [Jean] Hyppolite [Foucault's teacher in the Lycée Henri-IV, whom he occasionally refers to as “my master”], the young Hegel gives to the historical element – loaded as it is with rules, rites, and institutions that are imposed on the individual by an external power, but that become, so to speak internalized in the systems of beliefs and feelings (Agamben 4-6).

Foucault inherits this term, *positivity*, only to recast it as his “apparatus,” which, according to Giorgio Agamben, Foucault fails to adequately define (cf. Agamben 1,6). The broad category of the *apparatus*, inclusive of *naming* – and, moreover, of *language* – Agamben defines as “literally anything that has the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions of discourses of living beings” (Agamben 14). Commonly, apparatuses are considered to be wielded as tools by individuals or organizations, as is argued, in a

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<sup>5</sup>It has been noted that Ong is primarily discussing the power of naming in a context of orality, though he does explicitly suggest that the same holds true in chirographic and typographic contexts (cf. 33). Also, note that Ong evidently considers 'power' to be something like a *substance*, a notion which is not shared by Foucault who considers power to be a *relation* (cf. Allen 49). However, as discussed below (see, in particular the section discussing “Access”) Ong's conceptualization of “naming” as it relates to information that provides power or access, it may be said that it regains *materiality* in the context of a control society (cf. Ruffolo §9).

realm other than that of their being. Insofar as criticism is interested in *what the subject is* – an interest that leads to the imposition of *names* – the critical apparatus implicitly betrays the critics' having internalized *discipline's* logic of enclosure, a conceptual representation of the physical walls of institutions: marking their criticism as a reproduction of disciplinary power, rather than the individual critic's power. The reproduction of disciplinary power has a direct effect on the structure of analysis which appears to be “[p]utting this [text] to work and ensuring obedience to [the analyst's] rule” (Hardt and Negri 23), or the critic's hypothesis. In a sense, the disciplined individual offers a significant precedent for conceiving language the potential realm of the being of language. Insofar as the disciplined individual appears with a logic structured by interiorized discipline and reproduces the mechanism in the realm of praxis, language, with its intertextual referentiality may suggestively offer a parallel conceptualization.

In tracing the etymology of “dispositif” (Foucault's original French; *apparatus*, English) through *dispositio* (Latin) to *oikonomia* (Greek), Agamben uncovers how the apparatuses appear as phenomena detached from the ontological realm of the human being in the Judeo-Christian, Western civilization. Facing public concerns that the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) introduces polytheism and paganism into Christianity, the “monarchians” (theologians interested in preserving the monotheistic aspect) issued a response, which Agamben paraphrases:

“God, insofar as his being and substance is concerned is certainly one; but as to his *oikonomia* – that is to say the way in which he administers his home, his life, and the world he created – he is rather triple. Just as a good father can entrust to his son the execution of certain functions and duties without in so doing losing his power and his unity, so God entrusts to Christ the 'economy,' the administration and government of human history” (Agamben 9-10).

This had the effect of producing the conceptualization of action as detached from being: “the schizophrenia that the theological doctrine of *oikonomia* has left as its legacy to Western civilization” (Agamben 10).

More recently, the shift from manufacturing to capitalization, from the factory to the corporation represents a process of disenchantment in the modes of production. In early modernity, enlightenment thinking and scientific advancements produced the notion that enchanted values, which could be perceived as theology's value system, are irrational and that science held the key to replacing them with values of a character that could be “rationally understood and technically controlled” (Rosner 17). Though this perspective would lead to modernity's technological advancements and economic prosperity (the diegetic world enjoyed by the narrator of *American*

*Psycho*), these elements would appear essentially to be emptied of the meaning that for centuries enchanted objects in the world.

Reflecting on the effect of this, which Charles Taylor calls the *Malaise of Modernity*, he writes: “Some people sense a terrible flatness ... identified particularly with commercial, industrial, or consumer society. They feel emptiness in the repeated, accelerating cycle of desire and fulfillment in consumer culture; the cardboard quality of bright supermarkets, or neat row housing in a clean suburb” (qtd. in Rosner, p.18). The character of this view of the world appears reflected in the novel's, perhaps, most commonly cited phrase “surface surface surface” (323), which alternatively appears as “Surface, surface, surface” (350). The former appears in the larger context of “surface surface surface, a Rolls is a Rolls is a Rolls” (323) has been, in all likelihood, correctly associated with Gertrude Stein's famous line, Rose is a rose is a rose while simultaneously alluding to the elite, albeit, 'mass produced' consumer commodity of the Rolls Royce, and hopefully less to the notion that readers “roll along the surface of [Ellis's] language” (Serpell 60). Also, the latter repetition seems to be qualified, if not voiced by Stein's Modernist contemporary, Ernest Hemingway: “Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in ... this was civilization as I saw it, colossal and jagged...” (350).

Significantly, the invocation of Stein and her particular Modernist aesthetic, alight the language with the potential of irreferentiality: of words in a state of detachment from external references, textual independence, existing for their own sake: of a Rolls in relation to a Rolls in relation to a Rolls. This circumstance, where the appearance of one object is qualified (or finds its value) through its relation to surrounding objects, the series of “a Rolls is a Rolls is a Rolls” emphatically recalls the discussion in the previous section regarding the values of appearance derived from advertising. As the previous section illustrated, as the narrator describes the process of selecting the outfit he would wear on his date with Patricia, he implicitly suggests that there is no difference between the suit by Bill Robinson or the one by Alexander Julian other than the fact that “the Julian” will appear to be complimented by the Karl Lagerfeld, which he assumes Patricia will wear (72). As the outfits may be perceived as interchangeable as each the “Rolls” in the series, the series “a Rolls is a Rolls is a Rolls” could similarly be rendered as a Robinson is a Julian is a Lagerfeld. Given all of the brand names that appear as interchangeable in the novel the distinct quality of “Rolls” as a homonym of rose supports the lending interpretations the significance of Stein's notion of irreferentiality.

Contingent on the allusion to Hemingway suggests reading the first fragment as an intentionally simplistic interpretation, *what you see is what you get*, while the concluding fragment contributes an unseen character. The term “colossal” signifies as an overwhelming mass – suggesting a quality in excess of comprehension. The big picture perspective suggested by “colossal” is followed by “jagged,” which is a description that lends the detail of a local perspective to a surface, which appears nuanced as opposed to uniform. Still the inability to fully comprehend is reinforced, as the term “jagged” describes something that is apparently rough, raw, or undefined. It also implies an alternation between light and shadow, between aspects that appear elevated at the crest of a jagged peak along with aspects that remain in the shadow of the troughs between. Collectively, these attributes arguably describe an iceberg.

Hemingway's well-known Iceberg Theory, which is also known as the theory of omission, is conceptualized in his *Death in the Afternoon*: “If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.” By omitting elements of the story, as Hemingway's theory allows, a line of communication may be opened between the author and the reader's intuitive aspect of vision.

The intuitive aspect of vision may be illustrated in reference to the novel's internal conception of brand names. Of the many potential metaphors afforded by the concept of an iceberg in relation to the “surface,” surface may plausibly refer to both the *surface* of the water surrounding the iceberg and the surface of the iceberg. As water, the analogy suggests a surface with certain depth – that is, a sufficient appearance but in a state of equilibrium (i.e. sea level) and this appears in relation to the object of the iceberg. Considering the surface of brand names and with Bateman dressed in brand name clothing as the iceberg, it follows that 'Bateman' must appear above the 'brand name's appearance in order to give the 'brand name' a relative point by which its value may be measured. The analogy implies that if a brand name appears too often – the surface raises above the iceberg – it loses its contingency and disappears.

Where both Stein and Hemingway appear following essentially the same series of signs, the language of *American Psycho* implicates itself as being equally informed by both Stein's irrefutability – or the novel's hermetic system for producing significance, particularly evident in its excessive use of brand names whose values are contingent on the bases of their appearance – and

Hemingway's theory of omission. This may suggest that historical knowledge, recorded in the visual language of signs – Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue* which parallels the conceptualization of the perfectly disciplined subject – has virtually assumed the place of the 'author,' where it is found in relation to Hemingway's theory of omission, in the language of the novel. It follows that the aspects of the novel appearing to be qualified by unrecoverable uncertainty actually reflect the limits of historical knowledge, such as the question of life-after-death.

Before considering the phrase 'pull open' as an immanent aspect of the language in the novel that gives direction to the analytical apparatus, its appearance as a homonym of the novel's important character "Paul Owen" must be qualified. Both the presence of homonyms in the novel, as well as the character's importance have been well-documented in the criticism (cf. Coccojaru; Serpell; Szetala et al), though none have suggested this pun, which requires a slight modulation in the verbal pronunciation of the Paul Owen's name to discover the directive, *pull open*. The appearance of both words, "pull" and "open"(2), within the narrative sequence of his murder lends textual support for the reading of Paul Owen's name as a homonym for *pull open*:

The ax hits him midsentence, straight in the face, its thick blade chopping him sideways into his *open* mouth, shutting him up. Paul's eyes look up at me, then involuntarily roll back into his head, then back at me [...] I *pull* the ax out – almost yanking Owen out of the chair by his head – and strike him again in the face, splitting it *open* [...] (emphasis added; 203)

The fact that the direction appears embedded within the sign for an identity suggests a specific series of correlative concepts: *vocal* and *visual* languages; *identity* and *performativity*; and, perhaps, *being* and *praxis*.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the direction's object, what the language suggests as the object to be *pulled open*, is arguably the ontology of language, and not the concept of character or identity. A close reading of the excerpt reveals that Owen's mouth and face are opened, but it was the tool that was pulled. Conceiving of *language* as a tool, and considering that the tool, "the ax," is the object that is pulled in the text, may plausibly suggest that *language* is the object to be *pulled open*. Additionally, the fact that "[t]he ax hits him midsentence [...] into his open mouth" reflects the novel's prioritization of visual representations of language over vocalized language. The hierarchy is not only inherent to the novel's form in general and expressed through the appearance of the sign for name "Paul Owen" rather than vocal directive derived therefrom, it is, moreover, shown to be rather explicitly illustrated on the novel's first page, as discussed in a later section of this thesis.

Other interpretations leading to the object of the directive *pull open* seem significantly less plausible. Firstly, the capacity for the analyst to *pull open* Paul Owen's identity is remarkably limited. Despite his name appearing in excess of one hundred fifty times, Owen utters a mere twenty or so lines – none of which seem to reveal unique character traits – and the only occasion in the novel that seems prepared to attribute an individualizing character trait to him is compromised by the narrator before it even appears: “What I've mistaken at first for pomposity on Owen's part is actually just drunkenness” (201). The alternative interpretation, the act of *pulling open* the material body of Paul Owen, seems incongruent relative to the activity in the scene. In literal terms, it is Owen's mouth and face that are “open” and it is the tool that is “pull[ed],” not Owen's internal organs: his corpse, otherwise, remains reportedly intact.

Accepting the coincidence of meanings attached to a visual sign (identity) and a modulated utterance of the sign (a directive) discovers a significant degree of immanent dynamism in the novel's language. Specifically, this dynamism may be described as performativity. In *Gender Trouble* (also published during *American Psycho*'s pre-publication controversy), Judith Butler asks readers to “[c]onsider gender [...] a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (emphasis in original; 190). Setting aside the discussion of patriarchal hegemony in the language tradition by recognizing that the novel's English language does not have gender forms, Butler's search for a body with immanent gender may be conceived in the pared down terms of a search for body with immanent quality. She arrives at a conceptualization of a *corporeal style* in a discussion that departs from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* from which she quotes: “It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion [...] it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently *around, on, within* the body” (184). It follows that Foucault's soul is a product of conditioning (namely, disciplinary) that formally appears, according to Butler, in the performance of *corporeal style* that is an “intentional [...] dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Butler 190). Language may also be viewed by these same terms, which is not, necessarily, to argue that language has a soul, but rather that it may *appear* to have one through the performance of *corporeal style*.

It should be noted that Paul Owen's significance in the narrative derives from the two significant ways his presence disables the traditional frameworks that 'promise' an ontological transformation: in the Judeo-Christian tradition, religious salvation and in juridical framework, the becoming the disciplined inmate, simultaneously the celebrified, infamous serial killer. The transformation from a corporal through death to an eternal body as 'promised' in the Judeo-Christian framework follows directly and acts as an introduction to the juridical framework's promise of a transformation from a

deviant to a disciplined subject. According to conventional consideration, these structures primarily subject human individuals who subsequently internalize the effects of their mechanisms, yet, as is shown, the novel's language also appears to reflect an internalization, or a consideration, of these systems.

Primarily, the narrator's interest in Paul Owen derives from the fact that he is “handling the Fisher account” (34; 57; 58; 136; 137; 371). Critical discussion of the “Fisher account” conceives it as a material status signifier and Bateman's jealousy is rooted in the fact that Owen possesses an entirely unique commodity (Szetala 39-40). This argument appears to have validity within Szetala's critical framework, circumscribed and imposed on the text. However, this line of criticism fails to take a fully ontological approach, reflective of all the elements of *corporeal style*, to the language of “Fisher account”: that is it fails to consider the language as an intentional and dramatic expression of embodied meaning, contingently constructed.

Despite the name appearing seventeen times in the narrative, the “Fisher account” is never explained. However, there is some significant textual support for reading it as an *intentional* intertextual allusion to the Arthurian legend of the Fisher King. According to the Arthurian tale, the Fisher King is the latest in a long line of descendants charged with the task of keeping the Holy Grail: the legendary cup that Jesus Christ filled with his 'blood' and offered to his disciples at the Last Supper. In terms of textual evidence to support this Christian-themed reading, an allusion to the fallen angel Lucifer may arguably appear when Owen, in a uniquely personal admission, claims to “have a cousin who manages All We Need of Hell” (138). A series of contextual evidence appears in the narrator's description of his interaction with Owen:

When I press for information about the Fisher account he offers useless statistical data that I already knew about: how *Rothschild* was originally handling the account [note: the name of a famous Jewish personage suggests pre-Christian heritage], how Owen came to acquire it. And though I had Jean [Bateman's secretary] gather this information for my files months ago, I keep nodding, pretending that this *primitive* info is *revelatory* and saying things like “This is *enlightening*” while at the same time telling him “I'm utterly insane” and “I like to dissect girls.” (emphasis added; 201)

Furthermore, the indication of a Jewish predecessor informs a reading of Owen's given name as an allusion to the Paul the Apostle: a reading that is supported in the context of “primitive,” “revelatory” and “enlightening.”

Owen's proposed namesake in the first century Christian apostle introduces a *dramatized* precedent of transformation in both name and character, while carrying relevancy in relation to vision (see Section 1.3 below), violence and fleeing abroad. According to the “primitive info” (Ellis *American* 201) of the New Testament, Saul (who, after his conversion to Christianity would change his name to Paul) was known for persecuting and uttering violent threats toward Christians living near Jerusalem. On a journey near Damascus, Saul had an “enlightening” (201) experience: a sudden light struck him to the ground and the voice of Jesus asked Saul why does he persecute? When Saul stood up, he was blind. He remained blind for three days until the disciple Ananias, acting on divine instruction, visited him and restored his sight: “revelatory” (201). After which Saul preached in the synagogues, claiming that Jesus is the Son of God and, in response, the Jews conspired to kill him. He fled to Jerusalem to join the disciples, who at first doubted his faith, but after learning of the threat to his life, sent him off to Tarsus (cf. *Holy Bible, New International Version*, Acts 9.1-30).

As Paul flees to Tarsus from Jerusalem to escape mortal threat, Owen reportedly leaves New York for London after the narrator has killed him. In effect, the incongruent reports – Bateman's reported murder in New York (204) and Carnes' reported sighting of Owen in London (330) – reconstruct the modern conflict between Reason and religion regarding life-after-death. The conceptualization of uncertainty in regards to Bateman's criminal guilt reflects a traditional religious and historically-informed programming in the technology or ontology of the signs. When critics charge the narrator with unreliability, their reasoning might then be said to reflect a rational, post-Enlightenment, and, in other words, *disciplinary* mode of thinking. In consideration of the narrative's unreliability and uncertainty, critical interest in *what the subject is* reflects a search for Truth, which, as reported or reflected in the novel, is formally not accessible through language.

Facing the irrecoverable uncertainty (effected in the novel through an allusion to the after-life) critics have resorted, as is illustrated in the previous section, to imposing their various models, prescribed with certain values that recall the modes of disciplinary institutions in their invention and application of specific mechanisms whose design is informed by its aim to construct, for example, the disciplined factory worker at the site of the individual. For example, one could consider the uncertainty in *American Psycho* as a metaphysical – *contingent* on Mikhail Bakhtin's conception – response to an 'ideal' novel form, with “its spirit of process and inconclusiveness” (7). In accepting this contingency, with uncertainty as the novel's defining mode of logic a disciplinary mode appears to discover the same truth responsible for designing its analysis. The characteristics of the novel form, as a considered by Bakhtin, may simply be attributed to the consideration of human life as “a spirit of process.” The narrator's unreliability in relation to his account of the murders may also be

perceived as allegorical or operating on the symbolic level. It is conceivable to consider the irrecoverable uncertainty as an allegorical value reflecting the unresolvable historical relation between the Jewish and Christian faiths – where Bateman's murder of Owen echoes the Jewish conspiracy to kill St. Paul. The uncertainty in the novel appears to illustrate the inaccessibility of Truth through analysis.

The novel, in explicit terms, is a machine with its own limits that reproduces these limits at the site of the subjects, both of its subject-reader and its subject-narrator. Considering language as informed by its access to recorded historical knowledge and its limits (after-life) serves to regulate its subject's, the narrator's activities. For instance, a number of circumstances in the novel appear that are potentially transformative, yet are not transformative because his knowledge reveals its limitations. In one such instance, Bateman encounters Tom Cruise who is “wearing the same pair of black Wayfarers I have on”(67): an important sign that Cruise, for Bateman, represents a figure worthy of emulation. Bateman reflects his knowledge that Cruise lives in the penthouse apartment and his respect for the actor as he “courte[ously], without asking him, [presses] the PH button and [Cruise] nods thank you” (67). While this circumstance appears as an opportunity for Bateman to befriend Cruise in lieu of access to further displays of prowess (eg. Cruise's penthouse, his social circle and celebrity parties) Bateman fails to connect with Cruise on the personal level, which may have been essential to accessing Cruise's private sphere, because his information about Cruise is limited to the knowledge of his inhabiting the penthouse and the roles he has played in films. Furthermore, the potential of the latter bit of information is compromised as he demonstrates an ignorance of the actual film titles: “I thought you were very fine in Bartender.' [...] 'Cocktail. Not Bartender. The film was called Cocktail.' A long pause follows [...] silence, obvious and heavy between us” (68). Neither Bateman nor Cruise are wrong here. As Cruise lives in penthouse, it could even be said with *his head in the clouds*, he is literally illustrated as living or existing on a different level than Bateman. When Cruise 'corrects' Bateman, he signals a philosophical perspective that considers representations (i.e. the media of film) as describing reality. Bateman, on the other hand, seems to take a perspective from where representations (i.e. Cruise was “in [the identity of] Bartender”) are reality.

In a later scene, his ex-girlfriend realizes that he has hung his prized and valuable contemporary artwork upside down and laughs at him, effectively disarming his presumption of authority on contemporary art and seemingly making a joke of his lack of knowledge. In response, or retaliation, he resorts to violence: both screaming and arming himself with a nail gun. While her murder was perhaps inevitable [earlier, Bateman is “locking the door, making sure it's bolted

shut” (229)], she may represent the love he does not have – a force that appears also to offer the possibility of transformation later in the novel as discussed below – yet her laughing at him, directly followed by his violence, seems to be the more direct cause of his immediate violence. In this case she embodies a disciplinary apparatus insofar as she reproduces conventional limits that (violently) question his freedom to hang the painting in any way he chooses. When she asks him “[h]ow long has it been this way?” a sense of unflinching confidence – as opposed to a realization of having made a mistake – seems to qualify his answer: “A millennium” (230). This signals his foundation in the historical processes of knowledge.

As the relationship between individual, anarchic freedom becoming limited by traditional institutions associated with discipline (school, church, barracks, factory, prison) Bateman's violence may be seen as representing the sort of desperation that might have qualified the disciplinary recourse to 'violent' means as a method to structure society in a desirable manner. The novel cites Miss Manners (Judith Martin) in its prologue that considers “restraints” as necessary: “One of the major mistakes people make is that they think manners are only expressions of happy ideas. There's a whole range of behavior that can be expressed in a mannerly way. [...] In civilization there have to be some restraints. If we followed every impulse, we'd be killing one another.” Appearing in the prologue, this citation may be seen as disclosing to the narrative that follows that the violence of “killing one another” represents the natural free expression of human character.

Through discipline, or manners, the individual's access to what constitutes the ideal notion of freedom is limited. By rendering the disciplinary mechanisms as violent machines in their effect of limiting freedom, the ex-girlfriend's laughter may come to represent the violence of the entire disciplinary system, perhaps named in the novel as “Robert Hall”: the violence erupts Bateman screams “What the fuck are you doing with Robert Hall?” (230)]. This complicates the scene on a fundamental level as it suggests a potential reversal in the roles of the killer and the victim, raising the question: which of the two – Bateman's anarchic freedom or her disciplined subject – is the victim and which is the killer?

What remains after removing the notions of imposed meaning is a language, a technology that is hermetically contingent: reflecting the character of the knowledge of the age into which it is born with a performance capacity reflecting the limits of the ontological structure as it appears within the novel. The signs are characterized by their visual primacy with access to verbal representation and flexible relation to profound historical knowledge that appears in its limit at the fundamentally

uncertain reference to Truth. The inability of the narrator to access the transformative 'promises' of religious salvation is considered to reflect the limits of the human subject, described in the limits of knowledge regarding Truth, and the attainment of an eternal life.

## 2.4 What the Subject Can Do

### 2.4.1 Admission

Criticism almost unanimously conceives the novel, if not in terms of its whole as a “*confession* of a yuppie serial killer” (emphasis added; Storey 58), at least as a narrative containing “confessions” (Zaller 321; Helyer 740; Allue 77; et al) with one early exception in Carla Freccero. The word “confession” appears only once and its object is nothing: “[t]his confession has meant nothing...” (352). The notion of confession as “a formal statement admitting that one is guilty of a crime” (Oxford Dictionaries) becomes, following Foucault, “an interiorization that incites to a perpetual judgment of the self through scrutiny of one's behaviors and thoughts” (Bogaerts 112). The narrative of *American Psycho* seems rather to be a meticulous consideration of surfaces: both in terms of the narrator's physical appearance and the surface of the language. In fact the narrative appears to be a marked reversion *and inversion* of the progress considered by Foucault in the quote supplied by Bogaerts from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*:

We have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or marvelous narration of “trials” of bravery or sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage. (qtd. in Bogaerts 101).

Rather than describing Bateman's activities as “trials' of bravery or sainthood,” it would be more accurate to describe them as *meaningless exercises in exploitation*. He attacks and murders an unsuspecting man walking his dog: “I lean down, giving the appearance of picking up the briefcase, but because of the shadows I'm leaning into he doesn't see me pull out the knife [...]” (153). He kills a hungry and tired homeless man, “panting with the exertion it takes to sit up” (122). He surprises a delivery boy: “I find myself crouched in the doorway [...] leaping out at a passing Japanese delivery boy, I knock him off his bicycle and drag him into the doorway [...]” (166). He also, most infamously lures sex workers to his apartment with money to torture and dismember them (158; 272). The descriptions of murders taking place in the language mark the language as inherently superficial, particularly as it appears without consequence: the language can appear to confess to crimes, without constituting a *confession to crimes*.

Considering the language in terms of what it can do, *potentially* opens the space of the confession's object to every admission that appears in this self-reflexive passage and, through the concept of the narrator's unified identity, to every admission in the entirety of the novel, as Storey's assessment reflects. The language may at once appear mimicking the conception of significant religious transformation: "This is enlightening" while at the same time telling him 'I'm utterly insane' and 'I like to dissect girls'" (201). Here the ontological language appears at the limits of its performative ability, as merely representative: able to "dissect girls" but unable to *dissect girls*. And so it may seem that, considering this limit of ontological language, "This confession has meant nothing..." (352).

However, *American Psycho* begs to differ and does so in two qualitative ways. Firstly, the narrative reflects a reversion toward the values assigned to *displays* of preeminence in pre-disciplinary societies. Not only does the proclivity to *display* accurately reflect the *visual* character of the sign, the acts of these displays may be seen as opposing the values assigned to confession by the disciplinary tradition. Secondly, in terms of quantitative measurements, the language in the novel suggests a strong preference for *admission* over *confession*.

This thesis argues that language confronts an immanent limit in the subject of the 'narrator' that is inscribed in language. Where *confession* lends the subject to a juridical system, offering a new, transformed subject in the disciplined inmate, a "confession" of the acts described in language do not have this capacity without evidence of the act in the *real world*. In other words, "This confession has meant nothing..." may be subject primarily to a literal interpretation: meaning "nothing" as opposed to all other possible objects. Where later critics continue to use the word "confession" to describe the narrative they do so without acknowledging what Carla Freccero, early in the tradition, called "Foucauldian irony": "Bateman's confession [...] succeeds in revealing absolutely nothing, not because anything remains hidden, but because there is no truth to be revealed, extracted, and expiated *in confession*" (emphasis added; 51). Admission is an expressed acknowledgement of truth, whereas confession is an expressed acknowledgement of criminal guilt: in the United States, freedom of expression quite strictly precludes language from the realm of criminal guilt.

Furthermore the narrative expressly limits its use of "confession" to this single occasion, while employing the word "admit" approximately fifty times, including at the so-called "climactic confession" (Eldridge 30): "I leave a message, admitting everything" (330). Additionally, in the

same self-reflexive passage in the chapter titled “End of the 1980s,” a few lines above the word confession, 'admit' appears in syntax that suggests lending the term primacy in relation to the whole of the novel: “I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this – and I have, countless times, *in just about every act I've committed* – and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis” (emphasis added; 352). Formally considering the language in terms of what it can do and what it cannot do effectively liberates the medium, allowing it to be performative “in just about every act”: to “admit” its own truth “countless times.” The crafting of this syntactical structure assigns both a retro- and prospective relationship on “this” in respect to the surrounding signs: “admitting” refers both to “I want no one to escape” and “every act I've committed.”

In signifying as an opening or invitation, “admit” is commonly used in the novel as a way of presenting or introducing the narrator's conception of a truth, more or less grounded in an '*objective*' reality: for example, addressing the object-subject of a “hardbody,” the narrator remarks “I can't help noticing that one knee is, admittedly, bigger than the other” (45). In this example, the knee, seems to be assessed by the narrator in relation to the ideal form or objective concept of the knee. The notion of the ideal seems to be the '*objective truth*' that Bateman refers to with “admittedly.” However, the narrator may only resort to expressing the '*values*' of each knee in relation to one another, since the knees appear within the limits of language, which, bound to hermetic referential values, cannot appear to have value outside contingency: as nothing may appear in the ideal form. Realizing that each knee has distinct, albeit “almost imperceptibl[e]” characteristics, it follows that neither can meet the ideal form: “this unnoticeable flaw now seems overwhelming and we all lose interest” (45-6).

Admittedly, just as there is limited recourse to philosophical studies of the ontological nature of the plant, animal and other natural science kingdoms, there seems to be virtually no recourse to a similar knowledge of the language kingdom. It should, however, be considered premature and shortsighted to decide that the subjects of these kingdoms are not privy to something of an ontological status: particularly as we are very likely approaching the advent of artificial intelligence, which holds significant promise for an ontological Archimedean point.

## 2.4.2 Addiction

Gilles Deleuze, in the *Historical* section of his short, enigmatic essay “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (hereafter “Postscript”) credits Foucault, not only for providing a “brilliant” analysis of disciplinary institutions but also for perceiving “the transience of this model” (3). As disciplinary societies succeeded the societies of sovereignty, a new social model would supersede the disciplinary society. Deleuze marks the historical time of this later transition in the middle of the twentieth century, suggesting that “the disciplines underwent a crisis to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II” (“Postscript” 3). In his essay, Deleuze credits William S. Burroughs for naming these new forces “control” and works to develop Burroughs's insights regarding the nature of control that were originally illustrated in the novel *Naked Lunch* from 1959. Publishing “Postscript” in 1990, Deleuze names the new model of society, which has emerged out of discipline's crisis, a *society of control*.

Following Burroughs's conceptualization, *addiction* – or what, in *Naked Lunch*, is referred to as “The Algebra of Need” (172) – may be described as the immanent logical structure of the motivated being, the basis of *control*. Importantly, Allen Ginsberg, in the testimony he provided at the *Naked Lunch* obscenity trial in Boston suggests that “heroin addiction,” in Burroughs's novel is “a model for addiction to many other things beside drugs”: including “addiction to homosexuality”; “the United States addiction to materialistic goods and properties”; “addiction to money”; “and most of all, an addiction to the power or addiction to controlling other people by having power over them.” One of the most significant aspects of Burroughs's writings, according to contemporary art theorist, Charles Russell, is that Burroughs constructs characters that are the uncritical subjects of “incessant [...] forces of exploitation” (31): on the surface, *American Psycho*'s narrator seems similarly conditioned. Russell suggests, however, that Burroughs's novels – representing “the most graphic and extreme expression of anarchic idealism and rage in contemporary literature” – depict characters struggling to realize freedom because “to actively oppose the enemy insures that one remains defined by them” (31). Russell's conceptualization of what Burroughs's is suggesting – to “struggle against social control means to battle against one's prior identification with it” – foregrounds the analysis of Bateman's violence which may be conceived as the quality that saves him from becoming – what in Burroughs's novels – represents the “greatest danger”: that is “to allow oneself to be rigidly defined by something external to oneself” (Russell 31).

According to the logic, relative values are assigned by the addiction to subjects reflective of the subject's ability to placate the need of the addiction. In other words, the assignment of values follows an “Algebra,” which may be considered as a system of correlative play between the objective, the *Need*, which is prescribed by the immanent addiction and the relative values of the addiction's subjects: the value attributed to the subject is a reflection of how adequately the subject is able to placate the *Need*.

Junk, insofar only may – and only temporarily – placate a junk addiction, is the objective: it is immanent and all else – its subjects – are assigned their value in relation to their ability to further the addict-subject's pursuit of the objective. This conceptual framework of addiction informs the narrative of *American Psycho* in the addiction to *appearance* – as a way of saying, an *addiction* to existing that conforms to its own ontological capacity, or the superficial manifestation reflecting the human existential conditioning in the history of language. The analysis of the narrative in these terms appears below. Here the “Algebra of Need,” which describes the value system related to addiction, is shown to inform the narrator of *Naked Lunch*:

And the junk was running low. So there we are in this no-horse [horse is a common slang term for heroin, i.e. junk] town strictly from cough syrup. And vomited the cough syrup and drove on and on, cold spring wind whistling through that old heap around our shivering, sick sweating bodies and the cold you always come down with when the junk runs out of you...  
(13-14)

In this excerpt, the addict-subject is entirely oriented by the immanent logic of addiction. The internal orientation – toward placating the immanent addiction – is evident in the virtual assembly (as opposed to the disassembling) of a metaphorical matryoshka doll: the hostile addiction within “you” – the addict-subject – is evidenced by “the cold you always come down with when the junk runs out of you”; and “you” are inside one of these “shivering, sick sweating bodies” enclosed within “that old heap,” an automobile.

The “Algebra of Need” informs a relational system as addiction inscribes value on the other subjects. The “cough syrup,” which may be perceived as an alternative to heroin, reaches its limited value as it appears to be an inadequate substitute when it is rejected by the body. The body's value as a vehicle to serve the addiction discovers its limits as sickness appears in the symptoms of withdrawal and delivers, ultimately, an allusion to the bodily limit of mortality. The automobile is similar to the body insofar as its value is also in its being a vehicle used in service of the addiction: and in terms of its capacity for speed, the automobile's value exceeds that of the body's. On one

hand, the phrase “old heap” seems to signal a parallel between the automobile's 'poor health' and the 'sickness' of its passenger. Yet, on the other, still in terms of physiology, the value of the automobile for the addict is fundamentally limited by its incapacity to be the physiological vehicle that delivers the junk to placate to the immanent addiction. Finally, in terms of heroin addiction, the narrator's physiological body is the essential vehicle, both in terms of carrying the addiction and placating it.

The “Algebra of Need” may be appropriated as a critical framework for understanding the values and limits of *what the subject can do*, in terms of placating the objective that the critic posits as the novel's, so-called addiction. The critic Marcus Abel seems to understand *American Psycho* as representing an addiction to the task of writing as described by Gilles Deleuze: “We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms one into the other” (qtd. in Abel 147). Abel might be understood as perceiving *violence* as the subject in the novel that is most qualified to placate, as its framework seems to mirror, the addiction: by Abel's account, “violence is [...] precisely such a frontier [...] remain[ing] one of the great incomprehensible events of life” (147). In its violence, *American Psycho* is writing at this frontier, its “value appears to be precisely in presenting us with the practice of writing [...] in experimenting with that which is 'unknown' to us” (147). Abel argues that the novel inhabits this frontier by offering symptoms without etiology, without explanation, and merely presents the violence as “forces that produce specific affective effects” at the site of the reader (148). *What the novel can do* is produce the reader's experience of ignorance, which in being experienced by the reader, is transformed into experiential knowledge.

The critic C. Namwali Serpell commends Abel for “attempt[ing] to investigate what the violence in the novel *does*, turning us away from meaning and towards function” (emphasis in original; 71) and takes up the task of carefully investigating the subject of repetition in the novel. Discovering repetition as compounding through countless forms (eg. in sequential signifiers, brand names, habitual activities, places, chapter titles, identities, etc.) leads her, firstly, to suggest that repetition in the novel effects “a vacuation of signification” (58). Secondly, repetition functions in the novel as a vehicle whose value is in its ability to construct the reader's expectancy: enabling readers to “know” that violence will be repeatedly encountered has the effect of involving them in a complicated ethical circumstance. Serpell similarly conceives the novel in its addiction to a frontier between ignorance and knowledge: more specifically, in its objective to construct a frontier on the reader's plane of ethics. Posing the troubling questions: What are the ethical implications of accepting, or eagerly anticipating the experiential knowledge of violence? On the other hand, what does it mean to stop reading, to in a sense, close your eyes and accept ignorance?

## Witness-Subject

Serpell suggests that a “vacuation of signification” (58) coupled with violence can be “ethically useful,” as it allows readers to “confront violence *as violence* [...] without escape routes of meaning. Violence and ethics may be the safest way to explore the darkest corners of the self” (emphasis in original; 69). In effect she dispels the notion of the reader's capacity to interpret the text, ultimately conceding that the text merely appears and in appearing, it may become “useful” as a framework to perceive the limits of one's own personal ethics. In this final note, Serpell betrays that her ethical interest has involved an discipline all along: the interest in what the aspects of the novel *can do* are ultimately conceived in terms of what it *can do* to reveal *what the subject is*, namely the reader, the ethical-subject.

Incidentally, thesis concedes to a similar perspective, yet conceives of the reader as rendered essentially passive – as a mere *witness-subject* – even in relation to their internal ethical discourse. The concept of the witness suggests a limited 'readerly' capacity, stripped of the interpreting capacity and implying a relation to the narrative that may testify to the truth of its *appearances*. Considering the implications involved with interpreting “I am an noncontingent human being” (352), which appears in the novel within the same self-reflexive passage discussed above, offers support for reconceiving the reader-subject as the witness-subject. In the merest act of regarding the proposed word “noncontingent” the space of the subject-reader becomes the space of subject-witness. The act of reading, insofar as it traditionally involves the assignation of meaning to words, encounters the impossible word “noncontingent.” The 'subject-reader' must fail to put the word into a relation that could render it visible; must fail in attempts to represent it, so as to at least render it uniform and thereby produce its vulnerability to deviancy as method to make it appear. Every effort to be a subject-reader of the word immediately, fundamentally alters its very being in an act that violently strips it of the prefix of its 'identity.' In the final section of this thesis, the narrative is discussed from the perspective of a witness-subject: witnessing the novel as it *appears*. The one consolation that may be offered to the subject-witness is the *memory* of the *negative* as the language reveals its relationship to historical knowledge. Jean Baudrillard expresses a concern that the increasing digitalization of images effects the *negative's* disappearance: “negative” in terms of analog photography represents, for Baudrillard, a “irrefutable testimon[ial] [...] [of the] blank between object and image” (37).

As the discussion becomes framed by a positivistic discourse of ethics, the criticism is implicated as the biopower. The idea of ethics, insofar as it belongs to the positive realm, precludes the potential for any “[dark] corners of the self” (Serpell 69). Ethical values, having been imposed on the subject through various traditional apparatuses, are merely reproduced in the reader's 'exploration' of their 'self.' Discipline, in reconfiguring the individual as biopower to reproduce its normative value system, at the same time, produces abnormality, deviancy, resistance or opposition. Thus, as Serpell's discussion falls under the heading of *ethics* – with its 'good' and 'bad' values – the reader is actually confronting an idea of the self that is affected by a “disciplinary invasion of power” and implicated in reproducing deviancy within themselves.

Burroughs's model of addiction seems to be a framework capable of describing the logic of a fully-realized, post-disciplinary realm of biopower. Insofar as *addiction* represents the conceptualization of an “integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord” (Hardt and Negri 24), it surpasses discipline in terms of effectuality by eliminating the potential for resistance. What was formerly opposition or resistance is rather, in the framework of addiction absorbed into the ever-onward pursuit of the objective. What constituted an oppositional force in discipline appears as a subject ascribed with minimal value in terms of its capacity to serve the continuous pursuit of the objective. In other words, 'opposing forces' are integrated and appear in the short term perhaps as a reduction in velocity, a change in form, etc.: these alterations effect what Deleuze calls “modulations” (“Postscript” 4).

In this post-disciplinary context of *American Psycho*, the act of naming as an imposition, or an exertion of power over the subject no longer produces the occasion for resistance, but rather of modulation of the subject's value in relation to an ever-present objective. All of *American Psycho*'s critics recognize that names in the novel are often miss-assigned and characters commonly misidentified, yet none of the characters resist their misidentification through an attempt to, for instance, assert their real name. It seems that all of the critics have failed to consider the possible significance in the absence of resistance to this common phenomenon in the novel. Arguably the most significant misidentification in the novel is on the occasion when Paul Owen misidentifies the narrator. Bateman does not take offense or feel threatened by any power that could be associated with Owen's misidentifying him as Halberstam:

Owen has mistaken me for Marcus Halberstam [...] but for some reason it really doesn't matter and it seems a logical faux pas since Marcus works at P & P also, in fact does the exact same thing as I do, and he also has a penchant for Valentino suits and clear

prescription glasses and we share the same the barber at the same place, the Pierre Hotel, so it seems understandable; it doesn't irk me. (85)

On the contrary, Bateman assumes this given name of Halberstam and leverages the misidentification as an opportunity to further his objective, which this thesis argues is an addiction to *appearance*.

Importantly, *appearance* also more distinctly addresses the fundamental relationship between the literary work and the reader, which is largely a visual framework, and a framework of extraordinary importance in the novel. *American Psycho* is arguably replete with evidence suggesting the inestimable importance of the visual perspective in the novel. Criticism interested in *what the subject is* commonly rely on psychoanalytical terms in probing the text for an etiology: how an abusive past suffered by Norman Bates's of Hitchcock's *Psycho* explains his behavior in the film is a particularly relevant example and is examined below. In searching *American Psycho* for a similar etiology to explain the narrator's behavior, analysts inevitably come across the single instance when the narrator turns his gaze in the direction of his father. Significantly, his father only appears in a representative visual medium, the photograph, leaving the narrator to make his father appear through one of the novel's rare instances of ekphrasis:

In the photograph of my father he's wearing a six-button double-breasted black sport coat, a white spread-collar cotton shirt, a tie, pocket square, shoes, all by Brooks Brothers. He's standing next to one of the topiary animals a long time ago at his father's estate in Connecticut and *there's something the matter with his eyes*. (emphasis added; 342)

Notably, the eyes are the only physical feature of his father that appear in this description which, like countless other descriptions of characters in the novel, could easily be interpreted as the description of a visual advertisement appearing in a magazine for a line of clothing. Similar to this instance of ekphrasis, the other descriptions seem to effectively dislodge the notion of a representation – the advertisement appearing in a magazine – from its quality of being a representation. They are brought to life in a sense that is literally connected to the visual sense – “[there is] something the *matter* with his eyes.”

This phrase signifies both as the common idiomatic expression meaning 'there's something wrong' and the literal interpretation, 'there is something [significant, because material, tangible] with his eyes'; the latter reading finds support in its echo: “Evelyn says angrily [...] 'Your animosity is *grounded on nothing*. There *must* be something *really* the matter with you” (emphasis added; 314). In this other instance, both idiomatic and literal meanings are present and made significantly more complex and forceful in being qualified by the similarly idiomatic/ literal reading of the emphasized

words. It signifies, in other words, as *you have no reason to be upset and your expression is without orientation and yet, you really are material.*

### 3. Corporeal Vision of Language

#### 3.1. Corporeal Vision in *Inferno* and *American Psycho*

Disciplinary modes are featured in the opening of Baudrillard's essay as he discusses how the accumulation of knowledge about the real world becomes the impetus for analysis, which is then redeployed to transform the real world: “paradoxically, the real world begins to disappear at the very same time as it begins to exist” (11). This transformation may also be considered in historical terms of the forces leading up to the Enlightenment followed by the production of the *disciplinary subject*. In other words, disciplined subjects are no longer 'real' individuals, but rather objects of social engineering, manufactured to accord with and reproduce the ideal required of the current system of production. In outpacing, in terms of efficiencies, factory system effected the former domestic system's demise and, in turn, created the factory worker through the deployment of disciplinary mechanisms (i.e. the time clock, hourly wage, constant supervision, etc.) which had not been present in the domestic system. A similar phenomenon, Baudrillard avers, occurs in the processes of developing language and concepts: “[b]y representing things to ourselves, by naming them and conceptualizing them, human beings call them into existence and hasten their doom, subtly detach them from their brute reality” (11). Simply stated, “the real vanishes into the concept” (12). Examining the novel's first line ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE provides an exemplary impetus for a discussion regarding disappearance through forces of conceptualization and analysis: Baudrillard reminds his readers that “‘to analyse' means literally 'to dissolve’” (11).

John Freccero's article “Infernal Irony: The Gates of Hell” is an invaluable source of background material from which to approach not only Dante's work, but as this thesis argues, *American Psycho*, as well: particularly in terms of vision, appearance and disappearance. Above, this thesis argued that Paul Owen's given name may refer to St. Paul the Apostle and the religious historical figure reappears here in relation to Dante. Freccero remarks that, “[t]o speak of vision in the Middle Ages was to evoke the experience of St. Paul who, in his letter to the Corinthians, claimed to been 'rapt to the third heaven,' where he saw things that it is not lawful for a man to reveal” (J. Freccero 769). Presuming that Paul's concept of “the third heaven” derived from his unique experience of meeting God face-to-face, exegetes speculated on the meaning for centuries. According to Freccero, St. Augustine's commentary provided the most authoritative conceptualization of Paul's experience, “distinguishing three distinct modes of vision”:

*Corporeal vision* was vision in the ordinary sense through the organs of the body. By spiritual vision, Augustine meant *imaginative vision*, whether stimulated directly by the senses or indirectly by writing, memory or dreams. Finally *intellectual vision* was of the highest order, bringing total understanding with it [...] a direct intuition of the Truth, “face to face” [...] without mediation or accommodation. (emphasis added; J. Freccero 769-70)

Freccero suggests that Dante may have attempted to represent, in the poetic compositions of his *Divine Comedy's* three parts – *Purgatorio*, *Inferno*, *Paradisio* – the three Augustinian conceptualizations of vision: respectively, the imaginative, corporeal and intellectual. The challenge hypothetically undertaken by Dante is present in the language's limited capacity for representing the disparate conceptualizations of vision. Writing, Freccero concedes, naturally belongs to the *imaginative* realm: “the interpretation of sensation” (771). “The difficulty” Dante faces is in writing the other two parts where “*corporeal* vision falls short of the imagination, while *intellectual* vision transcends it” (emphasis added; J. Freccero 771). It may follow that the corporeal vision informing Dante's *Inferno* may also significantly inform *American Psycho* as both texts begin with this *iconic* phrase. For the definition of icon, Freccero cites C.S. Pierce's theory of signs: “we might say that the words on the page cease to become symbols and become icons, signs that resemble their own significance” (J. Freccero 775). The relationship to Dante's *Inferno* may supply an alternative conception of the novel – one that marks the work as an intentional accomplishment in form and style – to those critics who have might considered its superficial aesthetics as a 'failure' to adequately *interpret sensation*. Dante's possible interest in representing *corporeal vision* is understood as providing support and further impetus for this thesis to examine the novel in terms of the corporeal 'material' of the novel's signs, as described in the above, ontological section on ontological language. Following the recognition that both *Inferno* and *American Psycho* begin with the 'same' inscription, this thesis considers how the construction of Dante's vision, as understood by Freccero, informs the appearance of the Dante's line in Ellis's novel.

Both Dante's and Ellis's text render a temporary, virtual disappearance of the line's significance. The “hypothetical first-time reader” would have encountered Dante's original text in the medieval period lacking the formal signals (eg. quotation marks, block letters, or italics) that would alert today's readers to the fact that the line is an inscription that the narrator is reading aloud (J. Freccero 774). In Dante's original text, the lack of these signals cause his reader “to wait until the fourth tercet in order to realize that the pilgrim has been thrust in front of the infernal portals and *sees* the text we have read” (emphasis in original; 774). A similar experience is effected in *American Psycho*. The quote from Dante appears as the first words of the novel in the beginning of a exceptionally lengthy, paragraph-long sentence. At the first formal break in the reading, *American Psycho's* readers likely

feel that they are in the company of a significant character in a significant setting, which may have the effect of rendering the already exceedingly “familiar” line from Dante, all but forgotten.

This thesis argues that the line's primary significance in *American Psycho* is buried in the second paragraph: requiring a particular interpretive sensitivity in the approach to the novel that many readers are not trained to attend to it. As an example of the lack of interpretive sensitivity consider Serpell's account:

It may feel as though we are slogging through the initial descriptions of consumer culture, the first few lists of items, but the readerly training to which Ellis's repetitions subject us soon allows us to accelerate, to skim, and for less conscientious readers, even to skip. [...]

They also make the first violent scene in the novel incredibly shocking; the effect is “sliding down the surface of things” only to slam into an aesthetic and ethical wall. (60-1)

Serpell's observation confirms the novel's success in mimicking Dante's poetics, which Freccero describes as a “poetic strategy [...] to pretend there is no poetic strategy, to represent the inscription with an implied replication of the text” (775). The line's iconicity is already marked in artistic renderings of the poem in the centuries directly following Dante: “they had no choice but to represent the gate by the text itself” (J. Freccero 775). When readers of *American Psycho* encounter the line, it is as “one of the most familiar passages in Western literature” and minimal effort is required of the reader to interpret its significance (J. Freccero 774). As Freccero recounts “[t]he pilgrim's difficulty resides in the interpretation of what he sees” (775). In effect, the quality of a temporary disappearance or the withholding of the line's significance – marked by the difference between seeing and interpreting – that had qualified the original line in Dante is preserved in the line's representation in *American Psycho*.

Carla Freccero, in her criticism of *American Psycho*, writes that this line from *Inferno* is “known to Dante scholars as 'infernal irony'” (C. Freccero 51). The irony Carla Freccero refers to follows John Freccero's observation that the pilgrim's journey actually begins when he “sees the inscription and wonders about its meaning [...] calling attention to *the fact that vision is not interpretation*” (emphasis added; J. Freccero 772). The “infernal irony” represents Baudrillard's concern with the disappearance of the real through processes of analysis: a process of knowledge that transforms the real “brute reality” into concepts. *Vision*, more precisely, the Augustinian intellectual vision that characterizes St. Paul's experience of coming face-to-face with Truth, disappears as meaning appears.

Dante's line appears in *American Psycho* as a translation, which may be considered as another step toward the consolidation of meaning's priority over that of the original vision, of "brute reality." The translation appearing in the novel is distinctly the work of John Ciardi<sup>6</sup> significantly of "the modern 'critical' school of translation" (Acocella 140):

Skeptical about the possibility, and the value, of reproducing word for word the content of the original (the Victorian ideal of translation), this group, [William J.] De Sua claims, turned instead to an interpretive type of translation, in order, if not to replace the original, at least to 'show where the treasure lies,' in accordance with Ezra Pound's recommendations in his *Make It New* ... [Ciardi's and Dorothy Sayers's] interpretations of Dante, coupled with the insistent emphasis that their "critical" method allows them to give these interpretations, lead to some very serious distortions of the text. Most obviously, their shared belief in the tanginess of Dante's language does no good service to that language; its subtleties tend to become banalities, and its more vigorous colloquial moments take on, particularly in Ciardi, a flat crudeness completely foreign to Dante's poetry. (Acocella 140, 142)

Paradoxically, in an effort to "show where the treasure lies," and particularly as this effort seems to have effected a distortion of the original, both the original and the translation appear, in their contingent relation to one another through the quality of their difference. For Joan Acocella, on the one hand, Ciardi's translation makes its appearance, ironically, as "subtleties [...] become banalities" and on the other, relative to Ciardi's "flat crudeness," Dante's language appears somehow nearer to its own originality. In other words, Dante's text and Ciardi's translation may only appear – in the evidence of Acocella's text – on the contingency of their relationship to one another: the perceived value of one informs the perceived value of the other.

Considering the original and the translation according to the "Algebra of Need," where the Need is specified as *appearance*, it follows that the contingency of their relationship may be more precisely considered as the subjectivation of the one by the other. As the other's subject, each becomes assigned a value that reflects its specific capacity to placate the other's immanent addiction to *appearance*: the Need to appear. It must be noted that, this thesis considers neither the original nor the translation to be literally constituted in, by or through *appearance*. Recall Burroughs's junk addiction. In the excerpt from *Naked Lunch*, the automobile and the physiological body of the junk

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<sup>6</sup>John Ciardi was a prominent member of the eminent, post-WWII Boston circle of poets, the editor of *Saturday Review* in the 1950's, a Dante scholar and translator, poet and critic. Incidentally he was "one of the first literary men, and maybe the first in print, to recognize *Naked Lunch* as a 'masterpiece'" (Birmingham). In his lengthy review of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* appearing on the dust jacket of the Olympia Press's first edition, Ciardi compares Burroughs to Dante in a convoluted reference: "No less a writer than Dante made it a principle of harmonious style deliberately to coarsen the writing when dealing with debased characters as his subject matter."

addict are assigned values by their capacity to be vehicles in service of the addiction: as vehicles, the automobile's capacity for greater speed awards it a greater value, relative to the limits of the physiological body's capacity for speed; in terms of these vehicles' technology, the automobile's technological capacity to deliver the junk to the addiction is vastly limited relative to the body's technological-physiological capacity. While neither the junk nor the junk addict are considered to be the Need, which remains immanent and apart – motivating (transcendent) and unmotivating (a temporary placation of the Need) according to the terms of duality – neither of the texts *are* their appearance, rather, they *are contingent* on their addiction to *appearance*, on their Need to appear. Both Dante's and Ciardi's texts appear through their marked difference from one another, beginning with the difference between the Italian and English languages. They continue to appear through notable differences in their aesthetic qualities. Dante's text continues to appear on the basis of its being the original-subject.

In conceiving Dante's text as the 'original-subject,' it is perceived – removed from its relation to Ciardi – in relation to the concept of 'originality.' The concept of originality, once recognized, may be generally be understood as assigning a persistent relative value to the 'original-subject.' This recalls the Baudrillard's concern of “the real vanish[ing] into the concept”:

The moment a thing is named, the moment representation and concepts take hold of it, is the moment when it begins to lose its energy – with risk that it will become a truth or impose itself as an ideology. We may say the same the of the Unconscious and its discovery by Freud. It is when a thing is beginning to disappear that the concept appears. (12)

It might be said that the 'original-subject' is assigned the highest value relative to the Need to appear in the moment of its appearance, and before it is conceptualized, named, represented and reproduced: each constituting immanent forces of disappearance, which may be conceived of as the interiorization of disciplinary logic in the being of the 'real.' It follows that the 'original-subject' is assigned the lowest value relative to the Need to appear in the circumstance of mass production, which might be considered as an exacerbation of the forces of disappearance.

The technological capacity of mass production constructs a realm that is further removed from the original: that is, even further removed than the subjects and technologies of discipline and reproduction from the “brute reality,” or what might be considered in Augustinian terms, as “a direct intuition of the Truth, “face to face” [...] without mediation or accommodation” (J. Freccero 770). According to John Freccero, Dante's *Inferno* represents an act of writing that is intentionally styled to appear as a “corporeal vision,” which is a character of vision that “falls short of imaginative vision” (771). This might suggest that appearance (as the object of corporeal vision) in

*American Psycho* – a narrative replete with references to mass produced objects and insofar as it may be understood in relation to Dante's *Inferno* – is not “stimulated directly by the senses or indirectly by writing, memory or dreams” (J. Freccero 769). Where *imaginative* vision is conceived of as an appearance in relation to stimuli, the logic according to which stimuli operate may be, potentially, characteristic of corporeal vision.

The logic of contemporary advertising communications for mass produced objects may be shown to significantly inform the language of *American Psycho*. The role of advertising might be described as mediating the distance between the consumer's imagination (the realm of sensory stimulation) and the consumer's arrival face to face with the object (Augustinian intellectual vision). In formal terms, advertising is neither the “imaginative vision” nor the “intellectual vision”: the commodity in a highly-materialistic society, such as is represented in the novel, may plausibly be considered as representing the conception of “Truth,” as the of the highest order of the visions in St. Augustine's writings (J. Freccero 769-70). In mediating the distance between the consumer's imaginative vision and their direct vision of the commodity, advertising logic may be seen as appealing to the imaginative vision by directly stimulating “the senses or indirectly by, writing, memory or dreams” (J. Freccero 769). Assuming a form of logic, advertising may be considered as a representation of a corporeal vision, with the Need to appear that is threatened by the significant forces of disappearance immanent to the characteristics of advertising (i.e. brand names, representation, conceptual values, mass production, etc.) Lastly, the significance given to 'appearance' in this thesis may be considered as derived from significance of appearance for advertising in relation to the production of economic value, followed by the inestimable influence of the advertising model on the conception of *American Psycho*.

### 3.1. Language Analysis: Evolution of the Disappearance of the Real

This thesis takes the term *appearance* from the philosophical discourse found in Jean Baudrillard's essay "Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?" which follows from the premise that the moment something makes its appearance also marks the beginning of its disappearance (10). What Baudrillard calls the "inviolable golden rule of duality" is inscribed on, what might be described as the immanent or interiorized level of phenomena. In other words, appearance must always occur at the expense of disappearance, and vice versa.

This analysis of *American Psycho* conceives the narrative as an ontological structure that follows an immanent logic described as the Need to appear. Deprived of the privileged position of the being within technology, this thesis contends that The Need to appear may be, in a sense, considered as a potential value-laden framework to conceive of a will to exist for the framework of technology, specifically the technology of language and the novel form.

The unconventional introduction of the novel's narrator on the first page is often mentioned in the criticism, yet, in lacking critical attention to appearance, the critics generally regard the instance as another indication of the novel's uncertainty. The uncertainty remains for Serpell, even as she carefully accounts for the form of the appearance in a "doubly removed mode: a second person pronoun in a quotation" (58). Significantly, the narrator's presence is pronounced by another character, Timothy Price, as he says "I mean the fact remains that no one gives a shit about their work, everybody hates their job, *I* hate my job, *you've* told me you hate yours" (emphasis in original, 3). In isolation, this manner of introducing the narrator is not entirely unconventional. However, as the narration is almost exclusively dominated by the voice and presence of Timothy Price for the first four pages, this must construct in the hypothetical first reader, without prior knowledge of the text, the occasion for a novel turn of events as the narration is completely handed over to the control of a first person narrator on page eight. Patrick Bateman emerges for the first time as the novel's narrator with the thought "I shiver" (8) – rendering the first instance of the embodied narrator as appearing in the circumstance of a body in transition: a proverbial coming in from the cold.

The phenomenon of *appearing*, being subject to the play of duality, is dependent upon the presence of a force of disappearance. In other words, the appearing-subject must also be a disappearing-

subject. This analysis does not by any means exhaust the variety of manners in which the narrator makes his appearance in the narrative. This exercise is merely intended to demonstrate the presence in the novel of an operational formula that leverages the opportunities for the narrator to *appear* in a novel. The opportunities for the narrator appear become present in the novel's virtually countless manifestations of contingencies, wherein the narrator may appear by assuming a quality of difference. Difference is considered to be a technique employed by the narrative to placate the narrator's Need to appear despite the imposing, ever-encroaching forces of disappearance that are particularly omnipresent in an social environment, such as the narrator's, that is thoroughly engaged in the consumption of mass produced commodities: where mass production signals uniformity and the ultimate disappearance of individuality. In the circumstance where the narrator is assigned the name "Bateman" (7) this threat of disappearance appears to be manifest in the dialogue, rendered in a common, violent idiom against a voice without attribution in the text that is characterized by a traditional, considerate perspective toward the 'individual.'

"Should we bring flowers?" [without attribution]

"Nah. Hell, you're banging her, Bateman. Why should we get flowers? [Price says] (7)

At the same time that the narrator appears – in the given sign of his name – he appears to be considerate: a quality that not only makes him appear unique in the present scene where he is seen in relation to Price's wholly inconsiderate response, this precedent of Bateman's identity being attributed the quality of a considerate individual establishes the opportunity for him to appear again, in a later scene, with inconsiderate behavior. In other words, it appears likely that the uncertainty that troubles the criticism of *American Psycho* may be the direct result of the narrator's interest in appearing in spite of disappearing, which leads to the 'appearance' of the disappearance of the real, that begins in the second chapter. This demonstration primarily traces what might be considered as an evolution of the narrator's appearance up to the disappearance of the real and does not presume to note every contingency even within this exercise's highly-limited frame of the first chapter.

It follows, that in order for the narrator to appear in the first person, the narrator must first not appear in the first person. The narrative is able to illustrate this by disclosing the narrator's presence in the second person (3) and then again in the third person surname (7). The filmic cues in these first pages, specifically "[p]an down to the Post" (the New York Post) (4) and "[p]anning down to the sidewalk there's an ugly old homeless bag lady holding a whip" (5), led Söderlind to conflate the "narrative voice" with a "movie camera" (Söderlind 70). This contributes to the impetus of her analysis that considers "Price as the external projection of Patrick's interiority" (Söderlind 70). Heise considers the filmic cues as evidence "underscor[ing] [...] *American Psycho's* highly stylized representations [...] condense the mean streets of the city" (Heise 156). The fact that both critics

consider the narrative, implicitly, in a framework of appearances seems to be the direct result, in these instances, of vision related to the filmic cues. Importantly, despite the direction given to the video camera's lens, the technology may generally be considered as an introduction of an objective perspective. Thus when Bateman appears in the first person, he also is appearing as a subjective perspective that is specifically located within a physiological body as opposed to the mechanical body of a camera.

Coincidentally, it is the act of taking off his Armani overcoat that causes him to “shiver” (8) and for his individuality to be conflated with that of Price's identity. In other words, the narrator's first appearance as the first person, subjective perspective of a 'human' (because of the physiological hint in “shiver”) is simultaneously met by uniformity's force of disappearance. Arriving at Evelyn's apartment, Courtney greets both characters:

I shiver and hand her my black wool Giorgio Armani overcoat and she takes it from me, carefully airkissing my right cheek, then she performs the exact same movements on Price while taking his Armani overcoat. (7)

Read literally, as she takes both of their “Armani overcoat[s]” and greets them both with “the exact same movements,” the only remaining distinctions between the two characters is temporal, indicated by “then” and the presence of a first and third person. Where Söderlind notes, in general terms that find support elsewhere in the narrative, that “Tim and Patrick are frequently confused for each other or referred to as one person” (71), this thesis conceives this “confus[ion]” as providing the essential circumstance of disappearance – a circumstance of more or less, established uniformity between Price and Bateman – that prepares for the narrator's subsequent appearances.

Evelyn, Bateman's girlfriend, is hosting a dinner party in this first chapter when Courtney greets the characters at the door and other elements in the pre-dinner scene at Evelyn's contribute to the reader's sense of Price and Bateman as interchangeable, a condition implying an established sense of uniformity. As Courtney explains to Patrick:

“We have to save Evelyn. She's been rearranging the sushi for the past hour. She's trying to spell your initials – the *P* in yellowtail, the *B* in tuna – but she thinks the tuna looks too pale [...] and she doesn't have enough yellowtail to finish the *B*” – Courtney breathes in – “and so I think she's going to spell Tim's initials instead. Do you mind?” she asks, only a bit worried. [...]

“I'm terribly jealous and I think I better talk to Evelyn,” I say, letting Courtney gently push me into the kitchen. (8)

The comment “I’m terribly jealous” appears to signify as *he doesn't really care* in the first appearance of this line to the reader as the hyperbolic qualifier, “terribly,” render an allusion to sarcasm. Furthermore, as the reader discovers that he does not discuss the matter with Evelyn, a recollected appearance of this line seems to confirm the reader's initial interpretation: *he doesn't really mean it*. Arriving in the Evelyn's kitchen, a space that Bateman should feel at ease in, the reader discovers that it is Price who feels at ease while Bateman remains in virtually silent unease.

“I told you to keep *Finlandia* in this place,” Tim mutters, looking through the bottles [...]

“She never has *Finlandia*,” he says to no one, to all of us. [Note the series of an absent audience, followed by a uniform audience coinciding in the attribution.]

“Oh god, Timothy. Can't handle Absolut?” Evelyn asks [...]

“Bateman. Drink?”

“J&B rocks,” I tell him, suddenly thinking it's strange that Meredith [Price's girlfriend] wasn't invited. (9)

Price offers Bateman a drink as if he were the host, or as if he were acting on behalf of the host.

Bateman takes the occasion to begin a process of distinguishing himself from Price on the basis of taste, which is an opportunity that appears here through the concept of choice, introduced by Price's shown preference for “*Finlandia*,” over “Absolut.” Price's preferred drink appears in the novel with an emphasis placed on the latter two syllables, signaling its distinction within the composition of the sign. While conceding that the particular arrangement of emphasis in Price's utterance may in fact accurately reflect a common pronunciation of the name, one perhaps derived from a real television commercial, lacking this special knowledge closes that line of interpretation off, leaving it to remain as speculation. Attributing the pronunciation to a voice may in fact be considered irrelevant, as the sign appearing on the visual level sufficiently illustrates the concept of a sign with the capacity of rendering choice between difference – a visual cue in the sign where in the narrative the notion choice makes its first appearance: between emphasized and non-emphasized letters, between verbal and visual interpretation, between individual preference and no preference, between *Finlandia* and Absolut, and for Bateman, presumably between Absolut and J&B. There is no evidence that Evelyn *keeps* specifically for Bateman, in the sense that she does not “keep *Finlandia* in this place” for Price, or simply happens to have J&B among “the bottles” (9).

In terms of the limits of ontological language – the sign may represent a physiological body affected by alcohol, but the language itself cannot appear affected by alcohol – renders virtually no distinct value associated with one alcoholic drink as opposed to another: marking its play here as, according to the framework of this thesis, only reflecting its capacity to appear in a state of relative visual

difference: in other words, to render the perception of choice amongst virtually interchangeable objects.

Directly after Bateman makes his choice and the language demonstrates its extensive capacity to appear in variety, the language appears in a pair of repetitions; a repetition of repetition; representations; reproductions. The extensive capacity of language to appear in variety and through variety, exponential numbers of contingent relations that constitute the vast potential of language to appear in opposition to uniformity: appearing in opposition to disappearing.

"Oh god. *It's a mess*," Evelyn gasps. "I swear I'm going to cry."

"*The sushi looks marvelous*," I tell her soothingly.

"*Oh it's a mess*," she wails. "*It's a mess*."

"*No, no, the sushi looks marvelous*," I tell her and in an attempt to be as consoling as possible I pick up a piece of the fluke and pop it in my mouth, groaning with inward pleasure, and hug Evelyn from behind; my mouth still full, I manage to say "Delicious."  
(emphasis added; 9)

Significantly, Evelyn is convinced that "a mess" has appeared, and this may be perceived as an allusion to the capacity of language to appear in excessive variety. In rendering the actual disappearance of the repetitious words and phrases, the revisited excerpt contains no reference to the sushi other "fluke" which is the name of a flatfish, but also signifies as (1) (n.) an unlikely chance occurrence, especially a surprising piece of luck and (2) (v.) to achieve (something) by luck rather than skill (Oxford Dictionaries). Furthermore, in this 'proofread' excerpt, Evelyn appears to appeal to "god" as she mourns. The fact that Bateman ingests the fluke and "manages to say 'Delicious'" begs to be considered in terms of the ontological character of language in a corporeal circumstance: this discussion appears below in relation to the influence of Dante's *Inferno* on *American Psycho*.

Significantly, on the next page, Bateman's physical appearance receives its first assessment and it appears thoroughly narcissistic: "Hi. Pat Bateman," I say, offering my hand, noticing my reflection in a mirror hung on the wall - and smiling at how good I look" (10). In the novel, this excerpt appears set apart in a paragraph of its own, so the indication that he is actually "offering his hand" and name to another character in the apartment is not an entirely lucid image of interaction. Furthermore this excerpt follows shortly after his entrance into the room that is occupied by strangers, who are literally strange: as he enters, he clears his throat – a common gesture used by a person to signal their person's presence – and is barely (or "warily") noticed.

"Ahem," I cough.

Vanden looks over warily, probably drugged to the eyeballs. Stash doesn't move.

"Hi. Pat Bateman," I say, offering my hand, noticing my reflection in a mirror hung on the wall - and smiling at how good I look.

*She takes it; says nothing.* Stash starts smelling his fingers.

Smash cut and I'm back in the kitchen. (emphasis added; 10)

The odd appearance of a semicolon here between "she takes it" and "says nothing" may perhaps be perceived as a signal that the language is not entirely intended to be interpreted within the terms of representative realism. Rather it could be read literally as the visual image that does not 'speak' to the matter of whether or not she has literally taken the offered "hand": the "hand," in the sense that is either detachable or a thing apart from Bateman's body, in a similar sense that the word *hand* appears separately from the word *body*. This sense of separation literally appears in the narcissistic element of the excerpt, where the image of Bateman is represented in the mirror. The confusion generated through the narcissistic element, insofar as Bateman may appear to be introducing himself and offering his hand to the mirror, lends sufficient plausibility for the entire interaction for to be considered in terms of language's full capacity for representation without real consequence: that is Bateman may literally offer his "hand" to Vanden and Stash, who then curiously "[s]tarts smelling his fingers" while not, in any real terms, suffer the loss of his hand. The final line in the scene, another filmic cue, signals the work of representation in the scene.

"Back in the kitchen," where things are really heating up between Evelyn and Price, the liberation that the above discussion seems to afford to Bateman through his access to language on the representational level disappears as Evelyn gives him instructions to follow, just before she effectively exacerbates the interchangeability of Bateman and Price by disappearing with Price.

"I have to talk to you," Evelyn says.

"What about?" I come up to her.

"No," she says and then pointing at Tim, "to Price." (11)

Two pages earlier Price began to construct the premise of their mutual disappearance out of literally nothing: "Price hands me a drink and walks toward the living room while trying to remove something invisible from his blazer. 'Evelyn, do you have a lint brush?'" (9). Shortly thereafter Price repeats Evelyn description of Bateman as the "boy next door": a common expression signifying as normal (i.e. harmless). "Boy next door.' Tim smirks and nods, then reverses his expression and *hostilely* asks Evelyn again if she has a lint brush" (emphasis added; 10). Incidentally, Tim's "smirk" indicates he knows something ahead of time: that Evelyn's next-door neighbor would be murdered and her head would appear in Bateman's freezer (112). The escalation in Price's expressed hostility toward Evelyn appears without reason in the narrative and its appearance is repeated,

though with in a variation of the word “hostilely,” just before the two of them disappear, after Evelyn addresses Bateman.

“No,” she says and then pointing at Tim, “to Price.”

Tim still glares at her fiercely. I say nothing and stare at Tim's drink. (11)

Bateman's act of “star[ing] at Tim's drink” recalls the discussion on “*Finlandia*” and language's capacity for variety. Through the conception of language's acceptance of variety, hypothetically perceived by Evelyn as “a mess,” potentially offers a framework for perceiving Evelyn's disappearance with Price as more than a search for a lintbrush and more than a simple conversation: she is in a variety of relationships with, at least, Bateman, “the boy next door” and the hostile, deviant, Price. In consideration of the significance of Judeo-Christian concepts in the novel, as are discussed below, it may appear reasonable to consider Evelyn's name in reference to the story of Eve's problematic relationship with God, the serpent and the Tree of Knowledge. Yet, in contrast to the story in the book of Genesis, *Evelyn's* innocence remains in tact, relative, that is, to Bateman's. In the second chapter of the novel titled “Morning,” Bateman consumes three varieties of *apple* – a “Japanese apple-pear,” “apple butter” and “apple-cinnamon tea” (26-7). Furthermore, in this chapter the narrator describes his apartment in terms that could be considered as a contemporary materialist's vision of paradise: loaded with expensive high-tech entertainment equipment and appliances, expensive artwork, designer furniture, and a hygiene routine reflective of a spa-quality treatment. Further speculation is beyond the scope of this thesis. It only remains to mention that support for this hypothetical inversion of the traditional conception of Eve's corruption may be literally found to revolve around Bateman's failure to choke Luis Carruthers:

my index fingers touch each other just above Luis's Adam's apple. I start to squeeze, tightening my grip, but it's loose enough to let Luis turn around - still in slow motion - so he can stand facing me (147).

Following Evelyn's instructions, Patrick finishes preparing the table and the aggression that began to appear in the disguise of sarcasm in the expression “I'm terribly jealous,” as Price and Bateman began to be perceived as interchangeable, appears to have reached its limit of containment. The guests, seated at the table:

[wait] for Evelyn and Timothy to return from getting Price a lint brush. [...] [They] come back perhaps twenty after we've seated ourselves and Evelyn looks only slightly flushed.

Tim glares at me as he takes the seat next to mine [...] (11)

As the reason for “Tim's glare” is never explicitly stated or even alluded to in the text, it may simply be considered as marking the boiling point for Bateman's antagonism. In other words, he has

internalized his antagonism while the notion of interchangeability has effectively limited his capacity to appear in the value of an individual.

Insofar as his appearance, contingent on the basis of name (or initials) and body (the assumed affair with Price), has succumbed to uniformity, the narrator following an objective to appear evokes a novel contingency, a system of values that has is traditionally characterized by disagreement, namely politics. In the circumstance of this antagonism having reached its threshold, Patrick's *re-appears* by delivering a political monologue at the dinner table, the content of which appears as a laundry list of socio-economic and etho-political statements, some of which appear contrary the opinions that Price has uttered or made allusions to since the beginning of the novel. The monologue begins to appear under the surface of the narrative as Price reads the headline from a magazine titled *Deception*:

“The Death of Downtown,” he says: then pointing at each word in the headline, “Who-gives-a-rat's-ass?” [...]

“Hey,” Vanden says, as if she was insulted. “*That* affects us.”

“Oh ho ho,” Tim says warningly. “*That* affects us? What about the massacres in Sri Lanka, honey? Doesn't that affect us too?” [...]

“Oh come on, Price,” I say. “There are more important problems than Sri Lanka to worry about. Sure our foreign policy is important, but there *are* more pressing problems at hand.”

“Like what?” he asks without looking away from Vanden. “By the way, why is there an ice cube in my soy sauce?”

“No,” I start hesitantly. “Well we have to end apartheid for one. And slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger [...] Better and more affordable health care for the elderly, control and find a cure for the AIDS epidemic, clean up environmental damage [...] We have to ensure that college education is affordable for the middle class and protect Social Security for senior citizens [...] and reduce the influence of political action committees.”

The table stares at me uncomfortably, even Stash, but I'm on a roll.

“But economically we're still a mess [...] We also need to provide training and jobs for the unemployed as well as protect existing American jobs from unfair foreign imports [...] At the same time we need to promote economic growth [...] hold down interest rates while promoting opportunities for small businesses and controlling mergers and big corporate takeovers”

Price nearly spits up his Absolut after this comment but I try to make eye contact with each one of them [...] [14]

Importantly, Price is shocked by Bateman's statement which signals that he has acquired his individual appearance, yet again, in his *mimetic*, political candidate's speech-act replete with economic-political *analysis* reflecting a well-informed, reasonable, *bi-partisan* consciousness, Bateman is threatened by an accumulation of broader social forces effecting disappearance: specifically in his assumption of mimetic representation; in his orientation toward idealized as opposed to *realized* aims; and in the course of thorough analysis – Baudrillard reminds his readers “‘to analyse' literally means 'to dissolve'” (11). As the general reader feels prepared to follow along in agreement with Bateman's stated political concerns, a consensus appears that transcends the 'border' between the contemporary worlds of the novel and of the reader. The narrative's logic oriented toward the production of appearance is sensitive of this encroaching uniformity and responsive in constructing another 'novel' turn of events, a new contingency through which to appear differently.

Bateman's internal thought process appears for the first time in the narrative, significantly at the point of an explicit reference to vision as he “tr[ies] to make eye contact with each of them.” What appears as the thought process is the disciplinary logic adjusted by the post-disciplinary circumstance of mass production.

Price nearly spits up his Absolut after this comment but I try to make eye contact with each one of them, especially Vanden, who if she got rid of the green streak and the leather and got some color – maybe joined an aerobics class, slipped on a blouse, something by Laura Ashley – might be pretty. But why does she sleep with Stash? He's lumpy and pale and has a bad cropped haircut and it as least ten pounds overweight; there's no muscle tone beneath the black T-shirt.

Bateman's disciplinary analysis of Vanden and Stash, “artiste [types] from ohmygod the 'East' Village” (5), is explicitly informed by values attributable to the concept of a *model* appearing in advertisements, a form, which carries in its sign the immanent disappearance of the real. Rather than reflecting an interest in disciplinary techniques that transform individuals into the biopower to reproduce the discipline values through an interiorization.

The conceptual disappearance of the real is formally produced in the novel through an apparent discord between what appears in the realm of the body and what appears in the realm of the narrator's thoughts. The character of his conscious thought concerned with reproducing models and attended by misogyny and materialism strongly conflicts with the character of his voiced utterance. The conclusion of his monologue, now turned toward addressing social and ethical concerns, makes him *appear* to the witness subject as disingenuous, duplicitous, uncertain. To the other dinner

guests, not privy to his thoughts, continue to perceive him by character of his statements regarding his social and ethical concerns. In a sense, this di-vision recalls the schizophrenia inherited by the western world, of the separation between being and praxis, where the witness-subject has the privilege of seeing the being in language, the characters in the world of the narrator perceive him only in relation to his actions.

“But we can't ignore our social needs either. [...] provide food and shelter for the homeless and oppose racial discrimination and promote civil rights while promoting equal rights for women [...] encourage a return to traditional moral values and curb graphic sex and violence on TV, in movies, in popular music, everywhere. Most importantly we have to promote general social concern and less materialism in young people.”

I finish my drink. The table sits facing me in total silence. Courtney's smiling and seems pleased. Timothy just shakes his head in bemused disbelief. Evelyn is completely mystified by the turn the conversation has taken and she stands, unsteadily, and asks if anyone would like dessert. [14-15]

Despite the duplicitous nature of Bateman's identity that appears in the moment of crisis as the two contrary ethical dispositions collide, the content of the monologue persists as a contingent system of values: constituting potentialities for the narrator's subsequent appearances. Each item on this list of concerns – homelessness, racism, feminism, traditional morality, curbing representations of graphic sex and violence in media, materialism – principles a model that by virtue of antagonism, allows him to pursue his objective to appear. This early scene in the novel appears to render a model of appearance that is based on the antagonism between the apparatus (Price) and its subject (Bateman). There are many instances in the early pages of the novel to support this relationship; recall the very Bateman's very first appearance in the “doubly removed mode: a second person pronoun in a quotation” (Serpell 58) as Price, says “*I hate my job, you've told me you hate yours*” (emphasis in original, 3). Finally, at the moment that Bateman's conscious appears, it appears to have internalized the model of antagonism as a productive model for appearances.

Having interiorized the antagonistic model conditioning duality, this antagonistic duality conditions the relationship between the world wherein Bateman appears (the fictional, albeit contingent world) and Bateman's consciousness (the limits of imagination), the question of which is ever actually appearing seems to reflect the irresolvable relation between the representation and the 'real' (following the introduction of the Archimedean point). The result of this dynamism, which produces virtually endless opportunities for the construction of new value systems, of new contingencies, plays itself out throughout the entirety of the novel – to the point where the narrator, near the very of the novel, now turned self reflexive seems to admit to this process: “My self is

fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being. My personality is sketchy and unformed [...] this confession has meant *nothing* ... ” (emphasis in original, 352). This “*nothing...*” concludes the passage temporary inner monologue, a technique that appears only in this chapter of the novel. Bateman returns to seemingly important conversation with Jean, his secretary, while they are out on date.

“Appearances can be deceiving,” I admit carefully.

“No,” she says, shaking her head, sure of herself for the first time. “I don't think they are deceiving. They're not.”

“Sometimes, Jean,” I explain, “the lines separating appearance – what you see – and reality – what you don't become, well, blurred.”

“That's not true,” she insists. “That's simply not true.”

“Really?” I ask, smiling.

“I didn't use to think so,” she says. “Maybe ten years ago I didn't. But I do now.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, interested. “You used to?” (353)

Jean's response that begins with “I didn't think use to think so” has an uncertain character in relation to her previous statements as well as Bateman's. Importantly, even within a section that seems to explicitly challenge the framework's premise with language conditioned by Jean's love, simply presents an yet another novel contingency through which Bateman may appear.

... a flood of reality. I get an odd feeling that this is a crucial moment in my life and I'm startled by the suddenness of what I guess passes for an epiphany. There is nothing of value I can offer her. For the first time I see Jean as uninhibited; she seems stronger, less controllable, wanting to take me into a new and unfamiliar land – the dreaded uncertainty of a totally different world. I sense she wants to rearrange my life in a significant way – her eyes tell me this and I see truth in them, I also know someday she will be locked in the rhythm of my insanity. [...] This relationship will probably lead to nothing ... this didn't change anything. I imaging her smell clean, like tea ... (354)

The novel's final words THIS IS NOT AN EXIT are haunting as long as they remain explained. While it was posited above that these words might mark the reader's departure from the novel's flow of communication, it is only to enter the flow of communication in the 'real world' where everything struggles against their own disappearance, even the novel must stay in print.

#### 4. Findings and Suggestions for Further Research

Constructing an analysis on the basis of an interest in what the subject can do, presents an immanent challenge that in doing so, in allowing the language to do what it can and then describe it ultimately contributes to its limitations. It is my hope that, contrary than close the text with this analysis, this perspective brings livens it. As acknowledged the scope of this thesis was limited primarily to the first chapter: from the appearance of what might be considered in the vein of realism to the disappearance of the real. This leaves the task of the examining how an addiction to appearance may continue, and specifically under what contingencies within a framework readily acknowledged as a space where the real has disappeared from.

This paper has attempted to argue that Bret Easton Ellis's controversial novel *American Psycho* is an extraordinarily-controlled, yet radically-playful, literary novel that offers significant insight into the contemporary human condition. The ethical concerns related to the novel's depictions of misogyny and violence problematized the novel's public appearance were exacerbated by the absences of a consoling etiology, a system of justice and, moreover, recourse to a system of certain meaning. It was these latter features that prompted this examination to discover an alternative, non-traditional and ultimately, in some cases, anti-traditional framework for its discussion. Not only did the publication of Gilles Deleuze's on a *society of control* coincide with that of the novel, the concept provided a strong philosophical reference for accepting the novel's feature of uncertainty.

Following the assumption that the narrator's fundamental objective is to appear steers the analysis toward examinations of contingency: on what basis does the narrator appear? The contingency of the reader resolves the framework of the narrator's appearance. The reader transmuted, becomes the narrator's witness. The commonly discussed and never resolved uncertainty of – whether or not the narrator exists or is a figment of the imagination and likewise, whether the murders occur or were imagined – is resolved by this framework: the witness can testify with certainty that he / she has witnessed the murders.

This leads to an in-depth examination of the language's formal means of producing contingency, including the limited value of the subject-narrator. The narrator-subject's value as a vehicle through

which language may appear is conditioned, by the subject's relation uncertain terms in the history of knowledge, such as the exemplary question of the after-life.

I believe, given the time, that the logic proposed in this examination of the narrative form could be applied to the entirety of the novel. The notions of *appearance* and *disappearance* – insofar as they are related to the notions of the *real* and the representation – offer, perhaps, a more interesting reason for applying this logic to the novel's trajectory. Theoretically, an exploration using similar logic would reveal Ellis's creative capacities to create opportunities in the language for the narrator to appear in relation to the forces of disappearance, among which the essential contingency of maintaining the interest of the subject-witness must be counted, if not entirely prioritized.

Resorting to the extreme violence depicted in the narration reflects an extreme will to create and an anarchic tendency in terms of author background research and freedom of expression. With regard to this 'delimited' framework, the work, which runs for almost 400 pages, presumably exhausts the Ellis's ability to construct additional variations of narrator's contingency. As these contingencies are, in a sense, a direct reflection of the contingencies appearing to the creator, an 'exhaustive' exegesis may have the significant potential to 'catalog' the modes of contingency available to the being in the world in language, or at least, available to Bret Easton Ellis. Considering this as a catalog of contingencies of a particular milieu of Manhattan, NY at the height of advanced capitalism may considerably contribute to the project's allure.

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