UNIVERSITÉ CHARLES-DE-GAULLE – LILLE III

UFR ANGELLIER

FICTIONALISATION AND IDENTITY IN BRET EASTON ELLIS'S GLAMORAMA

Note de recherche
présentée en vue de l'obtention du diplôme de Maîtrise

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

'I'm just a – I'm just a whole lot of different simple people.'

F.S. Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*.

Published in 1998, *Glamorama* is Bret Easton Ellis's fifth and latest work. It took eight years to the author of the controversial *American Psycho* to publish this novel, mainly because of personal problems delaying his writing. In the wake of writers such as Denis Cooper or Jay Mc Inerney, Bret Easton Ellis is regarded as belonging to a literary movement born in the 1980s called by the media "the Brat-Pack", due to the themes tackled in their novels: the indolent lives of rich, consumption-crazed young people considering life with apathy and distrust, spending their time watching television, shopping, taking drugs or sunbathing, in a postmodern, post-punk world where morality has been overcome by a total sense of loss.

Glamorama has also been considered to be a kind of follow-up to Ellis's *The Rules of Attraction*, written ten years before and staging several of the same characters in their student life at Camden University, a fictional equivalent for the author's Bennington College, where he was a student when he published his first novel, *Less Than Zero*(1985).

However, *Glamorama* stands in opposition with Ellis's earlier novels in the sense that the text is organised around a strong plot and along a chronological line necessary to the development of a mysterious conspiracy that will end up swallowing the hero. The notion of plot was quite incidental in the author's previous works, which tended to focus more on stylistic issues and general satirical themes, such as apathy, alienation and the disappearance of feelings and human contacts in favour of an extended mode of consumption. Here, the notion of plot is given a strong importance, since the satirical side of the novel springs from the treatment of the narration, its organization and its paradoxes.

Plot is used in the two senses of the word, and features prominently in *Glamorama*: the plot of the story stages the hero as he becomes trapped into various layers of fiction, a victim of a mysterious conspiracy closing in on him. The plot against the main character

corresponds to the plot of the novel, thus erasing the limits between the narration and the diegesis: the two dimensions of the novel are intertwined, so much that it is impossible to summarize the plot of the novel without incorporating the narration itself, which is to say the way the story is told.

The story is that of Victor Johnson, also known as Victor Ward, a self-proclaimed "quasi-famous" fashion model in search for a greater celebrity. At the beginning of the book he is involved in the opening of a night club with partner in business Damien Ross and assistants Beau, J.D and Peyton. During the preparations for the opening night, we learn about his lifestyle and the problems he has concerning an incriminating photograph of him and lover Alison Poole in a delicate situation. A love triangle is set up between Victor, Damien, Damien's girlfriend Alison and his lover Lauren (who is also Victor's lover, in addition to Alison and his girlfriend Chloe Byrnes.) Mysterious threats begin to appear when Victor is chased by two Jeeps in Manhattan, a chase followed by strange faxes announcing "I know who you are and I know what you're doing." In search for a DJ, Victor incidentally meets a man, F. Fred Palakon, who offers him 300 000 dollars to go to Europe and find an ex-girlfriend of his, Jamie Fields, to bring her back to the United States. Victor refuses at first, but when at the club opening night all his secrets and betrayals are uncovered he decides to leave and boards a ship to London. He finds Jamie Fields quite easily, and stays for a while in London. During this time he meets Jamie's friends, Bentley Harrods, Bruce Rhinebeck, Tammy Devol and Jamie's boyfriend Bobby Hughes, a former supermodel Victor admires. He lives with them in a big house, where he finds out that all of them are involved in murders and bombings. He is progressively trapped into the group, and moves with them to Paris. In France Victor experiences drug-induced difficulties to stay close to reality and loses touch with the world as camera teams start invading the narrative space, creating confusion by the different films they are supposed to shoot about Victor, the terrorists or anything else. He is given drugs by the terrorists who keep him with them, friendly at moments, but threatening at others. The terrorist cell starts dissolving, and its members die one after the other. Victor, after witnessing the death of his ex-girlfriend Chloe in a hotel room in Paris, goes on in search for Bobby to kill him, which he does after a brief fight. He is nonetheless still a captive to a mysterious conspiracy seemingly organised by Palakon himself, and is flown to Milan where he spends weeks in a hotel room with a "bodyguard" actually here to keep him indoors, called Davide. When the latter is killed in a moment of privacy with a supposed prostitute, Victor is left alone in Milan. He tries to contact his sister in New York only to talk to Victor Johnson, that is to say himself: the

narrator therefore finds out that he has been replaced in New York, and finishes his narration by losing himself in the picture of a tapestry hung in the hotel bar in Milan.

This brief account is sufficient to show that the novel plays with its own fictionality, and many levels of fiction add up to create a maze in which the narrator gets lost. The main device used is the destruction of the boundary between the real and the fictional: the characters are involved in the shooting of several movies, and they are presented as actors playing their own part in a film about their own lives. The uncanny presence of camera teams creates a complete defamiliarization in the fictional space, and the identity of the characters becomes evanescent: they are at the same time themselves, actors playing themselves, and empty shells invested by an actor at some point of the films. By making his characters even more fictional than they are as characters in a novel, Ellis creates a strange and absurd disconnectedness of the self which echoes back to his former works, in which characters are interchangeable and live in a Disneyfied world of easy consumption and money.

Dealing with the worlds of the fashion industry and international terrorism, *Glamorama*, as the facetious titles suggests it, is the satire of a society obsessed by image and status, losing itself into its own game of perpetual representation. It offers a criticism of the omnipresence of the media in contemporary society, and establishes a parallel between its own way of fictionalising characters through images and the fictionalisation of the real in our society, television imposing thoughts and ideas on audiences, with the result that individual desires are erased by conventions about what to consume and how to live. What is suggested is that the media not only adapt the real to their purposes, but that they construct the real to fit desires they have also created.

Glamorama can be seen as falling into two parts, illustrated by two quotations serving as epigraphs to the novel, one from Krishna and one from Hitler. There is a bright side of the story followed by a darker one. The novel is first centered on the fashion world, and it capitalizes on the fact that models are possibly the best example of fictional constructs in our world: they are actually characters, shaped by the modeling industry to fit any commercial purpose, and are therefore alienated from themselves in this process. The second part is a dark echo of the first, focusing on the terrorist activities of former models, and showing how absurd terrorism has become because of its need for mediatization (which is equivalent with loss of meaning). The implicit comparison with the world of fashion states the hazardous dimension of such fictionalized subversions of the self.

The purpose of this dissertation will be to examine the devices of fictionalisation at work in *Glamorama*, to show how they are articulated with the theme of identity and dissolution of the self, and to analyse the resulting consequences both for the fictional space of the novel and for the conception of contemporary society presented in the text.

The first part of this dissertation will be devoted to the examination of the hermeneutic quest, which in the novel brings forth a comparison between the role of the narrator and the role of the reader: the story is presented in the form of a postmodern picaresque novel, with numerous adventures happening to the hero in various places with various characters, all of them united under the predominant theme of conspiracy. The narrator has to establish links of causal relationship between all the elements, and this process can be assimilated to the reader's quest: how to process the organisation of the web of characters in the novel, their role in relation to the conspiracy, along with their belonging in particular places. This will be followed by an analysis of the postmodern devices used to subvert the organisation of the plot, how they create meaning in a retroactive way, metaphorized in particular by the growing presence of cameras setting a new perspective to the plot itself and inviting the reader to look for clues in an environment of noise and confusion. The deciphering of the text will then come under scrutiny: *Glamorama* manages to conceal meaning by creating a surrounding of noise which must be actualised permanently.

The second section will be devoted to the concept of fictionality, how it is played on in the novel and how the blurring of limits makes the novel a multi-fictional work. The present essay will then move on to a specific form of fictionality, the exploitation of various intertexts and the integration of different kinds of characters and genres as opening possibilities for interpretation while creating new noise the reader must cooperate with. One of the most obvious interpretation that are activated in this multi-facetted text is based on satire.

The final section will tackle the dual satire at work in the novel and a potential exploitation: how the fashion industry and the terrorist world can be compared and interpreted in terms of social criticism; at the same time metaleptic and partly autobiographic, *Glamorama* suggests that literature, and art in general, is to be considered as a way to cope with absurdity.

PART I
THE HERMENEUTIC QUEST

1.1 Victor's picaresque adventures

Glamorama can be considered as a kind of postmodern picaresque novel, telling the adventures of a young hero through various places and sets of characters, gaining wisdom from experience. Born in Spain in the middle of the 16th century, the picaresque form has been adapted by various authors in the world in the following centuries. The general features which can be made out of the picaresque form are, for some of them, present in a similar way in *Glamorama*. According to critics, the picaresque novel nearly always introduces the same themes and narratological devices: first, the birth of the hero has a bearing on all his future life; his (for the picaro is nearly always a male character) childhood is difficult and the hero leaves his home quite early. French critic Didier Souiller establishes that

> Le roman picaresque devient ainsi *roman d'apprentissage,.* . . et le récit se fractionne sous l'action de trois elements:
> 1/ L'itinéraire géographique.
> 2/ Le passage par différents maîtres (ou emplois ou maris ou rôles sociaux).
> 3/ Les récits librements insérés.[1]

Indeed, a comparison can be established between Victor's adventures and the picaresque technique, but also with the form of the bildungsroman. We are told the story of the main protagonist as he travels to different places, meets different people and goes through different experiences. Though the existence of embedded narratives in *Glamorama* is not very clear, Victor is still confronted to a whole set of characters, places and difficulties he must adapt to.

> Deux épreuves sont rituellement imposées au picaro:
> 1/ Le séjour en prison: lieu assimilé à l'Enfer, . . . c' est le comble de l'abaissement, le règne de l'arbitraire et d'une caricature de justice.
> 2/ L'amour: le roman picaresque est fondamentalement misogyne. . . le picaro est incapable de galanterie et se défie des femmes dont la duplicité est supérieure à la sienne.

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[1] Didier Souiller, *Le Roman picaresque* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1980) 58.

Though Victor is not literally speaking sent to jail, he still undergoes a form of captivity under the surveillance of the terrorist cell. The fear of women and their relative absence from the plot are also present in Ellis's novel. All these elements, classic to a picaresque novel, are however subverted by a tendency to blur them and make them quite unstable within the narrative space.

1.1.1 The web of characters

The set of characters in *Glamorama* is organized in such a way that it seems that all revolve around Victor, who is the central protagonist. Most of the events we witness have something to do with him, even those which seem detached from him at first, and the same goes for the characters. The reader discovers them in two different ways: in a chronological order as in any given text, but the formation of a conspiracy also defines the characters in a retroactive way, adding meaning to their former attitudes or words.

1.1.1.1 Introduction of the two sets of characters

First, as Victor introduces them into the narrative, that is to say in a linear way. From the first page we are gradually introduced to a lot of characters: at first, JD and Peyton, Victor's assistants for the opening of his night club, are present. Then come the reporter from *Details* magazine and Beau (a third assistant) then Damien (Victor's associate for the club) and so on. As the narrative unfolds we as readers are confronted with dozens of characters and names, the latter not necessarily equalling the other, as we shall see later.

In terms of structure, the novel can be considered as falling into two different sections, and this has a bearing on the role of the various characters belonging in each part. First, the bright side of the book revolves around Victor being about to open a night club in New-York; he is the "It Boy of the moment" (G 54), famous and rich. His chaotic relations to other people forces him to go away. He accepts a job a man called Palakon offers him: to go to Europe to find an ex-girlfriend of his and bring her back to the USA. However, as soon as Victor arrives in Europe, he gets trapped into an organisation of models turned terrorists, and can no longer go back to the United States. This heralds the dark side of the book, illustrated by the second quotation which serves as an epigraph to the novel, a sentence by Hitler ("You make a mistake if you see what we do as merely political") whereas the first quotation from Krishna ("There was no time when you nor I nor these

kings did not exist") corresponds to the first part of the story: the kings in question can be assimilated to the famous in general, but also to the omnipresence of the conspiracy in the novel: it is always present, even if the reader is not aware of the situation in the first part of the text. The "kings" are therefore the key characters in the plot, those who know what is going to happen and act according to a superior will emanating from the narrative itself.

1.1.1.2 Defamiliarization

Originally a term coined by Russian Formalism, defamiliarization is " the usual English translation of *ostranenie* (literally, 'making strange')"[2] and argues that "the essential purpose of Art is to overcome the deadening effects of habit by representing familiar things in unfamiliar ways."[3] The first knowledge the reader develops about the characters is slowly deconstructed by new issues being raised about the two parts of the text.

In each of these parts, the characters do not have the same status. In the first part, they are rather stable entities and seem to have little depth: they are rapidly characterized, and soon dismissed from the story.

For example, the first character we are introduced to is someone who doesn't even have a name: she is "the 'reporter' from *Details*" (G 6) and is thus presented: " Assignment: follow me around for a week. Headline: THE MAKING OF A CLUB . Girl: push-up bra, scads of eyeliner, a Soviet sailor's cap, plastic flower jewelry, rolled-up copy of *W* tucked under a pale, worked-out arm. Uma Thurman if Uma Thurman was five feet two and asleep." This is all the reader will know about this character, which is rather useless. Even the more important characters are presented in a very detached, objective way, which does not enable the reader to invest them with some specificity. For example, to introduce the reader to his girlfriend, Chloe Byrnes, Victor provides us with a mere biography: "Chloe was born in 1970, a Pisces and CAA client. Full lips, bone-thin, big breasts (implants), long muscular legs, high cheekbones, large blue eyes . . . ." (G 32)

On the other hand, those important, more regular characters are given some depth by becoming mysterious in the second part. As Victor goes deeper into paranoia and ignorance, the other characters are endowed with a mysterious side: we, like Victor, may suspect any of them are part of the whole conspiracy. This defamiliarization of the characters brings on

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[2] David Lodge, "Defamiliarization", in *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 1992), 53.
[3] ibid.

new interest for the reader, and affects the novel in a retroactive way. In the end all the characters are perceived as blurred unstable entities whose role cannot be clearly defined.

Within this multitude of characters, some emerge as being more important in the building of the diegesis. They are more relevant and can be termed as key characters. They represent different steps in the adventures of the main protagonist, ending one part of the story, starting another one or re-actualising what precedes their appearance in the book by going deeper into the motives at the heart of the events. The issue of the conspiracy reinforces this process of change since its imprecise quality creates confusion: any item of the text may therefore have something to do with the global conspiracy.

1.1.1.3 The conspiracy

The first part ends with the club opening party: Victor and Damien have managed to organize the evening (even though a definite list of guests is never established) and start the party, only to realize that their respective girlfriends are wearing the same dress, a first intimation of the "impersonator" motif that pervades the novel. At the center of the argument is a character, Alison Pool, who is both Damien's girlfriend and Victor's lover. She makes it quite explicit that everything is over for him in this part of the book, in the role of a club-opener: "'If you think Damien's ever going to let you open a fucking *door* let alone a club after he finds out you're fucking his little girlfriend you're more pitifully deluded than I ever thought possible.'" (G 154) After this episode, the narrative slides to a more unstable state and event though no one in particular seems to be responsible for this change but Victor himself, we learn later that everything has been planned and organized, and that Alison Poole and Lauren Hynde are especially involved in this manipulation, which Lauren admits a few pages later when she tells Victor:

'See, Victor, the problem is you've *got* to know things,' she says. 'But you don't. . . . I'm sure you'll wake up and figure it all out' she says. 'I wouldn't necessarily bet on it but I think you'll figure it all out. In the end.'(G 173)

This sums up the situation in which Victor is all along the novel: he is not aware of the reality of things going on around him, and he gradually discovers the plot of the story, which is also a plot against himself.

1.1.1.4 A three-layered conspiracy

The web of characters is organized on a three-part basis. The first set of characters corresponds to those living in New-York, and revolve around Victor during the opening of the club. The second set are those models-turned-terrorists Victor finds himself caught with, under the supervision of Bobby Hughes, the leader of the terrorist group and Jamie Field's (Victor's former girlfriend at college) boyfriend. On a third level are characters linked to the conspiracy but whose identity remains blurred: they are Victor's father (known as Senator Johnson,) the Wallaces and Marina Cannon (a.k.a. Marina Gibson) on the QE2 ship, the filming teams and the substitutes, as we will term those characters who take the place of others: for example, the fifth part of the novel is narrated by a character who seems to be (and claims to be) Victor Johnson (Victor Ward's real last name.) He becomes a substitute for the previous Victor, who we know is detained in a hotel in Milan. This new Victor takes the place of the former, not only in his everyday life and decisions, but also as the narrator of *Glamorama*. This is quite disturbing for the reader, since they have the same name, the same attitude, look alike and the substitute is not seen as different by his friends. We only know that this is not Victor because Victor cannot be in this situation.

1.1.1.5 The actors of the conspiracy

The substitutes, since there are several of them, are the visible side of the conspiracy: they allow a change in the situation without the context needing any change. Characters are replaced so that everything in the novel converges toward an end that has already be chosen by the conspirators. In this context, the reader may be suspicious of any character in the book.

Accordingly, one of the most important character is also the most mysterious: F. Fred Palakon. He seems to be the one in control of the whole diegesis, as Jamie tells Victor:

"Your father wanted you . . . out of the country . . . . Palakon did that . . . but the people who don't want your father elected . . . also were in touch with . . .Palakon and . . . they had something else in mind. . . . Either way Palakon couldn't lose. He set it all up." (G 422)

He is the keystone to the structure of possibilities building the conspiracy of which Victor is the victim: he first sends Victor to Europe in the search of an ex-girlfriend, Jamie Fields, right after the moment when Victor loses his position in the New York set of characters. He seems to be in contact with Victor's father, and this adds a political dimension to the conspiracy, supposedly organized by Japanese people who support his

father for the elections, while the American government uses him to infiltrate the terrorist group (who also use him to transport a prototype of explosive.) Finally, Palakon is also in touch with Bobby Hughes: "Once again F. Fred Palakon shakes Bobby's hand. Once again F. Fred Palakon gestures toward the camera."(G 395)

At the end of the book, while Victor watches a soundless video, all three dimensions unite:

> I recognize this woman. This woman is Lorrie Wallace. The Englishwoman who ran into me on the *QE2*. The woman married to Stephen Wallace. The woman who wanted me to go to England. The woman who recognized Marina. . . . Finally Dad and Lorrie Wallace at Carol Laxalt's annual Christmas party. . . . And in the background, sipping punch from a tiny glass cup, is F. Fred Palakon, a giant Christmas tree twinkling behind him. I hold a hand over my mouth to stop the screaming. (G 475)

Lorrie Wallace, along with her husband, is a person Victor meets on his way to Europe to find Jamie Fields. They introduce themselves as friends of his father, though Victor does not remember knowing them at all, and they try to direct him to London, which was Victor's initial destination before he met Marina Cannon and decided to follow her to Paris. Later in the novel Jamie explains that Marina had been sent to warn Victor about the hazards waiting for him in Europe, but that she disappeared mysteriously in the middle of the cruise, kidnapped by Bobby Hughes. The Wallaces are obviously another means of control over the main character of the story, and try to make him do was has been planned for him. This directing of the character is echoed by Palakon soon after meeting the couple. He tells Victor: "' Just go on about your business. . . . Just follow the script.'" (G 205) Which is finally what Victor does, by going to London and following the directions he was given.

Other characters have the same controlling role. Marina Cannon represents the opposite of the Wallaces. She seems to be on the side of the people trying to uncover the terrorist group, a group Jamie Fields belongs to as well. However, Marina is a peculiar character in that she has no definite shape or role. While on the QE2, Victor meets her only a few times, first near the ship's swimming pool, then at a dinner with the Wallaces, and eventually on the deck of the ship. After this she does not appear again.

1.1.2 Retroactive meaning and unstability

Marina's character is invested with sense and purpose well after Victor's arrival in London, and this makes her a blurred entity. She has two different names: she first introduces herself as "'Marina Cannon,'"(G 197) then as "'Marina Gibson.'" When they meet for the last time on the deck, Victor defines her as "the voice," or "the hood."(G 220-1) Her character has completely disappeared and what is left is only that "voice", the only thing by which she can be identified: both characters are standing in the dark, in the fog, Victor is drunk and therefore his account of the situation is very imprecise; she is "back to [him]and she's wearing a very cool oversized hooded Prada wool jacket." (G 220) She is then only referred to by means of synecdoches : she is a "hood," a "voice," a "figure" with no real substance. We learn later in the novel that it was probably Bobby Hughes in that hood and that this was another trap, and that Marina was working against the terrorist cell. We learn all these elements at the end from Jamie Fields, as well as the devising of "' A scenario'" built by Palakon along with Victor's father and Victor's father's enemies (G 422.)

Jamie Fields' role as a character is especially important in respect to the other characters, since she is the one who triggers a re-evaluation of the reader's perception of all the other characters. She links Palakon to Victor's father and the terrorist group, by exposing the network built against Victor: his father wanted him out of the United States for political reasons (since the behavior of his son was bad for his public image) and hired Palakon to get him out of the country. The senator's enemies also hired Palakon to get Victor in a clumsy situation that could be used against his father in his political campaign, that of being part of a terrorist group.

Meanwhile the group possibly related to the American Government or army, working against the terrorists (which is to say Jamie, Marina and Lauren) used him to transport a prototype of Remform, a powerful explosive, hidden in a hat Lauren gave Victor and which was intended to be given to Jamie. Finally, the terrorist group learnt about it and Bobby boarded the QE2 to steal the hat. This explanation transforms the character of Lauren Hynde who, Jamie says, "'wasn't Lauren Hynde . . . . Lauren Hynde died in . . . December 1985 . . . in a car accident . . . outside Camden, New Hampshire.'" (G 425)

This creates complete defamiliarization with the character of Lauren. First, she is a substitute for the real Lauren. Then, her meeting with Victor and the transferring of the hat take on new meaning. This situation creates a tension within the narrative: when Victor meets Lauren for the first time, she seems to be trying to run away from him and keeps repeating "'I've gotta go'". (G 86-7).

When she gives the hat to Victor, the impression given is that she does not chose a specific item: "When I turn around she's at the closet, tearing through dresses and stacks of sweaters until finally she finds a black ladies' hat – cool-looking, with a tiny red flower embroidered on its side – and she studies it for a nanosecond before shoving it at me. 'Here.'" (G 128)

This event seems accidental, since they have been disturbed by Damien Ross who arrived early, and the hat only provides an excuse for Victor's presence in Lauren's apartment. However, with Jamie's testimony, this scene changes tones. What first looked like a grotesque bedroom comedy scene becomes part of a devised scheme to put the Remform prototype into Victor's possession. What this implies is that of course Lauren knows what's inside the object, but also that she has always acted for the realisation of this moment, that her meeting with the hero was not accidental and her reactions were planned to make him react by coming to her apartment. What is more, we can suspect that Damien was also knowing about the whole situation since he provides the opportunity for the hat-giving.

1.1.3 Movies and camera teams

The different characters in *Glamorama* are unstable entities who change shapes and names on several occasions, and who all belong to a web of connections surrounding the main protagonist. The main interest for the conspiracy is that this set of connections can never be proved, and stays on the level of the potential explanation. This would account for many things, like the problems of seeing people where they are not as it happens several times to Victor, end yet some inconsistencies still remain. For example, why should Lauren tell Victor "'Just give me that damn hat back,'"(G 128) if the whole point of the scene is precisely to make Victor keep it?

This could perhaps be explained by the confusion lying in the narrative itself: it seems that the characters and what they are doing are being constantly filmed, by at least two different teams who appear at different moments of the novel, as in "The film crew follows Tammy into the dining area, where she has a tense breakfast with Bruce."(G 293)

The mixing of points of view triggered by the presence of those cameras over the events may account for different attitudes from the characters: one of the teams seems to be simply following Victor and shooting a movie in which he is the hero. Perhaps it is the continuation of the report we are introduced to at the beginning of the novel ("Assignment: follow me around for a week. Headline: THE MAKING OF A CLUB." (G 6)) but no detail is ever provided about this.

However, we know that the director of this "fashion" movie is called Felix, since Victor has several conversations with him along the novel. Again this character is unstable since when he announces Victor that their movie is over, he realizes that "Felix's accent has disappeared,"(G 351) which only makes things worse as to the possibility of a conspiracy.

The other filming team seem to be filming a movie about the terrorist group, in which Victor appears but does not have the main part, since he sometimes tells about scenes in which he is not but that involve the terrorists: "(On the opposite side of Place Vendôme , twenty technicians are at various lookout points and the director is studying a video playback monitor of the footage shot earlier today of Bruce Rhinebeck . . . .)"(G 353) The two teams have different purposes for their films, but the films involve the same characters and their attitude is different depending on who is filming them. Lauren's asking the hat back could be a way to act normally in front of cameramen who know nothing about the terrorist side of the story. The problem lying in the interpretation of this event is that the filming of the scene is not explicit as it can be at other moments, so that the reader can only suppose that such cameras are present and tamper with the characters' attitudes, which highly limits the conception of *Glamorama* as picaresque since the fluctuation of the status of the characters do not allow them to be identified as definite stepping stones in the main protagonist's progression.

In the same way the role given to places is also deconstructed. The landscapes, cityscapes and countries Victor evolves in are all flattened by an affectless prose and a global impression of sameness.

1.1.4 Places

The system of locations at work in *Glamorama* is in some ways quite comparable to a set of places in a picaresque work: the main protagonist begins his journey in a given place, his home, and leaves to live out different experiences that will eventually change his

character. In Ellis's novel, the character leaves New York, travels across the Atlantic ocean by boat, arrives in Great-Britain, travels to France and ends his trip in Italy, from where he does not seem to come back. Each sequence represents a further steps taken towards the entrapment of Victor, and yet the places he goes whether it be London, Paris or Milan, are in a way flattened to the same unspecific cityscape. In *Glamorama*, the author takes one step further the themes he had already developed in his former novels, and especially in *Less than Zero*, the first sentence of which is "People are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles."[4] *Less Than Zero* is a book in which the notion of place is highly important:

> [it] suggests that geography and space, once a fictional hinterland for critics to interpret as they might, have gradually come to dictate the themes and structure of the novel, leaving emotional issues to become amorphous, to function as background. . . . What is uncertain now is the human element, the moral and emotional imperatives.[5]

This is achieved by a predominance of the cityscape in the characters' actions, to show that consumption society dictates its laws over people through a system of signs and patterns. In *Glamorama*, the cities also serve as structure for the novel: in each different city different events happen which are not connoted in the same way depending on the place: New York is where the fashion crowd gathers for hip parties among celebrities, and where the narrator is totally unaware of any conspiracy around him. In London, he meets Jamie Fields and joins the terrorist group. He starts getting involved in bombings and he witnesses murders. He is getting trapped inside their circle. In Paris he is the victim of the terrorists, and realizes progressively that the plot surrounds him and that there is no escape. Finally, in Milan, he is put aside of the story and becomes the victim of a successful conspiracy designed to literally change his character, as we shall see in a later part.

We also witness a development of Ellis's theme of the city as a monstrous and destructive being, a place alienating its inhabitants in a fever of consumption and fashion by providing them with the objects of their desires. This theme is extended beyond Los Angeles and California to stretch out and embrace the whole western world: California is no longer the only place in the world where consumption-crazed people long for fame and money, what Jean Baudrillard calls "'le lieu mondial de l'inauthentique'".[6] *Glamorama* is an attempt at universalising this concept along with Ellis's themes of vacuity and of a

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[4] Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than* Zero. Simon & Schuster, New York 1985, Picador, London 1986, 1.
[5] Elizabeth Young, "Vacant Possession", in *Shopping in Space: Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction*, Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney. New York and London: Serpent's Tail, 1992, 21.
[6] Jean Baudrillard, "L'Utopie réalisée", in *Amérique,* Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1986, 101.

media-obsessed society. The characters act in the same way everywhere, they talk the same language in New-York and in Milan, and elements of national individualism are mostly represented as being either distant or destroyed.

Placing the various national features at a distance emphasizes the universality of the themes and characters of the novel. A good example of the meaninglessness of places in the novel can be seen towards the end of the novel, at a point where Victor experiences an important confusion:

> And then a close-up: airplane tickets to Tel Aviv.
> Bobby's outside Dschungel, a club in Berlin, calling a girl a slut. A famous American football player is idling behind him.
> Bobby in front of a Jewish synagogue in Istanbul.
> Bobby wearing a skullcap. Bobby praying in Hebrew.
> Bobby at the Saudi embassy in Bangkok.
> Bobby drifting out of a bungalow in Tripoli . . . Bobby hops into a battered Mercedes 450SEL. A Toyota bus with bullet-proof windows trails the Mercedes as it heads into a dark, vast desert. . . .And then a black Citroën heads down Route Nationale through southern Normandy outside a farm village called Male. (G 394)

This particular extract shows how Ellis puts all places on the same level by merely juxtaposing them. The short sentences give the impression of photographic snapshots, of a cinematographic montage, which is reinforced by the presence of the phrases "Then static" and "More static" before and after the description. The impression conveyed is that of a ubiquitous character, who is at different places at nearly the same time, because of the terseness of sentences, starting again with "Bobby" as soon as the name of a place is mentioned. What is suggested by those "pictures" is only that Bobby may be in contact with people in the Middle-East and in France.

However, the image of the van in the desert is used again toward the end of the novel, at a moment when Victor, supported by the French filming team, decides he is going after Bobby to kill him:

> We're on a motorway. In a large van. We're heading toward the airport. The driver is
> the best boy from the French film crew. I'm catatonic, lying on the floor of the van surrounded
> by camera equipment. . . and sometimes what's outside the windows of the van is just
> blackness, and other times it's a desert, maybe somewhere outside L.A., and other times it's a
> matte screen, sometimes electric blue, sometimes blinding white. . . .Outside, it's a desert again
> and I'm moaning.(G 431)

This image of the desert is rather surprising in this context, considering the fact that the characters are logically supposed to be in France at this moment of the novel, where no such desert exists. The defamiliarization of the locations takes place inside a van being driven on a motorway in a desert. This losing of the sense of place in such conditions echoes the American myth of the road movie, a journey without a purpose, in which the desert plays an important part. Again, this theme is dear to the author of *Glamorama* since the desert was extremely present in Ellis's first novel, *Less Than Zero*, in which the presence of the desert just outside Los Angeles is constantly reminded to the main character of the novel, Clay. The desert is presented as a menacing entity about to submerge the city. Emphasis is laid on the contrast of California itself: the place of high sophistication in the cities, bordered by the raw violence of the desert.

For Baudrillard, "Le désert n'est plus un paysage, c'est la forme pure qui résulte de l'abstraction de toutes les autres."[7] In *Glamorama*, this notion of extreme superficiality of the desert echoes the characters' own vacuity; the majesty of the desert lies in its complete abstract quality, while the addition of the superficiality of the characters provides a kind of textual void: they all are so superficial that all meaning and sense of purpose is erased. In *Amérique*, Baudrillard opposes California to Italy: "Pas de charme, pas de séduction dans tout cela. La séduction est ailleurs, en Italie, dans certains paysages devenus peintures, aussi culturalisés et raffinés dans leur dessin que les villes et les musées qui les enferment." (119) Here, however, no distinction is made between Italy and California: they are both superficial places where landscapes and people have no depth at first sight. Still the conclusion of the novel takes place in Milan, and perhaps we could see this transfiguration, as we shall define it later, as an opposition on a larger scale than what was examined in Ellis's previous novels, in which the contrast was established between the West coast of the USA and the East coast: in *Less Than Zero*,

> The lip, throwaway tone of Californian cool is already all-pervasive and this adds intriguing depth to the East/West dichotomy. Here, in California, in the decadent sub-tropical heat, the social tone is enforcedly one of rigid cool. It is in the cold East. . .that there is the heat of intellectual debate, of passionate engagement.[8]

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[7] *Amérique* 122.
[8] Young and Caveney 28.

The West coast is the place of aimlessness, Los Angeles its physical incarnation and the heroes of the book the compulsory victims of this abstract place. In *The Rules of Attraction* (1987), Ellis's second novel, this dichotomy is erased since the novel takes place in the university campus of Camden, located in New Hampshire. Even in this place of supposedly high intellectual activity, trivia takes over even the titles of the courses as with "Trombone theory"[9], where "skateboarding club" starts at the same time as the "Jack Kerouac fan club." [10] The erasure of the distinction between high brow and mass culture symbolizes the flattening of culture and the deterioration of moral values in the United States. The East/West distinction is no longer valid, and in *Glamorama* this statement is extended to Europe, a movement which already started in *The Rules of Attraction*: an apathetic Victor Johnson tells about his stay in Europe in short, nervous sentences in which subjects and objects are extremely superficial and the activities similar whatever the place: "Saw the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace. Ate a grapefruit next to the Thames River, which reminded me a lot of the cover of that Pink Floyd album. . .looked for heroin but couldn't find any. Bought some speed. . . it was expensive, so I split for Amsterdam. . . Smoked a lot of hash . . ." [11]

London, Amsterdam, Paris or Milan are all the same place: they echo the difficulty of identification of the different characters, a theme recurrent in Ellis's works. Characters have trouble recognizing each other, and often mistake someone for someone else and this raises many questions which we shall answer later.

However, some highly symbolic places are acknowledged by the narrator as specific places and they can be considered as relevant insofar as they serve as targets for the terrorist attacks in Europe, which may help us define the motive of the terrorists.

1.1.4.1 Symbolic places

Bobby Hughes's terrorist group aim their attacks at different places, and even if the narrative is much more detailed on the actual explosion, the places bombed are for most of them highly symbolic. The first attack takes place at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris, the second one in the Paris underground (but the bomb was supposed to go off near Notre Dame), Victor then fails to destroy the Louvre museum, the Ritz hotel goes down as well as the Café de Flore.

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[9] *The Rules of Attraction 269.*
[10] *The Rules of Attraction* 317.
[11] *The Rules of Attraction* 17.

Those places are relevant to the themes developed in the novel, since the attacks represent a literal disappearance of culture in the traditional sense. In a way, what the terrorist do is in accordance with their former activity, since they are all ex-models. A connection is established between the two activities, seen as inexorable and dictatorial. And while, as models, they dictated the laws of fashion, they keep on widening the gap between high and mass culture by destroying symbolic places, leaving only mass culture for a reference to people. Since models in general are a medium in the creation of some of this mass culture, they are trying to achieve a domination over the minds by creating what people need, a need they create themselves.

The bombing of the Café de Flore is a case in point. It partakes in the deconstruction of culture, but it also marks a metaleptical destruction of the literary past, a theme quite common in postmodern literature: this café is known for having been the favourite meeting place of Jean-Paul Sartre and all the French literary establishment of the mid-twentieth century. Postmodern literature deconstructs the literary heritage by using and showing traditional patterns and themes, while at the same time implying their pointlessness and experimenting with them.

The treatment of places in *Glamorama* is mainly relevant by the uniformity of the different cities, since the plot is after all inescapable and that everywhere is the same place, and, after all, possibly just a set in a cinema studio. The decline of a certain traditional and moral culture and the emerging of a Baudrillardian hyperreality is put forward, thus creating a uniformization of places and a de-location of the characters. Baudrillard defines the hyperreal ("hyperréel") as "un produit de synthèse irradiant de modèles combinatoires dans un hyperspace sans atmosphère."[12] The hyperreal is the representation of the world we live in, and it has gradually become the space we live in. This process of representation is termed as "simulation", which is "la génération par les modèles d'un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel."[13] *Glamorama* addresses the topic of the hyperreal in its treatment of places: all cities in the western world are now part of the same system, in which values and references share the same origin in the commercial process of simulation. What is more, simulation is ever-present in all the characters: their references are the same and spring from the consumption-obsessed milieu of fashion in which they all belong. The process of uniformization affects them as well, so much that in the end they have difficulties identifying one another.

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[12] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation*, (Paris : collection Débats, Editions Galilée, 1981).

Victor's journey is after all a travel without motion: he actually crosses the ocean and goes to several places, yet his activities and references do not change at all, and he stays in the world of the non-specific. However, his part in the picaresque *Glamorama* still seems to teach him a lesson. At the very end of the novel, his character experiences something quite close to a moral realization of his self. Victor finally recognizes his past errors and flaws, thus reaching a heightened state of self-consciousness: "I'm falling forward but also moving up toward the mountain, my shadow looming against its jagged peaks, and I'm surging forward, ascending, sailing through dark clouds, rising up, a fiery wind propelling me. . . ."(G 482) This epiphany has a role on two different levels, one related to the theme of simulation, the other one to the status of the character. His realization becomes an ascension, and he gains on a rather mythical dimension while his very self disappears from the narration.[14]

1.2 The narrative as a system in constant evolution

Glamorama is a novel that requires constant re-evaluation of its content by the reader. Its specificity resides in the way the narration (the way the story is told) interacts with the diegesis (the story itself, outside any representation), two systems that are usually quite different and separate. Here, however, narration and diegesis are intermingled and one is not totally separate from the other. To summarize the plot of the novel implies dealing with the topic of the fictionalization and narration processes. The way the events are related and the constant blurring of the determining elements of the plot make it difficult for the reader to understand exactly the story, "streamlined, no frills, the lowdown: who, what, where, when and don't leave out why. . . ."(G 5). As Victor announces it in his first monologue, we as readers also have "the distinct impression . . . that *why* won't get answered." (G 5)

Throughout the novel, the reader is harassed by an overload of information, names and brands, and realizes later in the narration that some of these elements are relevant, but that most of them are not. The narrative continually plays on the notions of redundancy and noise, inviting the reader to play a specific part in the deciphering of the different elements that constitute the plot. He has to decide which elements help build up the plot, as is true of

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[13] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation.*
[14] See 3.2.3.2, p. 113.

any given narrative, but more specifically here s/he has to determine who exactly the narrator is.

1.2.1 The question of the narrator: the search for meaning

To provide a clear definition of the narrating voice in *Glamorama* is less easy than it seems. Narrating "I" and narrated "I" are often mixed together, the narrator loses substance at several moments of the story, and his unreliability is a source of problems in the relation between the reader and the text.

In *Glamorama* as in all of Ellis's works, the story is told by a first-person narrator who is the main character of the diegesis. This process implies the use of internal focalisation, which can obviously distort the events since we see them through the medium of the narrator-character, who uses communication codes that are both exclusive and disruptive in the conveying of the general meaning of the text: they are exclusive in the sense that they use specific references not accessible to anybody, and disruptive in the global meaning of the text, since double meaning is quite developed.

1.2.1.1 Language

Victor can be defined as a somewhat unreliable narrator: he seems at first to be the narrator (though we will see that things are more complex) and, though in charge of the narrative, we often find that he is unable to explain many things. This can be imputed to several elements. The first example of a misunderstanding is to be found on the very first page of the novel. When someone answers him that the design for a floor of the night club has been "approved by, well, moi," (G 5) Victor doesn't understand what is meant by this foreign word. And several times in the novel we witness Victor's lack of knowledge concerning words, which are most of the time a source of humour. One of the most telling examples is:

> "Victor,…. Can you tell the difference between a platitude and a platypus?" "One's a … beaver?" "Which *one*?" "Oh god, this is hard," I moan. "Where's my publicist?"(G 73)

This might be very funny, but it shows a deep problem with Victor, especially Victor as a narrator : he has a problem with words, and it is only one of the aspects that show his lack of specification, of personality. This particular sentence illustrates perfectly

the idea at the center of the hero's behaviour: the only people who are competent with language are publicists: they have the power to choose the meaning of words, they define words in a way and they add the different connotations and underlying values of certain words. Those values are however those hinted at by the characters when they used them.

This is possibly why Victor uses a vocabulary that is not his own, mostly using excerpts from pop songs or advertisement-like catch phrases. For example he addresses a member of his band by saying "'Shine on, you crazy diamond,'" (G 94) which is the title of a song by Pink Floyd. On different occasions, he just quotes songs in the middle of the conversation, where they may, or may not, make sense in relation to the context. During a conversation with Damien Ross, the co-owner of his club, we witness this dialogue: " 'Shalom Harlow sneezed on me,' Damien's saying. 'I've got chills,' I admit. 'They're multiplying.'" (44) This is the first line of a famous song from the musical *Grease*, even if it is completely out of context and implies a certain relationship between the reader and the text, as we shall see later. While Victor is crossing the Atlantic to go to Europe, the mysterious Marina Cannon asks him the reason for his journey, and he is unable to provide a coherent answer and ends the conversation with one of his cliché-phrases:

"I just wanted to write some poetry and, y'know, make some videos . . . get away from that whole cyberspace scene. Just chill out . . . Get back to my roots. Gotta get back, back to my roots." I sip the light beer confidently. "Come back down to earth and get back to my roots."
"Your family's in Europe?" she asks.
"Er, well, I'm not sure, but I'm, I mean, I've *heard* I had a few roots there" – I pause – "Europe." I pause again. "Baby, I'm just really searching for some honesty." (G199)

We should also notice about this extract that "gotta get back, back to my roots" is an excerpt from the song "Going Back to my Roots" by the band Earth, Wind and Fire. His motto is "the better you look, the more you see", and even though this sentence happens to have a very significant meaning within the context of the novel, it seems that Victor only considers the "look good" side of the advertisement-like sentence. His language reveals what his concerns are. Though he doesn't know what "platypus" means, he is able to produce sentences like "'You look very Uma-ish tonight'" (G 155) or "She is shot through with something like pain or maybe something else like maybe something by Versace" (G 142), which shows that his only frame of reference is that of celebrity and fashion. The underlying issue is that of reliability : can we trust Victor as a narrator, since his conception of events is so limited ?

1.2.1.2. Beyond the "here and the now"(G 60): narratorial supplement

As in Ellis's previous novel, *American Psycho* (1991), the trust the reader invests in the narrator is gradually deconstructed and the former is left facing a text where everything has to be deciphered or put into question, with the narrator unable to see or notice everything, since we are placed in the situation of a traditional internal focalisation.

However, the "narrating I" is sometimes detached from Victor, who acts as if he is telling the story: it sounds as if the "narrating I" was suddenly leaving the usual internal focalisation towards a more omniscient position; however, this movement is confusing, because the narrating voice still uses the pronoun "I", and the separation between "narrating I" and "narrated I" (as the focaliser of the narration) is blurred. We are gradually introduced to sentences which play on this distanciation, like: "I walk into that frame, not noticing the black limousine parked across the street, four buildings down, that the cameraman pans to."

The question of the situation of the narrating voice is central to the determination of who the narrator is. There is no obvious answer; we can suppose Victor is the narrator, yet we wonder about his physical and temporal position concerning the story he is telling: does the tense of the narration correspond to the time of the narration? Is Victor, as he claims he is, "In the here *and* the now?"(G 60)

Victor sometimes shows signs of a perception which he as a character cannot possibly have access to. The problematic concerning what he doesn't see or hear or know (this is particularly obvious in several descriptions of bombs exploding in public, where we are given the exact number of casualties, instant and to come later) is something that only an omniscient narrator can deliver. Yet the confusion springing from the use of the same pronoun "I" for both entities blurs the distinction, the limit between them, almost resulting in metalepsis. Victor seems to be both a character and a narrator, but sometimes those aspects are separated with the result that distance intervenes between narration and narrated. This distance seems to be effective on the level of the time of the narration: it is supposed to be in the present, as indicated by the use of the present tense, but a twist in the plot distorts the narration and make the characters aware of what is happening and what is going to happen to them. This element granting preknowledge is the presence of a scenario.

Throughout the novel Victor is constantly reminded of the existence of a scenario, a "script" he must follow: the director of one of the two filming teams asks Victor: "'Haven't you read the script? . . . Don't you know what's going to happen to you?'" (G 194).

However, he is never completely aware of the complete situation, nor is he ever confronted with the complete script. This element allows the figure of the narrator to duplicate himself, in a way: a possible explanation for the extra-diegetic capacities of the narrator is that we may be confronting at least two different "narrating I"s: one who tells the events as he lives them, the Victor the reader acknowledges as the narrator of the story, and one who may be the image of what Victor is doing, the Victor of the scenario, the actor who has learnt his lines and delivers them accurately, so accurately that character and actor are no more distinguishable. This possibility is quite credible, since we are told on various occasions that the characters are not really themselves, but actors playing the characters. The first instance of this defamiliarization occurs when Victor comes back to the club he owns with Damien in order to talk to him. When he enters the club,

A door slams shut behind me, two pairs of hands grab my shoulders. . . silhouettes and shadows come into focus: Damien's goons (Duke but not Digby, who was recast after we shot yesterday's breakfast.) (G 169)

This sentence causally enounces the problem as if it was unimportant. The characters have no real existence, which is to be related to the general conception of what fictional characters are: they are not real, but the products of fiction. Yet there are actors who give those characters what seems to be a physical reality: "the door opens and someone playing the building's superintendent – "a young gorgeous guy" – peers in and spots me . . . and the actor seems bewildered and finally he apologizes for missing his cue."(G 185)

Here, the description of the actor is between quotation marks, which indicate that the words have not been chosen by the narrator, but are excerpts from something else, which we deduce is the script of the film. "'A young gorgeous guy'" applies both to the character in the script and to the actor giving his character a corporeal reality, so that they are intertwined entities, even more so since Victor is then sitting alone in his hotel room, leading us to expect someone like the superintendent of the hotel to come in, but not an actor.

This condition of the characters, as having two different (though not separate) identities raises the question of Victor's identity.

1.2.2 The two movies

Since many characters seem to be not themselves, but actors, we could easily infer that Victor is perhaps not his own character, but an actor playing the part of Victor. This would explain his attitude toward the different cinematographic devices used in the book: he knows there are actors and sets and cameramen, since he himself is an actor, so he does not find it surprising at all to say that such character was recast or that another one misses his cues. Still some characters resist this interpretation of facts: the substitutes, who are not their own characters. If they belonged to this consideration of the novel as a film, they would be actors playing the part of characters who play the part of other characters. The problem is that Victor is not aware of their multiple personalities, even if he is himself an actor. He takes the characters the actors play for the actors themselves, because he has undergone a change in status.

For a concrete explanation, let us take the example of Lauren Hynde. As we have already said it, Victor meets her quite by chance in a music store. She belongs to the New-York set of characters, that of fashion and parties. Her character is later invested with new meaning when we learn about her being involved in an anti-terrorist group. Finally, we learn that it "'wasn't Lauren Hynde . . . . Lauren Hynde died in . . . December 1985 . . . in a car accident . . . outside Camden, New Hampshire.'" (G 425)

The character previously introduced as Lauren Hynde is changed by this declaration: she becomes a faceless, nameless mysterious entity threatening the hero. In the fifth part of the novel, the "narrating I" is no longer the same character. We guess from the context of the description that it is Victor's substitute talking. He gives the codename DAN as his identity (G 459), and finally meets with Lauren Hynde's substitute, whose name is Eva. They are both substitutes and know each other's true identity, so that the narrator refers to her not as Lauren, but as Eva, while exterior characters still call her Lauren.

We should consider *Glamorama* as being the narration of two different films being shot at the same time with nearly the same characters. Yet the characters do not have the exactly same part in both movies. In the first one, we are told the story of Victor, the model, who opens clubs and goes to Europe to look for a friend. In this film, the characters and the actors are rather distinct, and the actor playing Victor is aware of this distinction. A second movie is filmed, in which the actor playing the part of Victor becomes the central character of a story in which he becomes trapped in a terrorist organisation. In this film, the

substitutes reveal their true character and new characters appear: Lauren becomes Eva, since Eva is the substitute for Lauren, but still the actress playing Eva is unseen, because the actor-turned-character Victor is not aware of his shift in position. Palakon, the mysterious agent, appears only in this film and is then unknown to the members of the filming team of the first movie.

This theory of the two movies is reinforced by the cryptic words of Jamie Fields with who Victor chats when he finds her in London:

> Jamie notices how distracting they are. 'I know – it's ugly,' she sighs, lighting a cigarette. 'It's for the movie.'
> 'Which one?' I'm asking.'
> She shrugs, exhaling. 'Both?' (G 243)

So it seems that there are indeed two different movies being shot, though even Jamie, whose character is the articulation of the two films, is not even sure of the situation herself.

Victor eventually gets lost in this maze of actors and characters, which we shall call hypersphere, since it is the intermingling of several levels of reality, which themselves are hyperreal in the Baudrillardian sense of the word. In the end, he is lost in those layers of fiction:

> 'is this . . . is this for real?' I'm scanning the room, looking for signs of a camera, lights, some hidden evidence that a film crew was here earlier or is right now maybe in the apartment next door, shooting me through holes strategically cut into the crimson and black walls. . . 'I mean, is this like a movie? . . . Is this being filmed?' (G 373)

This disorientation is the beginning of the process of complete detachment the main character undergoes later in the novel, and explains in a way the fate of the character and his downfall because of the total misunderstanding of his environment, which will be explained in a later part.[1]

The behaviour of Victor in his search for the truth is quite similar to that of the reader of the novel, who must likewise process a lot of things in order to be able to make sense out of the text: not only those multiple layers of fiction, but also a general tendency of the narrative to be cryptic and not to give any clues as to the interpretation of the events.

1.2.3 Noise and truth

Noise is a determinant factor of the novel, and the hermeneutic quest of the reader actually echoes the main character's. While Victor is confronted to a maze of possible realities, we as readers are confronted to a text which does not give its own meaning. Redundancy is one aspect of the text which enables the narrative to conceal itself behind patterns, themes and words that create noise in an already unstable environment of multiple possibilities.

The reader needs to sort out the information contained in the text to make meaning out of it, and this is only achievable in certain conditions of reading: the text plays on the notion of the ideal reader as a condition for its complete understanding, and this too complexifies the issue as far as the dialectics noise/meaning is concerned.

1.2.3.1 Redundancy and noise

In communication theory, noise corresponds to any event that pollutes the message during its transmission from its source to its destination, and disrupts the understanding of the message. This concept can be applied to a textual environment, and postmodern writers tend to incorporate it in their novels since it reflects on the capacity to convey meaning. In *Glamorama* several elements can be considered as noise because they are not relevant to the understanding of the story. However, their status is never clear since they can be actualised at any given point of the text. In addition to the confusion noise generates, we should also consider its presence in relation to the very themes addressed in the story.

1.2.3.1.1 Chapters and sections

The first element which can be termed as noise the reader has to face when reading *Glamorama* is the ordering of the chapters. The first chapter of the book is numbered "33" and the narration starts immediately afterwards. However, the part in which this chapter belongs is actually numbered "1". This already brings the reader's attention to the physical organisation of the text, and plays on the general conception that the first chapter of a novel should be chapter one. It triggers several questions: why is the first chapter number 33? What is going to happen when we get to number 0? Is there a reversed temporality in the

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[1] See 3.2.3, p.111.

novel? The answer to this last question becomes rather obvious, since the narrative goes on in a normal, traditional direction.

There seems to be a teleological ordering of chapters, that is a conclusion-oriented process which indicates that the narration tends to the realization of some important event which we assume is going to happen when we get to the end of chapter 0.

In fact, this order of the chapters may and may not be seen as teleological. Indeed, the countdown starts again when the second part of the novel begins. In a way, we could see this as the narration failing to achieve what it was meant to do, and trying again to get to its point. As the story of part 1 unfolds, and the numbers of the chapters go decrescendo, we as readers may try and guess what is going to happen at the end of this part, at chapter 0. We could think that part one ends with the complete downfall of Victor in the New York scene, which we tend to expect as we see him getting trapped in circles of misunderstandings and contempt. Yet this is not the case since Victor's dismissal from the New York episode happens well before this, at the end of chapter seven, when all the characters present at the club opening reject him. The few chapters left are only useful in the way that they allow for a transition to the next part. The physical parts of the text actually correspond to the parts of the story. Part One takes place in New York, part Two on the QE2 ship, part Three in London, part Four in Paris, part Five takes place in New York again but it is quite specific as we shall see later, and part Six takes place in Milan.

The teleological chaptering does not really follow, however, the marking events of the plot. The impression given is that the parts of the text are only present to separate it into neat pieces in which the action itself is not really relevant. We could compare this to the delimitation of the acts and scenes in a theatre play: each time the curtain goes down the scenery and background of the stage changes, though the characters are still here and the plot is not finished.

Part five, however, stands in contrast with the other parts in this respect: the place is New York again, and nearly everything seems to be the same as in part one. Yet one major point differs: Victor is no longer Victor, but a substitute codenamed DAN. The events, discussions and themes are nearly the same as in part one, but knowing that Victor's character has been invested by someone else changes the perception we have of the scene: what seems relevant here is the similarity between Victor and DAN, and this represents the opposite to the other parts in which everything else but the characters change.

Part six adds on new noise in the consideration of the teleological chaptering: here, the numbers of the chapters are back to their traditional order: we start with chapter 0 and

finish with chapter 15. This creates a new disturbance in the reading of the novel, because it suggests that something has happened that has reversed the order of the chapters. The problem is that what happened just before (in the material aspect of the text) was a scene in which the main protagonist did not appear. We have to conclude that what the text was aiming at was the complete substitution of Victor in the New York scene, and the dismissal of his whole character in the rest of the fictional space. In this case, the question raised is the following: why should there be a sixth part, most of all considering how little information it provides concerning the hero of the book? Indeed, we are mostly given a blank description of Victor's daily activities, his realization that he has been replaced, and a last cryptic chapter which strikes us as rather anti-climatic.

What is more, chapters in part six are extremely short: chapter thirteen reads "In a nearby room in the Principe di Savoia a propmaster is loading a 9mm mini-Uzi," which only brings on new interrogations: traditionally, a chapter is regarded as a separation of the events and each chapter is supposed to contain one element important to the rest of the story. Here, however, we have the feeling that the organisation of the text is provided at random and that chapters are no longer meaningful in themselves. They become a great source of noise in the reading of the text since they attract the reader's attention to facts which are actually useless, which in turn hints at self-reflexivity: what is really relevant? What should we pay attention to and are the most obvious elements only a sham?

1.2.3.1.2 Language as source of noise

Another important source of noise comes from the language used by the characters, mostly Victor with his advertisement-like pop lingo and the different codes he uses, but also different characters who speak enigmatic or confused sentences which again may or may not be relevant to the general understanding of the novel.

Some sentences can look meaningless or misplaced when they are uttered, but gain on new meaning as we learn about the situation of the speaker in the plot. In the first part of the novel Victor and Alison are talking about Victor's girlfriend, Chloe, and about her possible relationship with someone called Baxter Priestly:

> 'Hey, tell me what you know about Baxter Priestly.'
>   'Someone with amazing cheekbones.' She shrugs. . . 'I think Baxter has a major crush on Chloe Byrnes,' she says, eyes-flickering gleefully over my face for a reaction, then, after thinking about something, she shrugs. 'She could do worse.'
>   'Oh boy, Alison.'

> She's laughing, relaxed. 'Victor – just keep an eye out."'
>
> 'What are you saying?' I ask, stretching.
>
> 'What is it you always say?' she asks. 'The better you look, the more you see. Is that it?' (<u>G</u> 98)

The sentence "keep an eye out" can be seen as having two different meanings: in the context of the conversation, we could say that Alison is warning Victor to be careful about Chloe's relationship with Baxter, that it is potentially dangerous for Victor and that if he watches them carefully, he could see that they are maybe more than friends.

But we could also consider this sentence in the global context of the book and the situation of Alison inside the general plot Victor gets trapped in. Since she knows about the plot and the script, she might be warning Victor against what is going to happen to him, and that if he looked more accurately at things he would discover things, for example that Lauren Hynde is not really Lauren Hynde.

Double meaning is extremely present too in some mysterious lines which come back regularly throughout the novel, without any mention of where they come from except that they are written in italics: "*we'll slide down the surface of things*" (<u>G</u> 144-50) comes back regularly and becomes a kind of motto for Victor, though he first hears it in a song. The sentence is extracted from its context and interwoven in the narrative so that it means something new, in relation to the main character this time, that of complete detachment from reality which helps overcoming the problems he is facing.

"*It's the things you don't know that matters most*" (<u>G</u> 341) is another of those sentences which is more present towards the end of the book. Originally this sentence comes from one of the films' director, Felix, but again it is taken out of context and becomes a symbol for Victor's crisis of consciousness: he realizes that what is happening around him is closing in on him in a wide plot he is dimly aware of, but knows nothing about. It dawns on him that he is alone and that all the other character possibly know everything.

1.2.3.1.3 The extradiegetic voice

Some more curious passages are present. We are no longer confronted to a recurrent sentence, but to individual passages in which the narrator is not intervening. They also mark the progressive unconscious realization of the main protagonist, but at the same time the distance between the sentences and the situation implies a kind of superior omniscient knowledge giving advice to the hero, interrupting even the narration:

I slowly move into the bedroom where Jamie and Bobby are sleeping deeply, gracefully, on a flat sheet soaked with our sweat even though it's so cold in this room

the room is a trap. The question about the hat will never be asked. The question about the hat is a big black mountain and the room is a trap. A photo of your expressionless face is on the cover of a magazine, a gun lies on top of an icy nightstand. It's winter in this room and this room is a trap

that my breath is steaming as I keep staring down at Jamie and Bobby sleeping on the bed. (<u>G</u> 341)

This type of textual event happens several times in the novel, and each time creates noise by triggering questions: who/where does this come from? Why? Why now?

This extradiegetic voice is very disruptive in the understanding of the novel: it appears in the middle of a sentence and therefore the meaning of the sentence itself is lost in favour of the voice's paragraph. What is more, it states things as if it was telling the absolute truth, which we cannot even be sure of, even more since it is often in contradiction with what the narrator is telling us. Another passage in which this voice appears is the suicide of one of the terrorists, Tammy, who is found in a bathtub with her wrists slashed:

Tammy's slashed wrists have been cut to the bone – but even that wasn't 'enough,' because somehow she managed to slice her throat open very deeply

(but you know it's too deep, you know she couldn't have done this, though you can't say anything because you know that scenes are being filmed without you and you know that a different script exists in which you are not a character and you know it's too deep)

and because it smells so much like what I imagined . . . I can't stop gasping. (<u>G</u> 383)

We can notice that the typography of the remark has changed, no longer in italics but between brackets. This can be interpreted as the character becoming more and more aware of what he doesn't know. What is more, the pronoun "you" is far more present in this passage, which indicates a certain self-reflexivity form the part of Victor, as if he was thinking to himself. However this thinking cannot be conscious, because Victor is in the process of narrating the events when this sentence interrupts him. We shall see in a later part how this voice can be interpreted in terms of literary intertext and what part it might play.

These elements of noise, however, can be seen as quite relevant to the plot and thus qualify as false noise. They make sense to the reader who has the possibility to relate them to the general conspiracy theme, omnipresent in the story. Some other sources of noise can however be considered as quite useless and as having the only role of delaying the action.

Those are the moments when Victor tells us about the fashion shows he attends, the food he eats or the memories he has. Though these empty passages serve a purposes in terms

of literary intertext[2], they only delay the action. A striking example of such a dilatory strategy lies in the infinite list-making which goes on in the first part. They are only lists of the people who may or may not come to the club opening party. They extend for several lines, even pages, during which nothing but names, "yes"s and "no"s appear (G 65-73). The reader undergoes an overload of names, since they all succeed one another very quickly and we have nothing more to define those people than their name. They are non-characters, invested only with a signifier but nothing to signify for, except maybe "famous".

The point of these lists is precisely to blur the limits between one character and another, since they are all put on the same level, a simple item in an alphabetical list, which flattens all possible distinction. The redundancy used in those lists actually destroys its meaning. If we had a list of two or three elements, we might be able to remember them. But dozens of lists of hundreds of people make no sense at all.

This effect of dispersion of meaning through redundancy is called entropy, a termed first coined to be applied to thermodynamics. It is the dispersion of usable energy within a closed system, which inevitably increases while molecular disorder sets in. In the theory of communication, entropy refers to the tendency of messages to mean less and less because of repetition and it is the consequent predictability of such a message.

1.2.3.2 Entropy

Glamorama is, on the whole, a text which is difficult to understand fully. The simple delimitation of what is really happening is extremely difficult to make, because of the way the narration slides between possible worlds without pointing one as the "real" one. While the inherent disorder of the text increases (with random apparitions of seemingly autonomous phrases), the text means less and less. The last part of the novel leaves the reader wondering what is meant by the situation. As in several moments of the novel, we are faced with a situation behind which something deeper might reside, which would be the "true" sense of the book. Yet the disorder of the narration loses the narrator himself who cannot but state things as he sees them, not trying to make any meaning out of it any more.

At the end of the text, the disorder we have seen gradually increase has reached its climax, and this results in the creation of two opposite systems:

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[2] See 2.3.1, p.70.

First, the conspiracy against Victor has succeeded. The introduction of entropy into the narration (by means of setting different levels of fictionality) has also increased the incapacity of the narrator to analyse the events: too much noise results in a total confusion to which he does not react: "*confusion and hopelessness don't necessarily cause a person to act.*" (G 403), and this makes his task all the more predictable, obvious, since no meaning is present any longer in his environment and from his point of view: he is the center of a closed system reaching heat-death through the increase of disorder in this very system. The question of whether this disorder has been voluntarily introduced into the system is not actually relevant since it strangely enough does not make this system open. Disorder is not created; what is created is the conditions for this disorder to increase by itself. What the conspirators may have done is only to introduce several camera teams and scripts on the stage of the novel, but disorder created itself from there, and this only in relation to Victor.

From another point of view, the opposite tendency seems to have appeared by the end of the novel: part 5 shows a sort of return to normality for the character supposed to be Victor, who now calls himself DAN: he is the logical conclusion of the conspiracy, and in his system disorder has decreased, partially because of a rejection of what would bring disorder to the Victor system. The Dan system is thus open, and exchanges its potential entropy against a kind of negentropy springing from the Victor system. Dan obtains slowly the characteristics and relations of Victor, which sets up order in his system. His character was at the beginning of the conspiracy nothing more than an empty shell containing maximum disorder. By gradually exchanging this chaotic entity against the features of Victor his character has traded chaos for order.

The two systems are rather dependent, since the more bewildered Victor gets, the more concrete DAN becomes. In the end the substitution has succeeded without anyone really noticing, and the situation is, ironically, pretty much the same as at the beginning of the novel, with order and disorder distributed evenly in the *Glamorama* system: at the beginning, the most stable entity is Victor. Through the text he becomes more and more unstable, creating disorder around him; at the end of the story DAN has made the opposite path to find himself in a strong and stable position, while Victor dissolves in randomness. At the beginning of the story DAN was scarcely present: he was indirectly mentioned through what seemed like errors of perception or timetables: for example, towards the end of part one, Victor and Alison are talking while taking cocaine from a vial:

'That little conversation we had, Victor, upset me very much,' Alison groans, fixing her hair, wiping her nose with Kleenex. She looks at my innocent face in the mirror, while I stand behind her doing a few more hits. 'Oh please, Victor, don't do this – do not do this.'

'When?' I'm shouting out. 'What in the hell – '

'About ninety minutes ago? Stop acting like such an idiot. I know you're a guy who's not exactly on the ball, but please – even *this* could not get past you. . . .'

'Baby, I was doing my MTV 'House of Style' interview' – I check the watch I'm not wearing – 'ninety minutes ago, so – '

'Victor, it was *you*!' she shouts, pushing me away from her. (G 154-5)

Here again, both possibilities are credible, and the easiest solution to solve the question is, at first sight, not to trust Victor and believe Alison: Victor keeps on saying that he takes Klonopin and that it "'causes short-term memory loss.'" (G 84)Victor actually gives us reasons to distrust him, since his memory is apparently not very sure and that he could also be lying. The problem is that Victor is seen several times at places and shows where he could not be at because we as readers know what he was doing at this precise time, and the substitute hypothesis becomes more and more present and credible.

On the opposite, at the end of the novel it is Victor who finds himself in the position which was DAN's at the beginning: he is inside a hotel without anyone noticing him, out of the narrative space and time.

All these elements are present in the narrative and continually blur its limits, making it highly uncertain. The reader facing this text has to be active in order to make meaning out of it: he needs to evaluate and analyse the codes used by the book and the textual conventions and strategies put into use. His role is to decipher what he is reading and to reposition the elements in relation with the global work.

1.2.3.3 The role of the reader

The reader in *Glamorama* is highly involved in the narration and the unfolding of the plot. The novel starts with a monologue of the narrator who is complaining about specks on a wall of his club. Several major themes of the novel are introduced in this monologue: the narrator is into the fashion business ("'I wanted to point this out to someone yesterday but a photo shoot intervened'") (G 5) and seems to have responsibilities toward the other characters present around him. We can already see that he has problems with names: "'and Yaki Nakamari or whatever the hell the designer's name is'" along with a concern for social status. The theme of confusion of identities is also present since Victor says "' Yaki Nakamari . . . mistook me for someone else so I couldn't register the complaint'" and he

already seems to be alone in the way that he sees things the other characters do not see: "'Specks – specks all over the third panel, see? – no, *that* one," which sets him apart from the rest of the characters, while raising the reader's attention to the fact that he might not be completely trustworthy. The last lines of the monologue introduce us to the way of speaking specific to the narrator: he asks, for the first time, a question which will come back regularly throughout the book: "'what's the *story*?'"

This self-reflexive question, along with its preceding details ("'I don't want a lot of description, just the story, streamlined, no frills, the lowdown: who, what where, when and don't leave out why'") roots the narration in a metaleptical dimension: this is the introduction to the novel, and is indeed a way of introducing the story.
The narrative in *Glamorama* is very self-conscious and plays with the reader on several levels.

It first establishes a whole list of extradiegetic references, from the moment brand and actors' names are mentioned, references that do not only exist in the fictional space, but that the reader may know from our "real" world. This suggests that some competence is required from the reader to understand the novel: it creates the image of an ideal reader, which Umberto Eco calls "Le lecteur modèle"[3], and who has a wide knowledge of pop culture, who knows the people and the brands to whom reference is made.

> Pour organiser sa stratégie textuelle, un auteur doit se référer à une série de compétences . . . qui confèrent un contenu aux expressions qu'il emploie. Il doit assumer que l'ensemble des compétences auquel il se réfère est le même que celui auquel se réfère son lecteur. C'est pourquoi il prévoira un Lecteur Modèle capable de coopérer à l'actualisation textuelle de la façon dont lui, l'auteur, le pensait et capable aussi d'agir interprétativement comme lui a agi génerativement.
>
> Il a de nombreux moyens à sa dispositions : le choix d'une langue . . . le choix d'un type d'encyclopédie . . . le choix d'un patrimoine lexical et stylistique donné . . . des signaux de genre . . . .[4]

Glamorama mainly expects from its ideal reader to have some encyclopedic and linguistic references: encyclopedic because of the multiplicity of actors, brand names, pop songs present in the text, which can be identified. The problem comes from the multiplicity of those references, and since there are so many of them we can say that the novel presupposes an encyclopedic competence from its ideal reader. This creates a competition between the reader and the text, a kind of game in which one must overcome the other by a greater encyclopaedia.

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[3] Umberto Eco, "Le Lecteur modèle", in *Lector in Fabula*, (Paris : Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1985).

What is more, a literary intertext is extremely present at some points, and the reader is supposed to understand those references as again a means to prove its encyclopedic capacity[5].

The linguistic competence of the reader needs to develop itself along the models of the novel itself. The way the characters speak seems obscure at first because those characters evolve in a world different from the reader's. The language they use is a source of problems, but it also shows what is important for those fashion-addicts: the interview of Victor is quite revealing in this sense:

MTV: 'What really pisses Victor Ward off?'

ME: 'The fact that David Byrne named his new album after a 'tea from Sri Lanka that's sold in Britain.' I swear to God I heard that somewhere and it drove me nuts.'

MTV (after polite laughter): 'No. What *really* makes you mad? What really gets you angry?'

ME (long pause, thinking): 'Well, recently, missing DJs, badly behaved bartenders, certain gossipy male models, the media's treatment of celebs. . . um . . .'

MTV: 'We were thinking more along the lines of the war in Bosnia or the AIDS epidemic or domestic terrorism. How about the current political situation?'

ME (long pause, tiny voice): 'Sloppy Rollerbladers? . . . The words 'dot dom'? . . .' (G 141-2)

The narrator in *Glamorama* lives in a world far from general concerns such as expressed in this interview. The narrator's competence (and his interest) in respect to politics or the AIDS epidemic is extremely low, but on the other hand his competence in matters of celebrity world and fashion accessories is extremely high. His codes of reference are not the same as the reader, which creates a tension between him/her and the text.

The reader has then to adapt to this position by trying to construct the meaning of sentences like "'You're starting to sound like a Calvin Klein ad, baby, and I don't like it." (G 316) We have to suppose that Calvin Klein ads carry with them something negative, and that "'It's about attitude as a lifestyle'" (G 316) has a negative connotation, however cryptic it might be. Sometimes the reader has no other solution but to agree with the characters or to bypass their remarks, as it is the case here. No further meaning is conveyed as to the global unfolding of the plot, and we as reader may chose to dismiss those as noise. However the remarks of the characters indicate to the reader the general lines of thinking of the characters, which in turn helps the reader construct the failing competence. "Un texte repose

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[4] Eco 71.
[5] See 2.1.1.1.2, p.50.

donc sur une compétence mais, de plus, il contribue à la produire."[6] We learn that George Nakashima and Yoki Nakamuri are designers, and that Michael Bergin and Jenny Shimuzu are famous people, and most of all we learn that the characters know a lot about the celebrity world, so that any mention of a name unknown to the reader may be interpreted as "someone famous," since the main code of reference for the characters is that of celebrity and fashion, and that their topics of discussion is quite predictable. On the other hand, once the terrorist background of the second side of the novel has been established, the mention of unknown characters or names is quite obscure, since a new code is introduced in the reference frame. We no longer know in which frame of reference those characters belong. This is also true for the characters we have already been introduced to: for example, when the terrorist bomb the Ritz hotel Victor finishes his description of the events with: "In a daze, wandering past me: Polly Mellon, Claudia Schiffer, Jon Bon Jovi, Mary Wells Laurence, Steven Friedman, Bob Collacello, Marisa Berenson, Boy George, Mariah Carey." (G 355). In this situation the reader tends to trust less and less the apparition of such characters, since the worlds of models of famous people seems so interconnected with that of terrorism, and those characters have a potential double meaning.

Glamorama finally invites the reader to admit certain facts. What was foreseen in the incipit of the novel ("'why won't get answered'" G 5) is actually happening and, whatever the reader does, a definite answer to the motive of the terrorist attacks will not be provided. Thus the creation of frustration functions as a traditional narrative device to reinforce the interest of the reader to keep looking for answers. A re-reading of the text, however, only raises more questions: in part one, when Victor and a few other characters are being driven to the opening part of the club, Victor describes the topics discussed on the way: "I'm not really hearing the things that are being said in the back of the limousine, just words – technobeat, slamming, moonscape, Semtex, nirvana, photogenic" (G 144) In the middle of this list of words the reader may (or should) notice the word "Semtex" drowned into a surrounding of noise elements. Semtex is, as we learn it later, is a type of explosive. Which means that the characters sitting at the back of the limousine (Lauren Hynde, Chloe Byrnes and Baxter Priestly) may at some point be involved in the terrorist conspiracy.

The major problem of Glamorama is that it is open to multiple interpretations. It is what Eco calls "opera aperta" or open text :

On a un texte ouvert quand l'auteur sait tout le parti à tirer de la figure 1 [(schéma de la communication)]. Il la lit comme le modèle d'une situation pragmatique qu'on ne peut éliminer . . . Il décide .

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[6] Eco 72.

. . jusqu'à quel point il doit contrôler la coopération du lecteur, où il doit la susciter, la diriger, la laisser se transformer en libre aventure interprétative. . . . Pour nombreuses que soient les interprétations possibles, il fera en sorte que l'une appelle l'autre, afin que s'établisse entre elles une relation non point d'exclusion mais bien de renforcement mutuel.[7]

By constructing his novel so that one aspect of it echoes another one, Ellis leaves the reader in a problematic situation: every interpretation of the text is possible, and yet not one is completely satisfying in that it encloses the other possible interpretations. Questions are still raised about the role of F.Fred Palakon and Lauren Hynde, about who the substitutes work for or why does Chloe Byrnes die.

The novel weaves a network of contradictions in which, still, the narrator evolves and action takes place. The idea of a global meaning of the work is negated and only parts of it are meaningful if taken independently: we can understand who Palakon works for, we can make out why the terrorists plant bombs, but we cannot establish a distinct motivated connection between those two entities.

The evolution of the plot ties in with the quest of the main character. The narrator's quest for a reason for what is happening around him is implicitly paralleled with the reader's quest for clues. The narrator evolves in a chaotic multi-layered fictional space, while the reader evolves in a chaotic narrative structure which is contradictory: it first appears quite clearly in the delimitation of chapters and parts, it is conscious of its cyclical structure and of the reader's involvement in the hermeneutic process, and at the same time it conceals itself behind layers of noise, which both help and disturb the reader by providing the codes for the interpretation of the text and dismantling them in a chaotic reversal movement. The reader is, just like the narrator, lost and confused in an environment which establishes and transgresses its own limits.

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[7] *Eco* 75.

PART II

FICTIONAL WORLDS INTERFERING

2.1 The delimitation of the spheres and the crossing of borders.

Glamorama sets up a narrative space composed of several elements mixed together with no precise limit between them. What makes the novel a composed entity is first the separation of the action in several "episodes" and material sections text; but also the important presence of intertext in the novel.

2.1.1 The intertext

The intertext is by essence a fictionalised entity bearing the attributes of both its origin and its host. This hybrid status is necessary to the definition of the intertext: it needs to be recognizable, and also needs to make sense in the context of the novel using it. In *Glamorama*, two main types of intertext can be defined: one taken from pop culture, and another one from the literary heritage of postmodern literature. The process is also at work in the nature of the characters, who are for many of them issued from various novels preceding *Glamorama*, and in the reworking of different genres of fiction which are re-formulated and adapted to the story.

2.1.1.1 Pop Culture

There is an intense use of pop culture throughout *Glamorama*; it represents a set of references shared by the characters and also in part by the reader. It can be defined as a common knowledge coming from products designed to satisfy the masses :

> Popular or "pop" culture is products produced and sold to the general public, which over time become artifacts of a distinct point in history. It is movies, television, periodicals (newspapers, magazines), books, videogames and CD-ROMS, the World Wide Web, cartoons, comic strips and books, paper goods, (posters, postcards), mass fashion, fads, housewares and decorative arts. Pop culture is fictional or real-life characters or entities, both beloved and reprehensible, widely known or given "cult" status; to wit: Mickey Mouse, Elvis Presley, Austin Powers, Betty Boop, Scooby-Doo . . . .[1]

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[1] Victoria Mielke, "About this Site, Part 2", from 9/11: Pop Culture and Remembrance, available online at http://septterror.tripod.com/aboutsite_2.html, 2002.

These references to pop culture in the novel can be seen as belonging to three different categories : music, cinema, and finally the press and advertising. The main question raised by such an intensive use of popular culture is can it be considered as an authentic form of knowledge and how useful should we consider it?

2.1.1.1.1 Pop culture in the plot

In the context of the book, pop culture is not only omnipresent, it also feeds the plot with the intervention of the "Band on the Run" project, which remains a mysterious threat. However, the way Victor gains access to this project, in a mock-spy-movie scene, hints that it is related with the series of bombing and murders we have been witnessing since his integration to the terrorist group (G 365). We learn later on that the reference is not that of a flight number as the police initially thought (which is probably what the writer of this project wanted them to believe) and that the plane is not going to explode, but that it is the description of a song:

> "The bomb isn't on that plane," I'm saying.
> I glance down at the WINGS printout, crumpled in my hands.
> BAND ON THE RUN
> 1985
> 511
> "It's a song…," I'm saying.
> "What do you mean?" the director asks.
> "It's a song," I'm saying. "It's not a flight."
> "What's a song?"
> "The song," I'm saying. "It's a song called '1985'."
> "It's a song?" the director asks. He doesn't understand.
> "It's on a Wings album," I'm saying. "It's on the *Band on the Run* album."
> "And?" the director asks, confused.
> "It's not a flight number," I'm saying.
> "What isn't?"
> "Five-one-one," I say.
> "Five-one-one isn't the flight number?" the director asks. "But this is it." The director gestures toward the video screen. "that's flight five-one-one."
> "No," I'm saying. "It's how long the song is." I take in a deep breath, exhaling shakily. "That song is five minutes and eleven seconds long. It's not a flight number." (G 437-438)

Songs in general are frequently used by the main character, through quotations but also as providing a sound track to the novel. Their presence also raises the question of the reader's encyclopedia by playing a kind of quiz game between the narrator and the reader.

2.1.1.1.2 Musical intertext

From the beginning of the novel we know that Victor is an expert at pop songs, he knows every detail about any song, including their exact lengths; we witness a game between Victor and a member of his band called Aztec:

> "'Magic Touch,'" Aztec shouts out.
> I answer without trying. "Plimsouls, *Everywhere at Once*, 3:19, Geffen."
> "'Walking Down Madison,'" he tosses out.
> "Kirsty MacColl, *Electric Landlady*, 6:34, Virgin."
> "'Real World.'"
> "Jesus Jones, *Liquidizer*, 3:03, SBK."
> "'Jazz Police.'"
> "Leonard Cohen, *I'm Your Man*, 3:51, CBS."
> "'You get what you deserve.'"
> "Big Star, *Radio City*, 3:05, Stax." I yawn. "Oh, this is too easy." (G 91)

The issue at stake in this game is that songs are no more than names and numbers to Victor. They are deprived from their content and are only described on their surface: what is the most important feature of a song is no longer its tune or lyrics, but its commercial characteristics. And yet it is this conception of things that will help him realize the problem in the Band on the Run project: since he knows all the details about the song, he sees that the supposed clue about a bomb is actually a sham. Victor's knowledge provides the reader with a clue that he probably couldn't have found by himself, or only after some research.

There are many references to songs throughout the novel and the impression given is that Ellis is trying to create a soundtrack for his narrative, which is actually the case: we are told later on that there *is* a soundtrack to the narrative, or at least to one of the films embedded in the narrative: "The camera slowly pans around my apartment, Smashing Pumpkins' "Stumbleine" pours over the sound track . . . ." (G 184). They are all real songs, which exist in our world and can be called "immigrants" according to Thomas Pavel's terminology: "Les *immigrants* du texte viennent d'ailleurs soit du monde réel (Saint-

Martin-le-Grand ou Londres), soit encore d'autres textes …"[2] This means that, as immigrants, these songs can be more or less easily identified by the reader, which initiates a play on the intertext between the narrator and the reader, producing a reality effect which makes the reader feel closer to the text. At the same time we have the impression that the reader is invited to a game of guessing what the hidden references are. This plays on the discrepancy between the narrator's and the reader's respective encyclopedias, thus incorporating the reader into the same world as the narrator: the purpose of having an extended knowledge of pop culture is to outwit people who are seen as rivals in the race for fame.

On several occasions, the character use a quotation from a song to talk to someone, for example: "In tears, Tammy runs away from Bruce, who has China Chow perched on his knees, and a dealer Bentley sent over named the Grand Poobah whispers "Have you been experienced?" in my ear and arrangements are made." This line refers to a 1968 song by Jimmy Hendrix and to the sex drugs and rock'n roll way of life, which could actually correspond to Victor's point of view were he not ironic and distant.

Recurring elements give rhythm to the story, especially in its first part : U2's "Even Better than the Real Thing" appears several times, hinting first at the condition of the hero who pretends to be better than common people, but it is gradually deconstructed and the title gains on new meaning as the plot unfolds. One of the lines from the song becomes Victor's motto as he takes a distance from the accumulation of problems surrounding him: "we'll slide down the surface of things"(G 149) echoes the character's condition since he is not able to get into contact with his environment, even suggesting that he has always been alien to reality: indeed we could say that what he is experiencing, this mixture of fiction and reality, is "even better than the real thing", and the metaleptical dimension of the quotation exceeds the intention of the narrator when he first mentioned it.

Another song comes back repeatedly and very mysteriously. Victor hears someone whistling or singing it on several occasions, when he is alone in a desert place: "Outside, more light, some of it artificial, opens up the city, and the sidewalks on 14th Street are empty, devoid of extras, and above the sounds of faraway jackhammers I can hear someone singing "The Sunny Side of the Street" softly to himself and when I feel someone touch my shoulder I turn around but no one's there." (G 168) This song has a particular echo in a work by Ellis since it originally appeared in his first novel, *Less Than Zero*, as a

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[2] Thomas Pavel, *Univers de la fiction* (Harvard University Press, 1986 ; Paris : collection Poétique, Editions du Seuil, 1988) 41.

symbol for the main character's nostalgia of the past. It first appears in a passage in which Clay remembers his grandmother before her death:

Since that summer, I have remembered my grandmother in a number of ways. I remember playing cards with her and sitting on her lap in airplanes, and the way she slowly turned away from my grandfather at one of my grandfather's parties at one of his hotels when he tried to kiss her. And I remember her staying at the Bel Air Hotel and giving me pink and green mints, and at La Scala, late at night, sipping red wine, and humming 'On the Sunny Side of the Street' to herself.[3]

This song therefore hints at a kind of nostalgic memory, at the loneliness of the character, and it plays on a double level of intertext: that of the song, but also that of its significance in Ellis's first novel.

Most songs quoted belong to the same period, and are to be found in albums released during the 1990s. However they belong to many different genres, and it seems that we can distinguish two kinds of music in the novel. First, famous songs corresponding to the attitude of these *party people*, famous classic songs ranging from Abba and the Beatles to Everything But the Girl and Oasis ("Liam Gallagher echoing out, singing the first verse from "Champagne Supernova," <u>G</u> 414.) while on another plane we come across rather obscure songs belonging to such styles as new wave, indie rock or post punk, with bands like Primal Scream, Whitesnake or Imperial Teen. The reader is expected to know about the first category, whereas the second one adds to the hermeneutic dimension of the text: these are names the reader probably hasn't heard of before, and they do not take part in the game of finding if they come from the real world. Their importance is lessened, so that they only become a hint of Victor's knowledge about a specialized area of the music industry.

2.1.1.1.3 Magazines and advertising

Another area of pop culture extensively referred to in the book is that of the press and advertising. We are told about many magazines dealing with different subjects: fashion, television or health are the main topics, but what matters is that those magazines are the main source of learning pop culture in general. They teach their readers the most fashionable ways of life and tastes. The narration takes place in the world of fashion and

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[3] *Less Than Zero* 151.

trendy people whose main interest in life is to be as conspicuous and "in" as possible in their apprehension of the world. For them, celebrity is an end in itself.

One of the most important elements in the conspicuous consumption of the characters is clothes and especially designer items. All the characters consider it as vital to wear Calvin Klein underwear or Paul Smith shoes. But there is more to it that wearing the clothes for the sake of the label: the references to brand names exceed by far the mere description of items of clothing. We have here another example of the fictionalisation of the real.

The association of a brand name with an attitude or way of life is the work of advertising. Advertising uses different means to surround such a brand with a kind of aura, by a combination of visual and musical effects in posters or televised ads. So much so that those names become associated with certain values, certain attitudes, even ways of life. In the end, what the characters refer to when saying ". . . . she's shot through with something like pain or maybe something else like maybe something by Versace . . . ."(G 142) is no longer the brand itself, but the image of the brand they have integrated through advertising. Words become references to references, and even more so since the original referent is more or less denied or forgotten in the process of creating those sentences: in the example above, the brand Versace is no longer associated to clothes, and what remains is a strange, cryptic vocabulary and a bizarre use of words. The characters in *Glamorama*, and especially Victor as main protagonist and narrator, speak the language of advertising. Most of his language comes down to the same thing : he takes possession of a much used vocabulary, of ready-made sentences, integrates them and, doing so, changes their meanings, so that only his vision of the words counts. This process of reproduction and deformation can be compared to the works of Andy Warhol. By repeating the same item over and over, Warhol creates a defamiliarization and conveys new meaning. The meaning is not to be found in what is shown (or said in our case), but in the very process of recycling. Repetition creates originality, and this is what Victor Ward is looking for. What he says is sometimes meaningless, and yet the way he organizes words in rhyming patterns or advertisement-like catching phrases enables us (or the addressee) to acknowledge him as the author of the sentence. What Victor is constantly looking for is celebrity: "'Well, I represent a pretty big pie-wedge of the new generation. I'm maybe a symbol.' Pause. 'An icon? No.' Longer pause. 'Not yet.'"(G 140). Creating bizarre sentences is his way to show the originality he can bring compared to other people.

Victor and the other characters are obsessed by brands and fashionable details. He nearly always gives indications concerning the things he owns or sees:

> In the bathroom there's a poster of Diana Rigg in "The Avengers" and candles from Agnès b. and in the bedroom there's a down comforter lying on a futon that was handcarved in a Japanese forest and the original poster for *La Dolce Vita* that Chloe gave me for my birthday hangs over it and in the closet in that bedroom is a black Paul Smith suit, a black turtleneck, jeans and white shirts, vests, an open-weave pullover sweater, a pair of brightly colored Hush Puppies, black desert boots. . . .

The urge for conspicuous consumption the characters all feel is, as we shall see later, a product of the consumerist society, mainly through advertising.

Celebrity is a quest for acknowledgement. Throughout the book we witness the different characters looking for pictures of themselves in different magazines:

> Passing a newsstand by the new Gap, I notice I'm still on the cover of the current issue of *YouthQuake*, looking pretty cool – the headline 27 AND HIP in bold purple letters above my smiling, expressionless face, and I've just got to buy another copy, but since I don't have any cash there's no way. (G 19)

This quest seems quite self-indulgent, because what the characters are interested in is themselves. Narcissism is extremely present in the novel, and it is an important reason for the main character's situation of solipsism: since he only considers himself as important or worth considering, he cannot make any concession to the others, which causes his isolation and loss.

However, there is more depth to it if we consider it in relation to the episode of the compromising photograph Victor wants to destroy. What he does by looking at himself in magazines is find out how they construct or perceive him, and by extension what the people think about him. The magazines shape people's general considerations of who Victor is. The problem is that they only show a certain part of him, and the picture on the cover of the magazine is not Victor himself, but the image of Victor deformed through the choices of the magazine: it is someone else. What the characters try to do when going through magazines is ironically look for themselves literally: they are trying to be as close as possible to their public image, because they belong to the fashion industry, a trade in which they are consumption goods. This adds to the alienation and confusion of the characters: Victor is trying to be as faithful to his image on the magazine covers as possible, but since he is at the same time taking part in the running of one or two (or even

three) movies about him, he does not know any longer which Victor is being looked at or looked for, and he becomes a victim of celebrity. This quest of identity through the media has been termed by the American writer Don DeLillo the "universal third person."

2.1.1.1.4 The "universal third person"

In *Americana* (1971), a character reflects over the power of advertising:

> 'How does a successful television commercial affect the viewer?'
>
> 'It makes him want to change the way he lives.'
>
> 'In what way?'
>
> 'It moves him from the first person consciousness to third person. In this country there is a universal third person, the man we all want to be. Advertising has discovered this man. It uses him to express the possibilities open to the consumer. To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream. Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled. . . The third person was invented by the consumer, the great armchair dreamer. Advertising discovered the value of the third person but the consumer invented him. The country itself invented him. He came over on the *Mayflower*.'[4]

This perfectly describes the aspirations of Victor in *Glamorama*, as he is trying to enter the "third-person consciousness" through the reading of magazines. The universal third person represents the possibility of a better state of consumption. As we have seen it, Victor's only center of interest is that of consumption and celebrity. He wants to be more famous, and his image on the front page of a magazine only reinforces this desire. The fact that he keeps asking people if they have seen him on the cover of *YouthQuake* not only shows his narcissistic need for acknowledgement, but also indicates that he continually tends towards the third person state. His advertisement-like language is a reflection of the urge to become very famous. Celebrity is the third person Victor want to enter; it is a world of pure consumerism, in which new worlds and dreams of consumption are created with the help of models like him in a sort of vicious circle of emptiness. The kind of celebrity he is looking for is unattainable, since it means becoming pure image and desire, which Victor tries to achieve by recycling advertisement language and stereotypical attitudes. The erasure of personality is the price to pay to reach the ultimate celebrity. During an interview with the journalist from "*Details*", Victor offers a proof of his vacuity: "'What's wrong with looking good?' . . . 'What if it's at the expense of something else?' 'What's. . . something else?'" (G57) This complete involvement in the quest for celebrity should be

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[4] Don DeLillo, *Americana*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company 1971), 270-271.

the opportunity for him to gain access to this celebrity, but the mismanaging of his relationships and his lack of insight prevent him to reach this satisfaction.

Pop culture is obviously an important dimension of the novel's use of the intertext. However, *Glamorama* also uses more scholarly references to other novels. This helps defining what is seen as the erasure of the boundaries between high brow and low brow cultures: by juxtaposing trivial and literary references, Ellis suggests that the difference is no longer relevant in the context of contemporary literature, a literature which has become another item of consumption.

2.1.1.2 The literary intertext

Many references to other works of fiction can be found in *Glamorama*. They can be separated into two different sources: Ellis's own texts, and the rest of the literary background.

Many of the characters of the novel come from the novel *The Rules of Attraction*, in which they were young aimless students at Camden college, an equivalent for the author's Bennington College. This establishes a strong link between the two books, and sets a global perspective on Ellis's work. We see the same characters who have grown up and evolved from the blankness of the end of the 80s to the obsession with celebrity of the 90s.

The presence of Lauren Hynde, Jamie Fields, Bertrand Ripleis, Victor Johnson refers to *The Rules of Attraction*. What is more, the characters often speak of their past at Camden, linking the two stories strongly.

2.1.1.2.1 Self-references and auto-parody

Ellis's first novel, *Less Than Zero* (1985) is also referred to on several occasions: during the horror movie scene in the abandoned house, Victor finds, scribbled on the walls, the words "Disappear Here," which constituted a redundant mantra in *Less Than Zero.* They are yet another statements of the issue of de-individualization and death of the emotional. Victor's descriptions of former stays in hotels or rehabilitation clinics strongly recall *Less Than Zero's* affectless and apathetic tone, with settings on the West Coast and the flattening of activities and emotions:

Chloe and I went to L.A. last September for reasons we never really figured out, though in retrospect I think it had something to do with trying to save our relationship . . . We stayed at the Chateau Marmont in a

giant suite with a balcony twice its size overlooking West L.A. When Chloe didn't want to talk she'd rush to the bathroom, turn on the hair dryer full blast and point it toward my calm, bewildered face. . .Chloe was always 'dying of thirst', there were always tickets for some lame-o-screening, our conversations were always garbled, the streets were always – inexplicably – covered with confetti . . .Everyone talked about the year 2018. One day we pretended to be ghosts. (G 88)

In those passages the long sentences, the repetition of "always" and the general feeling of apathy transfer the novel onto a different plane, more reminiscent of Ellis's previous works, which take over the themes of the disappearance of feelings and the predictability of rich people's lives. The passages are extremely polluted by pop culture references, which intend to show that emotions are nothing more than other items of consumption, and which are less desirable perhaps because of their lack of immediacy.

Those passages, by referring to *Less Than Zero*, makes the reader feel a kind of nostalgia for the past. The fact is that the emotionless past still represents a secure haven where everything is predictable, thus reassuring. This stands in sharp contrast with the present time of the narration, where everything is blurred and nothing is absolutely certain. The image of the flat grey past as it is expressed in the passage above is the image of a paradise lost, the safety of youth and aimlessness.

The different novels by the author establish a sort of progression, with the exception of *American Psycho* which was focused on the diseased mind of a psychopath, Patrick Bateman, a character who had made a brief appearance in *The Rules of Attraction* as the brother of the central protagonist Sean (Patrick also appears in *Glamorama* in a club scene and reference is made to "his" novel through the sick pun he produces when telling a nearby woman "I like to keep abreast," a direct reference to his second personality as a serial killer.)

The friction created between all of the characters in *Glamorama* creates implicitly a kind of world outside the texts in which the characters are still present. *Glamorama* could be seen as the follow-up to *The Rules of Attraction*, but it does not immediately follows it in terms of story and time. There is a lapse of time between the two stories, during which the characters have evolved, grown up and have become adults. What happened in between is not mentioned anywhere and is left open, a blank space. This space is filled in part by *Glamorama* since we guess that during this time some characters have become models or actors, some have been contacted by secret services or terrorist cells, Jamie Fields has met Bobby Hughes on so on. All this is taken on by one of the mantras of the novel. "It's what you don't know that matters most" can be seen as directed to reader: we do not know what

has happened since *The Rules of Attraction,* but this is what matters most since it has defined the characters we can now apprehend inside the text. The most important questions raised by the story (who did it, why, who is Palakon. . .) do not find their answers inside the text, and yet they necessarily exist, somewhere, behind the text, in what we don't know.

2.1.1.2.2 Other literary references

The use of different narrative devices also refer to other literary works. The most obvious one is the presence of lists all through the book. A list in literature, especially a list of guests as it is the case here, marks a reference to Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.* This novel was the first one to incorporate such a list within its narrative, and the Gatsby gust list has become a symbol for the novel itself. In this way we could compare *Glamorama*'s study of the atmosphere of intense activity in the 90s with Fitzgerald's description of the Roaring Twenties. We should notice as well the names of the people playing in Victor's band, "the Impersonators": their names are Aztec, Conrad, Fergy and Fitzgerald. We can assume that reference her is made to two authors linked to Ellis: Fitzgerald, as we have said it, developed some of the same themes as Ellis, while Conrad possibly refers to *The Secret Agent*, a novel dealing with the issues of terrorism which was linked at one time with the motivation of the Unabomber responsible for the Oklahoma City bombings in 1993.

The presence of the character of Alison Poole hints at the work of another writer, Jay McInerney. Indeed, Alison Poole is originally the narrator of *The Story of my Life* (1991), written by an author who has been compared to Ellis and assimilated to a kind of literary group known as the "Brat-Pack", from the kind of characters used by them: young, rich and blasé characters who live lives of cheap entertainment, casual sex, drugs, in a post-punk atmosphere of disenchantment. Other writers in the "Brat-Pack" include Dennis Cooper, whose treatment of violence and homosexuality can be compared to that of Ellis's, Tama Janowitz, Donna Tart, Gary Indiana or Joel Rose, even if these writers do not enjoy the same exact popularity as Ellis and are seen as "ghettoized".

Reference is also made to the author that influenced Ellis a lot during the writing of *Glamorama*, Don DeLillo. When asked about the writers having influenced him in the writing of *Glamorama,* Ellis answered: "After I thought I couldn't be influenced by anyone anymore, I started seriously reading Don DeLillo. I couldn't get him out of my mind while

I was writing *Glamorama. . .*"[5]. The theme of celebrity and terrorism is at the heart of Delillo's novel *Mao II* (1991), in which a writer intends to trade himself against the hostages of Lebanese terrorists but dies on his way.

When Victor is referred to as being a Libra, the word echoes the title of one of DeLillo's novels. *Libra* (1988) also deals with conspiracy and alienation through the media, though it is more rooted in reality since its topic is the Kennedy assassination. However the symbol of the Libra has the same value in Delillo's text as in Ellis's: it represents oscillation, the inability of the character to chose between two different worlds and his subsequent downfall.

The mixing of different worlds is a postmodern feature in literature, and the omnipresence of an intertext springs from this issue: if worlds are created and mixed together, it is normal that such a things happens in the very style of the narration, on the construction of the novel. On the level of the text itself, the intertext also applies to more technical aspects: the nature of the characters is highly influenced by previous works, and the very genre of the novel borrows from various already developed genres and themes in literature.

2.1.1.3 Recycling characters

The characters in *Glamorama* do not all exist on the same plane. Several categories can be made out: immigrants, auto-immigrants, autochthones define the status of the characters in relation to the diegetic universe of the book. In the narration, they can be single-facetted (playing only one part in relation to the story), multi-facetted (having different roles in different moments of the narration) or non-invested (being only present to fill the narrative space with a mere figure). Those definitions are not exclusive, but can represent the evolution of the characters.

Characters of fiction are, as we have already seen it previously, separated into three large categories by Thomas Pavel:

Les *autochtones* sont décrits (à l'aide de prédicats extranucléaires) comme ayant été inventés ou créés par l'auteur du texte : ainsi, M. Pickwick, fruit de l'imagination de Dickens. Les *immigrants* du texte viennent d'ailleurs, soit du monde réel (Saint-Martin-le-Grand ou Londres), soit encore d'autres textes. . . Si un texte de fiction mentionne un objet

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[5] From Bold Type interview with Bret Easton Ellis, cited 05/06/01, available on the Internet at http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0199/ellis/interview.html.

réel, Paris, par exemple, en en modifiant considérablement les propriétés, le résultat sera un *substitut.*[6]

2.1.1.3.1 Autochthones

This category includes a lot of characters, from secondary (JD, Peyton, Beau who are just milling around in the club) to important ones (Bobby, Palakon, Marina Cannon.)

The status of the autochthones confers them a distinctive feature in the way that the reader cannot know them beforehand. When confronted to Lauren or Victor, the reader may feel more comfortable towards them since they are already known to him.

2.1.1.3.2 Immigrants

The category which is most represented in *Glamorama* seems to be the immigrants. While their number might not be as high as that of the autochthones, their presence is more noticeable to the reader, because they appeal to an extradiegetic pre-knowledge of the characters, what has been defined as encyclopedic knowledge[7]. The immigrants in *Glamorama* can be separated into two types: first, the "real-world" immigrants: they are characters we know from outside the literary world, they are the representations of real people we may know from the press or different cultural devices such as cinema or music. Their number is extremely high in *Glamorama* but their importance is extremely low. They are mentioned as a means to root the diegesis into the fashion world while at the same time giving a more realistic aspect to the events.

Those immigrants are particularly noticeable at the beginning of the novel, during the preparation of the party at the club. We are provided with endless lists of potential guests. Though the function of these lists shall be analysed in detail, their most obvious aspect is the contradiction inherent to those lists: there are the names of famous people we could consider as exceptional because of how famous they are. However, even if each name means something to the reader, the device of the list and accumulation flattens all distinction and rejects the possibility of any depth. They are already dismissed before their name appear, since they are not considered as people, but only as "RSVPs"; the only word

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[6] Thomas Pavel, *Univers de la fiction* (Harvard University Press, 1986 ; Paris : collection Poétique, Editions du Seuil, Mars 1988) 41.

[7] See 1.2.2.2, p. 42.

qualifying Matthew Barney, Candace Bushnell, Scott Bakula or Barry Diller is "yes" (G 70-1), which falls short of being considered as characterization.

They are characters defined only by their names, as if this was enough to make them entire individual entities, but too many names destroy meaning and they are just a background presence. Sometimes those celebrity characters are on the verge of being "substitutes", since they actually perform actions, however minor, which represent a choice from the author to integrate them in the narrative. When "Brad Pitt and Gwyneth Paltrow celebrate [Chloe's] choice of fingernail polish," (G 159) their status hesitates between "immigrants" and "substitutes" since we do not know what would be the reaction of the real-life people if confronted to this situation.

Another type of immigrant resides in immigrants from other literary worlds, who come mainly from Ellis's own previous works. They could be termed as auto-immigrants (by extension of Pavel's terms of "immigrant"), since they come from somewhere else but in the same time correspond to a self-reference, which implies that the world they originally come from is quite similar to that of *Glamorama*.

2.1.1.3.3 Auto-immigrants

This category integrates most of the main characters of the novel, both from the New York scene and from the terrorist group.

Victor, the main character, is himself an immigrant: he originally featured in Ellis's second novel, *The Rules Of Attraction* (1987), in which he made brief apparitions. In this novel he is Lauren Hynde's boyfriend but leaves for a journey around Europe, during which he appears to forget everything about Lauren but falls in love with Jamie Fields. This relationship between the three characters is referred to in *Glamorama* in a conversation between Jamie and Victor, though it is reversed and Victor doesn't remember anything about it:

> 'You must remember Lauren, Victor.' She says this sighing, looking away. 'Lauren Hynde?'
> 'It doesn't ring a bell,' I say blankly. 'Why? Should it?'
> 'You left me for her.' (G 249)

At the end of *The Rules of Attraction* Victor is trying to contact Jamie after leaving Lauren, so it seems that temporality is tampered with: it could be that in *Glamorama* events are not related as they happened (in which case those characters might not be immigrants

but real autochthones with the same name), or else it supposes a kind of time lapse between *The Rules of Attraction* and *Glamorama* during which the characters have continued to evolve, to grow up and to live on their separate lives, and during this time Victor would have left Jamie to go back with Lauren. This interpretation of things is the most consistent with the novel since readers who have already read the other works of Bret Easton Ellis already know certain characters and thus understand the self-referential dimension. In the same way, Bertrand Ripleis was also present in *The Rules of Attraction* as a minor character, which he still is though he seems to belong to the terrorist organization.

Alison Poole is a different kind of character: she is both an immigrant and an auto-immigrant. She originally comes from Jay McInerney's *Story of my Life* (1988) in which she was the young deluded narrator, which is an acknowledgement of McInerney's work from Ellis, since McInereney is another member of the same school of fiction. Alison Poole was then borrowed by Ellis and appeared briefly in *American Psycho* (1991), to find a more important role in *Glamorama*. This extends the idea of characters beings actors: by using an emigrant from other texts, Ellis creates roles for them, as if they had an existence outside the books, and could be invited to participate in a novel as it happens between TV series that integrate crossover episodes.

2.1.1.3.4 Non-invested characters

They are the characters who barely appear: most of them are immigrants from the real world, and are mostly elements in a list, which we can barely call characters. Their existence is supposed *in absentia* and is only due to a foreknowledge of their names by the reader. They are mostly noise impending to the understanding of the plot, even if they take part in communicating the concerns of the narrator about certain themes, like racism or homosexuality. Some other minor characters (like the French Premier's son and Sam Ho, both victims of the terrorists) actually play an important part in the plot, not so much by what they actually do, but rather because of how their characters are used as tools to trap Victor in the circle of the conspiracy. Sam Ho, for example, is very passive in the text: Bobby asks Victor to go and pick him up from a night club and to bring him back to the terrorists' house. They are not yet termed as terrorists at this moment of the story, but Sam Ho is going to introduce this theme into the narration, since he is the first person Victor sees tortured by his friends.

What is more, the terrorists use Sam Ho to capture Victor in their nets. They create images of Victor and Sam having sex, which establishes a direct link between them,

causing Victor to be the last person to have seen Sam before he died, thus making him highly suspicious, if this photo was rendered public. Several photos of the same kind are created, which correspond to the moments Victor was seen somewhere or with someone when he could not be there. One of them, called "'Victor' Hell's Kitchen w/ Mica, NYC" (G 357) places Victor in the same situation as with Sam Ho: the DJ Mica does not appear a single time in the novel; we only know that "'She's disappeared. No one can find her.'"(G 13) and that she is found "eviscerated" on Hell's Kitchen, another word Victor doesn't understand: "'She OD'd?' 'No,' Damien says very carefully. 'She was eviscerated, Victor.' 'Oh my God,' I gasp, holding my head, and then, 'What does eviscerated mean ?'" (G 149).

2.1.1.3.5 Single and multi-facetted characters

Many characters in *Glamorama* have two or more roles in the plot. Those who first appear as only part of the New York partying scene also appear to play a part in the terrorist conspiracy against Victor, or also in a anti-terrorist manipulation scheme. Those affiliations are however difficult to establish clearly. The text does not provide sufficient answers in this respect, apart from the confessions of a dying Jamie Fields. Yet she admits at the very end that she is not Jamie Fields. The question of whether we can trust her or not is implicit in this statement, and our suspicion is increased by the fact that "on cue a giant eruption of flies swarm into the courtyard in one massive black cloud."(G 426), which tends to indicate that the scene is also being filmed and is just another part of a movie, implying that everything is organised and planned, even Jamie's confession. The issue then comes from the motive of the film: who directs it, what for, and whom for?

We know that basically two big entities are fighting around Victor: the people in favour of his father (who also side with the terrorists) and the people against his father (who tend to side with the anti-terrorist organisation.) The fact that Jamie belonged to both makes her quite unreliable in her assertions. This adds to the confusion springing from a double set of cameras. One of the teams films Victor in relation to his celebrity status and knows nothing about the terrorist attempts, at least until Victor warns them (a scene during which the director of the team is killed). The other team shoots a movie about the terrorist organisation, not always involving Victor as he is aware of. The problem in Jamie Field's confession is that if it is being filmed by the "terrorist" camera team, then her confession becomes completely useless because of the probability the terrorist have to know everything she says.

The notion of character in *Glamorama* is quite distorted in comparison with traditional narratives by the treatment of the characters' different aspects evolving along with the plot. They change their personality along the guidelines of the plot and sometimes become very unstable entities whose very existence seems to be questionable.

The very notion of plot is played with inside the novel: it obviously is the ensemble of events happening around and to the characters of the novel which build up the story of the book. But "plot" also refers to a conspiracy, and the conspiracy present in the novel is also the story of the novel. The two meanings of the word are therefore mixed together so that the novel is articulated around the conspiracy.

This conspiracy, however, takes on different appearances throughout the book. As the story unfolds, the narrator goes through several episodes and different literary genres, adding to the overall artificiality of the text.

As the author uses and recycles some external characters as the protagonists of his story, in the same way he utilizes various literary genres to give texture to his narrative.

2.1.1.4 Mixing literary genres

The postmodern process of deconstructing literary genres is very active in *Glamorama*. Many episodes of various lengths which are scattered in the narrative have a specific genre attached to them, usually closer to cinematographic themes such as thriller, horror, romance, pornography or spy-story. The whole novel, however, can be seen as a deconstruction of a picaresque novel, as we have seen it previously[8], and also as a reworking of a classic tragedy.

2.1.1.4.1 A collection of styles

The novel is scattered with references to literary or film genres as the hero progresses in the narrative. The first part of the novel presents the style and activities typical of an Ellis novel: the characters are young, rich, live it up in constant partying, easy sex and easy drugs, along with an exaggerated interest for consumer goods, which is quite close to the tone of any soap opera, with trivial concerns and focused on difficult love affairs.

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[8] See 1.1, p.14.

The first change in the tone of events happens at a moment when Victor has just left Lauren and is driving his Vespa to go and meet a DJ at the Fashion Café. The beginning of chapter 14 shows Victor engaged in a car-chase scene on the New York streets:

A black Jeep, its top up, its windows tinted, wheels in behind me on 23rd Street and as I zoom through the Park Avenue tunnel whoever's driving flips on his brights and closes in, the Jeep's fender grazing the back of the Vespa's wheel guard

I swerve onto the dividing line, oncoming traffic racing toward me while I bypass the row of cabs on my side, heading toward the wraparound at Grand Central. I accelerate up the ramp, zoom around the curve, swerving to miss a limo idling in front of the Grand Hyatt, and then I'm back on Park without any hassles until I hit 48th Street, where I look over my shoulder and spot the black Jeep a block behind me. . . .(G 112)

This chase comes right before the meeting with the mysterious agent Palakon, and it might be interpreted as a way to force Victor into meeting this character. The description of the chase is very detailed, as if it was not a problem to Victor who narrates the events in a very detached way. It relies a lot on visual effects, and give the impression that we are watching a film:

I maneuver the Vespa onto the sidewalk but the Jeep doesn't care and careens right behind me, halfway on the street, its two right wheels riding the curb, and I'm yelling at people to get out of the way . . . businessmen lashing out at me with briefcases, cabdrivers shouting obscenities, blaring their horns at me, a domino effect. (G 113)

This passage uses all the clichés of the car-chase cinema scene, with the traditional shouting, horn-sounding and the car chasing the motorcycle. Other atmospheres are also played upon in various passages of the novel.

The horror scenes present in *Glamorama* have been reproached to the author. The graphic violence used to describe acts of torture had been at the origin of the refusal from publishers Simon & Schuster of Ellis's third novel *American Psycho* in 1990. They are yet another example of alternative genres in the description of the action, the question not being whether they are dispensable or not: they are another example of how everything in the postmodern culture of images is usable in commercial terms. The fact that the whole novel is "filmed" is in a way a means of showing how everything can be screened and watched. Thus the different genres present in *Glamorama* use the codes established by movies, and nothing new is created in the novel except the reflection on the distance

brought by a television screen. The question raised by the pornographic and violent scenes of the novel is: why should those things be more offensive in a book than on a TV screen?

The violent scenes still have a role in the delimitation of how the plot functions: we witness in many of them an interference of the fictional with the real, leading to a confused perception of the diegetic space. For example, when the terrorists place a bomb in the Paris underground, we are given this description by the narrator:

> A shot of the windows on the train imploding from the force of the blast
> A shot of doors folding in half.
> A shot of the train lurching forward, burning.
> A shot of a scattering crowd.
> Various shots of people blown apart, extras and stuntmen thrown out of the lightweight steel car and onto the tracks.
> Shots of body parts – legs and arms and hands, most of them real – skidding across the platform. . . Over the sound track Serge Gainsbourg's 'Je t'Aime' starts playing. (G 319)

This excerpt shows the blurring of reality and fiction perfectly: we are told that "most" of the body parts scattered on the scene are "real," which means that some are not and were added for the purpose of the film. This offers a metaleptic consideration of fictional objects: one can add or take anything to get maximum impact, and play with the conventions to blur the limits of what is to be taken seriously or not.

A passage containing a lot of references to the horror movie codes, corresponds to the moment when Victor comes back to the terrorists' house and ends up witnessing the horrible death of Bentley, one of the terrorists: first, "the door leading into the courtyard just swings open," (G 413) which reminds us of the doors opening and closing on their own in horror movies. Then we are told that "inside, things feel wrong"(G 414), that everything is dark and silent. The vocabulary of classic gothic imagery is very present ("A reflection in the gilt-edged mirror that hangs over the stove: my grave expression"), and mystery is introduced by the apparition of monstrous "cave drawings," of satanic symbols and messages ("DiSAPpEAR Here," a reference to Ellis's first novel, in which the narrator is confused when facing this giant billboard in Los Angeles.) The scene ends up in a gory scene with a lot of blood and detailed descriptions of what is happening to Bentley's body.

Among the other styles used in *Glamorama* we can make out the integral interview Victor gives to MTV, which is reported in a journalistic layout of a dialogue, with "MTV" and "ME" being introduced in front of each line, as it is usual when interviews are reported on paper. This can be seen as a parody of the interview style, and by extension a parody of

fashion magazines and popular press, whose questions are quite predictable and common, and to which a famous model can answer whatever he wants, even lyrics from a Nirvana song as it is the case here ("A mulatto, an albino, a mosquito, my libido", G 142, from the song "Smells Like Teen Spirit).

The second part of the novel, where Victor is crossing the Atlantic on a ship, can be seen as a reference to stories of travels on sea, with a distortion of the ship being attacked: here, the ship stops in the middle of the night and nothing seems to happen, though we will learn later that the leader of the terrorist cell came on board to redirect Victor in his journey. The conventions of the TV game show are also used when Victor and a member of his music band test each other on their respective pop music knowledge ((G 91.)

The global structure of the novel echoes that of a TV series, with an episode-based structure, crossovers with the characters, and a playful use of generic conventions which actually is an exercise in style. The consequences of those changes in tones are purely incidental. The use of different codes only hints at the versatile nature of television culture:

> . . . television programmes are likely to combine across genres rather than commenting on earlier versions of the same genre. . . Moreover, postmodern theorists might point out that genres need no longer make sense. The intertextual knowledge audiences display as skilled readers of media texts allows them to operate with an understanding that transcends and cuts across genres.[9]

They do not introduce another dimension but only highlight the fictionality of the "reality" Victor evolves in, which is to be paralleled to *our* reality[10]. The problem raised by those shifts in tone is that the novel might only result in a series of separate episodes with no real plot behind them. However, this is where *Glamorama* differs from the other works of B. E. Ellis: whereas *The Rules of Attraction* (1987) or *The Informers* (1994) did not rely on a plot and corresponded more to series of snapshots or still-lives, *Glamorama* has a strong narrative structure and as we have seen it, relies a lot on the notion of plot. Therefore, is there another genre we could assimilate *Glamorama* to, taking the novel in its entirety?

The answer is not certain, but the perception the reader has of the book make it strangely look like a form of modern tragedy, which would be the counterpart of the shattered multi-facetted entity we have just described.

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[9] Bernadette Casey, Neil Casey et al., "Genre" in *Television Studies, the Key Concepts*, (London: Routledge 2002), 110.
[10] See 3.1.3, p. 101.

2.1.1.4.2 *Glamorama*: a mock tragedy

The novel possesses many characteristics belonging to a tragic work. A tragedy describes a conflict between the main character and a superior force, with a sad ending (often it is the death of the main character.) The main protagonist is defined with a tragic flaw which brings about his downfall; he has to make a decisive choice, and his tragic flaw prevents him from making the right one. The ending of the tragedy is meant to trigger a catharsis in the audience, which corresponds to the relieving of a tension created by the main character, by means of an *anagnorisis*, a realization of the tragic flaw coupled with a reversal of the situation. Finally, the presence of a chorus forewarns the audience while providing a kind of objective moralistic commentary on the hero's actions.

Throughout the novel, we witness Victor's struggle against a superior force which is yet hard to define. In a classic tragedy, the hero is opposed to destiny or to the gods. Here, the main character is fighting against his destiny as a character of fiction: it seems that the hero is opposed to the plot of the novel in general, which constitute a postmodern apprehension of destiny within fiction. The character has become aware of his own fictionality, as well as that of what surrounds him, and the struggle takes place within the fictional dimension of the novel. The fatality of the novel is that the plot needs to get to its conclusion, and the hero is trapped within this fictional inexorable process. Without mentioning it directly, Victor is struggling against his own condition, his own existence.

His tragic flaw, therefore, is to be a character of fiction, doubled with an attraction for the hyperreal of consumer society. This refusal to get real leads him to his destruction, a destruction which occurs on the same fictional plane: he is not destroyed or killed as such, but his existence as a fictional character is deconstructed, rendering him useless.

The choice Victor has to make, which is at the center of the story, is obviously the mission he is offered by Palakon. His accepting the mission triggers the rest of the events, and finally his loss. Yet this choice is problematic in regards to the traditional conception of a tragedy: if the superior force Victor is struggling with is the plot of the novel, the choice he has to make when facing Palakon is actually not a choice at all: the plot dictates what happens in the diegetic world, and so Victor has no alternative then but to accept Palakon's offer. Victor is trapped in his own fictionality, which transforms the tragic choice into an illusory choice, that is to say a complete non-choice. In this respect the tragic structure is reversed, and does not define Victor as a tragic hero since no liberty at all is offered.

The ending of the novel, as well, is problematic when confronted with the model of the tragedy. The ending of a tragedy features the downfall the hero. In *Glamorama* however, two endings are to be distinguished. The teleological ending, supported by the descending numbers of the chapters, occurs at the end of the fifth part of the novel: here we witness *in absentia* the destruction of the main character and his substitution by another one. The tragic ending is then confirmed in this version of facts: the downfall of the hero is absolute and he subsequently disappears from the story.

Yet the sixth part of the novel adds another dimension to this ending. We know that the character has lost his place in the diegetic world, but he is still present for a passage which can be considered as a form of redemption, or at least as a less negative ending for him. This is a kind of epilogue that makes the character finally transcend the problems he has been facing, but a little too late since he has no longer a real existence in the book.

The idea of a catharsis in *Glamorama* is also problematic, since the ending of the novel does not trigger any relief or realization in the reader's mind in regard to any social problem as it was the case in Greek tragedy. Postmodernity has destroyed the social side of the novel, and a catharsis is no longer possible. What is more, the novel introduces characters who themselves are not concerned at all with any social or civilizational problem. The themes in *Glamorama* do not allow a catharsis, but only allow the relief of a narratological tension between all those fictional levels in the book. The epilogue transcends those levels and in a way unties the knot formed by the rest of the story.

This is quite logical since the traditional catharsis sprang from the resolution of the conflict between the hero and the superior force, and from the fact that the audience could integrate this superior force as part of their own lives. Here, the superior force is a fictional device, restricted to the novel and which can barely be assimilated by the readers as being part of their daily lives. The resolution of the plot therefore triggers nothing but the relief of the tension it has created.

It is by following the same logic that we can make out the presence of a form of chorus inside the novel: a chorus is traditionally the *vox populi* warning the hero about what is going to happen to him, and who creates a dichotomy between the tragedy and the audience by commenting on the action.

In *Glamorama,* the chorus is less obvious and apparent than in a Greek tragedy. The entity we could term as chorus is what we have previously defined as "the voice,"[11]

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[11] See 1.2.3.1, p. 34.

this mysterious independent-looking external entity commenting on what the narrator is facing.

The role of the voice, however, is in a way dissimilar to that of a chorus, since it does not forewarns the hero, but simply comments on the reality of what he is seeing. When the terrorist Tammy is found dead, the voice intervenes very clearly:

> Tammy's slashed wrists have been cut to the bone – but even that wasn't 'enough,' because somehow she managed to slice her throat open very deeply
> <u>(but you know it's too deep, you know she couldn't have done this, though you can't say anything because you know that scenes are being filmed without you and you know that a different script exists in which you are not a character and you know it's too deep)</u>
> and because it smells so much like what I imagined . . . I can't stop gasping. (<u>G</u> 383 [emphasis mine])

This intervention provides an alternative for what is happening. While it looks like a suicide, the voice offers another point of view. The aim of this voice is to create a distance between the reader and the text, and to warn the reader not to get too involved with the narrative, because appearances are different from reality. While doing this, the voice serves as a helper to the reader, by establishing a contrast showing the artificiality of the novel, its fiction-within-fiction dimension. The voice is probably the only entity present on the merely fictional level in the book, all the other characters being somehow involved to some degree with the conspiracy of the plot.

The problem with this metaleptic chorus is that its identity is not clear. We could think that it is Victor's unconscious speaking, but the shallowness of the characters' psychology forbids such an interpretation. We have to acknowledge it as an omniscient fictional device having a global understanding of the novel.

Another aspect to be considered in the conception of *Glamorama* as tragedy is the presence of *memento mori*, small recurring elements hinting at the fatality of the plot. Though they cannot be completely assimilated to a chorus, they still play a metaleptic role close to that of the "voice". They are present for all the characters indistinctly, whether they are the hero, terrorists or substitutes: the confetti, the cold inside the rooms, the "smell of shit", and flies. All through the novel, they create noise by invading the background of the action. The simple and casual gesture of waving a fly away is progressively invested with something else. Those elements are obviously part of the background noise resisting interpretation, but to consider them as reminders of the transience of the characters is also quite possible. Confetti, in such a conception, offers a certain irony in relation to the

characters' activities and status as models. They reflect upon the fact that trends are short in time, and that the characters, whether famous or "quasi-famous" (<u>G</u> 196) are soon to be evicted by new trends and models. It offers a double perspective on the concept of "vanity": not only is it the models' perception of being the only important thing in the world, it also highlights their transience and immediate disposability. As the characters say it at the beginning of the novel, in the world of fashion, "In is out." (<u>G</u> 15)

All these elements, when combined, indeed build up a sort of tragic narrative. Though far from the traditional Greek definition of the tragedy, the novel still functions as such, and Victor is a good embodiment of the postmodern tragic hero, and his fate, coupled with a metaleptical realization, the *anagnorisis* at the very end, is still tragic. Yet, considering the fact that many elements constitutive of a tragedy are transformed or missing, can we still talk of a tragedy? Or should we see it as a mere postmodern revisiting of ancient themes and patterns? Both solutions seem plausible, because at the book possesses an inherent tendency for contradiction which supports both conceptions.

Though constructed around a pattern of serial episodes involving various genres and types of characters, *Glamorama* still functions as a unity. The different aspects of the book actually make one. The theme of duplicity at the heart of the narrative also affects the narrative itself, and it can be viewed as many things. The story we are told, however, is that of the tragic destiny of a character in conflict with his own status.

The theme of duplicity is closely related to the idea of a loss of identity. Throughout the novel, we are presented with characters who lose themselves in the hyperreal in which they belong, and the idea that everyone has an identity is destroyed and replaced by a general blank order organized by the media.

2.2 The blurring of identities

2.2.1 Names and gender

As it was the case in Ellis's previous novel, *American Psycho*, the treatment of name and gender is extremely important in *Glamorama*, and is perhaps the most visible sign of the loss of identity undergone by the characters. It shows how an obsession with names corresponds to a total ignorance of the person. It creates characters who are interchangeable and who do not have any originality or desire.

We have just mentioned *American Psycho* as a work similar to *Glamorama* in the treatment of identity. But even if the result on the characters may be seen as similar, the use of names in *Glamorama* is completely opposed to that of its predecessor. When in the latter characters did not know each other's names and were always mistaken as to who is who, in *Glamorama* the very opposite happens.

Victor evolves in a world where knowing as many famous people as possible is vital to the social status. Names are determinant in the way that the more you pronounce, the more highly other people will regard you. Consequently, Victor is an expert at name-dropping. The problem comes from the fact that he does not know or cannot differentiate the people bearing those names. There is no difference whatsoever between George Nakashima and Yoki Nakamori, for example. The only value those names have is that they represent something. They are the proof of Victor's encyclopedic knowledge about fashion designers and famous people. But in this case, only the name is important. What the designer looks like or what he thinks is totally unimportant; what is is that speaking the name of this or that person shows a competence and creates an aura around the person who knows them, raising his status. This process is part of what the American writer Thorstein Veblen termed as "conspicuous consumption" in his first book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Conspicuous consumption is the "specialised consumption of goods as an evidence of pecuniary strength"[1] it is a notion essential to the study of the characters of Bret Easton Ellis's works, since they all belong to this materialistic microsociety termed as "Leisure Class" who

> not only consume of the staff of life beyond the minimum required for subsistence and physical efficiency, but [whose] consumption also undergoes a specialisation as regards the quality of the goods consumed. [They] consume freely and of the best in food, drink, narcotics, shelter, services, ornaments, apparel, weapons and accoutrement, amusements, amulets, and idols or divinities. . . Since the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific. [2]

In this respect, the names listed in *Glamorama* are nothing but items of conspicuous consumption, and they are no longer people. The reification of people is total since they are not considered on the basis of their human value but on their potential for raising the value of Victor's social image. His relations with the other characters is only valuable in those terms, and people are only worth considering if they represent an opportunity to

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[1] Thorstein Veblen, « Conspicuous Consumption », in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York: Macmillan 1899; Dover publications 1994, 43.
[2] Veblen 46.

improve his image a little more. When Victor receives advice from the waiter of a diner he went in to escape his problems at the club, he answers his remark by saying : "'There's a snag in your advice, man,' …'Yeah?' 'You're – a – waiter.'(G 168) This shows Victor's attitude towards the other people: anyone who is not rich or hip or famous is worth nothing. Therefore, the identity of those people, who they are, does not matter. They only partake in Victor's craving for attention. They are no longer people, and this is even more striking in one example. Calvin Klein is referred to many times in the novel. However, it is sometimes the person, sometimes the label, or even attitudes which are mentioned, thus deconstructing the entity "Calvin Klein" which no longer corresponds to a precise person or thing. This results in a contrast being established between the notions of name and character. The main characters of the novel, even if they may be blurred in terms of identity, possess a name referring to them, even if this name is wrong. The famous people present in the novel are on the contrary completely reified and their names do not refer to characters, but items of conspicuous consumption.

The system of lists used at length in the novel shows the absurdity of the name-dropping obsession in Victor: by superimposing names without referent in continuous lists, the author shows that those names are empty and worthless since nothing is made of them. The process of redundancy transform those names into meaningless data. This is to be paralleled with a famous sentence of *American Psycho*, in which the main character thinks desperately in a video store: "*There are too many fucking movies to chose from.*"[3] The extreme expansion of possible items of consumption provokes an anxiety because of the impossibility of choice. What is more, these various items are no longer different from each other since they form a clutter of data from which it is impossible to extract anything precise: "the sheer volume of advertisements creates what is often called 'clutter', with so many messages competing for attention that their impact is inevitably reduced."[4]

This is why names are a source of alienation in *Glamorama*: there are here too many names to choose from, and the reference to one instead of another becomes meaningless and randomised. In *American Psycho* the characters were individuals but their names were not precise. In *Glamorama*, we know their names, but there is nothing behind those names. The characters in *Glamorama* live their lives by trying to resemble the more famous and rich people whose names serve as absolute references. Whether it be that "'Andy [Warhol] once said that beauty *is* a sign of intelligence'" (G 40) or that "'Cindy Crawford always says –'" (G 165), Victor makes no decision of his own, always relying on

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[3] *American Psycho* 112.

those absolute references. Conformity takes over his life, is his life, because the only way to be acknowledged as a good consumer is to conform to the cannons established by the icons of the consumer society: "High-bred manners and ways of living are items of conformity to the norm of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption."[5]

This triggers a compulsory form of competition between people to reach towards the state of perfect consumer, which has become the only status receiving popular admiration. This is the only way Victor can become more than quasi-famous. Fame is the ironical reward for conforming to the famous. However fame is stated as being absurd in the way that it is supposed to provide individualization, but when confronted to the lists of famous people inside the novel the reader can only agree that fame is no longer a viable way of reaching individualization since there are too many famous people and they are all in a way conforming to each other without any differentiation possible.

This homogeneity, this lack of outline in the characters, is also rendered through the questions of gender and sexuality.

The distinction between men and women in the novel is sometimes quite invisible, and the fact that Victor is narrating the story does not help because he seems to be quite helpless about it:

> I click off and since I'm in my element I'm all smiles so I call out to the really muscular girl with the clip-on nose ring, 'Hey pussycat, you could hail a cab with that ass.'
> 'My name's David,' he says. 'Not Pussycat.'
> 'Whoa – you got that whole boy/girl thing going down,' I say, shivering
> 'Who is this clown?' David asks the room. (G 139)

The "boy/girl thing" serves as an excuse on several occasions in the text. But the fact is that Victor is sometimes unable to tell the difference between a man and a woman. On board of the QE2 for his crossing of the Atlantic, he does not notice that Bobby Hughes has taken the place of Marina Cannon, which eventually leads him to his downfall.

The notion of gender is hard to separate from that of sexuality in Ellis's works, since they both come down to the same thing: gender is no longer an element of someone's identity, and nor is sexuality, which has only become another item of consumption. Being what can be seen as a follow-up to *The Rules of Attraction*, *Glamorama* deals with the subject in a similar way. In *The Rules of Attraction*, there was an important confusion revolving around sexuality, seen as another way of spending your time, along with alcohol,

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[4] Bernadette Casey et al, "Advertising", in *Television Studies : the Key Concepts*, 3.

drugs and TV. This attitude partakes in the denomination of Bret Easton Ellis as a writer of "Blank Generation Fiction" established by Elizabeth Young. The characters of Ellis's novels belong to this blank generation who make no difference between having sex, taking drugs or watching TV. All activities are regarded as disposable items of consumption, the value of which is null. The bisexuality of the characters is only a consequence of this, and no differentiation is made between men and women.

The attitude of Victor in this respect is quite paradoxical: at first, he states his homophobia against JD and Beau, two of his assistants at his club:

'Love that piece you wrote for *Young Homo*, JD,' I tell him, going over the newly revised 10:45 guest list.
'Which one was that, Victor?' JD sighs, flipping through faxes.
'The one called 'Help! I'm Addicted to Guys!''
'Point being?' Beau asks.
'Just that you are both very *un*heterosexual,' I say, stretching.
'I might be a homo, Victor.' JD yawns. 'But I'm still a man – a man with feelings.'
'You are a homo, JD, and I don't want to hear another word about it.' (G 63)

In this passage it is quite explicit that Victor is a segregationist to homosexuals. His attitude towards JD and Beau is dictatorial and full of contempt. This is based on a consideration that being a homosexual is not fashionable at all, and that homosexuals are like inferior beings because they do not conform to the majority and the attitude of the famous, among who heterosexuals dominate, at least in their public image.

The contradiction within Victor's character relies on the opposition between his public image and his private life. For the public, he claims to be very heterosexual, but in reality he is bisexual, as the many passages of sex with Bobby and Jamie might prove it (if we do not pay attention to the fact that this might be another movie.) The fact that the two spheres have collided at one point is extremely annoying to him, since his image of the very heterosexual misogynist is altered by this episode:

'Victor, . . . I know for a fact that you've slept with guys in the past.'
I move into my office, looking for some Snapple or a joint. 'I dealt with that whole hip bi thing for about three hours back in College.' I shrug. 'Big deal. But now it's strictly the furburger era for me. . . . Dude, Keanu and I have *never* gotten it on. We're just 'good friends.''(G 64)

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[5] Veblen 47.

And this element becomes a problem in the question of the trust the reader can invest into Victor as a narrator. It seems that he is deliberately hiding his bisexuality, even to the readers, because he somehow doesn't accept it. However, on many occasions can we see that he has the reputation of being homosexual. A lot of characters question him about his relationships, and strangely enough Victor is never quite clear in his answers. Bentley Harrolds, the homosexual terrorist, asks him about his situation when they first meet:

'Are you still dating Stephen Dorff?
Jamie suddenly flops down between us as I'm coughing up the tequila punch, taking in air. . .
'Maybe it's true.' (G 257-8)

Homosexuality is something Victor does not accept or claim. The milieu he lives in relies on hypocrisy to keep up appearances. What is considered as a completely banal sexual behaviour is still highly condemnable in terms of social status. This is probably why Victor does not reject the possibility that he might be dating Stephen Dorff. The use of a famous name actually presents Victor in a positive light in terms of social status, and even if homosexuality is condemnable, the fact that it occurs with someone famous might provide a kind of balance. What is interesting in this dichotomy between private and public life is that the two elements are completely separate things. Victor actually has two different lives depending on the sphere he is in, public or private. The one exists in ignorance of the other, so that such a paradoxical attitude is possible and not problematic to Victor.

This adds to the interchangeable quality of the characters. Their lack of personification and identity (since gender itself is no longer a discernable feature) make them become mere items of consumption, and the different characters represent a series of possible choices of consumption. In the end, they all have the same difference to be famous, and they are all the same. What springs from such a condition is a state of alienation in which the characters are no longer individuals, but only part of the grand scheme of the novel, only a cog in the machinery of the plot. Their name, gender or behaviour is of no importance since they still perform their function inside the narrative.

Such an alienation also exists in regards to the use of language in the novel. Victor's vocabulary is another recycling process which follows the same logic as the recycling of characters: by re-using pre-existing elements, he alters their meaning and the only meaningful thing in them is precisely that they are recycled.

2.2.2 Victor's ready-made language

Language is what helps the reader of *Glamorama* understand the motives and the character of Victor. Paradoxically, his habit of talking without thinking is quite revealing as far as his identity is concerned: his conspicuous choice of words at the same time shows that he is a materialistic, narrow-minded character in spite of the "hipness" he claims.

The vocabulary of Victor is centered on pop songs, advertisement-like catch-phrases, and mottos coming back repeatedly throughout the book. The variety of references he uses defines his character has having an enormous potential of knowledge in terms of mass culture encyclopedia. This fixes the frame of references used afterwards, and prepares the reader by introducing him or her to the genre of the encyclopedia used in the novel. Everything in the book can be understood in those terms, and as we shall see it, pop culture goes as far as intervening directly in the plot itself[6]. By using pop culture as the main (and only) frame of reference for both characters and readers, Ellis hints at the alienation present in the general postmodern society of consumption, the destruction of a noble high-brow culture by mass televised items of consumption. The main problem comes from the fact that his satire has no external, objective point of reference within the novel. The satire is expressed in precisely the same words and attitudes it intends to reflect upon. The use of double-meaning helps establishing a distance between signifiers and signified, thus directing the reader toward an alternative reading of Victor's adventures.

The hero speaks a highly fashionable dialect. He is the "It Boy of the Moment" and is introduced as someone who has authority upon the people in his trade. Soon after the beginning, however, we realize that his position is not as firm as he claims it is, and he becomes unreliable from this point. We know for a fact that he is lying to other characters about what happened or not, and we cannot but be cautious about what he says.

The problem often comes from the fact that his encyclopedia of pop culture is way more developed than ours. So many references are accumulated that it is certain that such a discrepancy between the reader and the text was intended by the author of the novel. The first really problematic sentence Victor utters is a remark about the atmosphere before the opening of his club: "'It's just that this is all so . . . so . . . '89?'" (G 10) which raises the first of many questions in that vein: what does this mean? Why should Victor say to the

security man "'My middle name is Grand Master B?'" (<u>G</u> 11) All those empty words boil down to the same process, that of recycling words and ideas. The references of Victor belong to pop culture, but the pop culture valued as being worthy of interest, which is a certain form of pop culture which is not accessible to everyone. The meaning of such a sentence as "'This is all so '89'" can be established through the decoding of abstract references. "''89'" refers to the situation of culture and the dominant atmosphere at the end of the 1980s in the United States, a period of intense republicanism paired with a period of intense consumerism, resulting in a sense of alienation Victor considers as reprehensible.

So he borrows directly from what he wants to become: a popular abstraction. He wants to be at the same time part of the popular famous gentry while at the same time being a sort of cipher unattainable to a majority of the public. However, the effect of taking his words from somewhere else is that his individuality is reduced to nothing. The words he speaks are not his and come from somewhere else, often from a different context. Something else is speaking through him, but in a very fragmented voice. The coherence of Victor's discourse is very low, and the image conveyed is that of a series of advertisements being put together. His speech is sometimes like a sweep through various radio and television channels, including the white noise in between, the result not making a lot a sense. For example, during the MTV interview, when the journalist asks him what his thoughts about fashion are, he answers: "' I' m completely absorbed by fashion. I seek it. I *crave* it. Seven days a week, twenty-eight hours a day. Did I mention that I'm a Capricorn? Oh, and yeah – being the best at only one thing is counterproductive.'"(<u>G</u> 141)

Victor's language can be termed as ready-made: it is composed of words whose sense is pre-established, sentences which are already formed and whose meaning is cliché. Words are another item of consumption you chose to use, as you would chose such brand for clothes or food. The protagonist's attitude towards language is similar to his attitude to food, clothes or people: they are all disposable articles in a society where everything can be consumed.

Of course, this partakes in the process of alienation, since words and sentences are no longer created by an autonomous entity, but recycled in a lingo that lessens the original meaning intended by its creator and which deprives the speaker of any possibility of intervention: hipness occurs but no referent exists, which destroys meaning and creates an absurd situation. The presence of an original speaker is destroyed and those phrases become autonomous elements available for free use by anyone. Victor's will is also

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[6] See 2.1.1.1.1, p. 48.

annihilated since he has no other resource for his vocabulary but those series of soulless pre-packed clauses made for consumption.

Inside the novel, some elements appear as redundant patterns which come back obsessively, and form a series of mottos or slogans. They are specific textual events, and their singularity raises questions as to the limits of alienation in the novel. Along with them, the list pattern, extremely present in the first part of the book, should be analysed as playing a part in the definition of the identity of the novel itself.

2.2.3 Mottos and lists: patterns of distinction

The use of mottos and lists as textual patterns is to be related to the dominant themes of alienation and identity. Their function is double: they both represent a movement towards individualization, but they simultaneously point at alienation and dispersion.

Mottos are traditionally small sentences characteristic of a person, ideology or entity. They help identify someone very quickly, as it is frequent in advertising. In *Glamorama*, several mottos are used. Victor's credo is "The better you look, the more you see," which defines his character in quite an ironic fashion: he is not aware of the double meaning of this sentence and thinks that "'beauty *is* a sign of intelligence.'"(G 40.) Later in the novel, new warnings appear to come back repeatedly: "*We'll slide down the surface of things*" gains on new meaning each time it emerges in the text. So do other choruses like "It's what you don't know that matters most." Or "I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING," written on fax sheets.

The common point of those mottos is that they all trigger a singular alienation of themselves: they are extracted from their original context, a little more each time they appear, and the process of repetition at work puts more and more emphasis on them, which results in the feeling of an expansion of meaning growing with repetition. Each time we see "It's what you don't know that matters most," we take it a little more as a metaleptic remark, a possible hint from the narrative itself telling its readers that everything lies beyond the surface of the narration. In the same way, "W*e'll slide down the surface of things*" gains on a new thematic meaning for each apparition: the surface of things is the only reality present in the novel for the characters. They live and work in surfaces, they are obsessed by surfacing. On a metaleptic level, the surface of things represents the text itself, and the federating "we" takes the reader on a quest for something under the surface, which we feel is present but cannot have access to.

The meaning of the mottos evolves progressively until they become independent entities. At this point a reversal happens in their status. They are first taken on by Victor (except for the threat "I know who you are. . .") and considered as his intervention in the narration by a repetition asserting his own presence inside the narrative system. However, the more he uses them, the more they seem detached from his character. This also comes from the fact that his character is receding behind the narration, but still they gain on autonomy as textual items appearing at random through the text, reinforcing the impression of the dissolution of the character. In the end, they become representative of the whole book and can help summarize the general themes of the story: an obsession with surfaces and the idea of disconnectedness, mystery and threat.

Lists are also entities which undergo a phase of disconnectedness from the text. They are series of nouns or items of consumption and become alienated to the rest of the story by their mere form. The list creates order in a novel where chaos and randomisation of information are threatening. In her systematic analysis of narratives, Patti White explains this function of the list:

> As a hyposystemic entity, the list, a formally and conceptually systemized block of information, interacts with other narratological units in the instantiation of an overall narrative strategy. It functions systematically, maintaining its own structural integrity in the face of environmental perturbation and incorporating new information as an impetus for change and growth.[7]

The list can therefore be considered as dual: it functions as an independent system, with its own inner organisation and development which cannot be altered by the context of the list; but it also interacts with this context, given the fact that it occurs at a certain moment of the narration and with a particular purpose. The lists as they are present in *Glamorama* show the fragility of the surface of the text: a list interrupts the narration, disturbs it by indicating that the text is likely to be invaded by external textual events. What is more, we can distinguish an order in the organisation of the different guest lists we face, which is the alphabetical order.

However, Patti White's statement that lists incorporate new information thus triggering change and growth is not fully applicable to *Glamorama*. Of course, they incorporate new information from their role as guest lists: they develop the theme of the club-opening party by injecting new precisions about it, or they develop the general interest of the narrator and characters. Yet their systemic construction, paired with their

sometimes extraordinary length, neutralises the very meaning they create. The ordering of people like that of a catalogue devaluates the content of the list and finally the impression given is that of noise entering the narrative. The fact that the list in itself is not relevant to the narrative emphasises its role as noise generator. They create whole passages that can perfectly well be skipped during the reading without any problem with the rest of the novel, like the first guest list we are presented with:

Naomi Campbell, Helena Christensen, Cindy Crawford, Sheryl Crow, David Charvet, Courteney Cox, Harry Connick, Jr., Francisco Clemente, Nick Constantine, Zoe Cassavettes, Nicolas Cage, Thomas Calabro, Christi Conway, Bob Collacello, Whitfield Crane, John Cusack, Dean Cain, Jim Courier, Roger Clement, Russel Crow, Tia Carrere, and Helena Bonham Carter – but I'm not sure if she should be under *B* or *C* (G 8).

However, some of these lists have a specificity that suddenly reveals the concerns of the whole narrative. Such a list appears at a moment when the narrator is not paying attention to anything around him; he sits in a car with other people going to his club:

I'm not really hearing the things that are being said in the back of the limousine, just words – technobeat, slamming, moonscape, Semtex, nirvana, photogenic – and names of people I know – Jade Jagger, Iman, Andy Garcia, Patsy Kensit, the Goo-Goo Dolls, Galliano – and fleeting pieces of subjects I'm usually interested in – Doc Martens, Chapel Hill, the Kids in the Hall, alien abduction, trampolines. . . (G 144, [emphasis mine])

This list is a metaphor for the whole novel. Inside the most superficial randomised elements, some kind of truth may appear at times. The problem comes from the randomisation of these truths. As we have seen it, Semtex, appearing at the beginning of this list, is a prototype of explosive used later on by the terrorist cell. The list seems to be here to provide a sufficient surrounding of noise for the red herring to go unnoticed by the reader (and the narrator as well), but the occurrence of the word is not questioned: it needs to appear here and the only way the narrative has not to make it look suspicious is to drown it in a pool of noise. The "change and growth" indicated by Patti white occurs in a negative way: the list makes no sense in itself, but it does provide meaning as far as its presence hints at the strategy of the narrative in the blurring of clues.

Another similar list is a guest list fax revealing concerns about celebrity, possibly coming from the author:

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[7] Patti White, "Inside the List", in *Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative*,

nie Marais, Christopher Lambert, Tommy Lee, Lauren Hutton, Claire Danes, Patti Hearst, Richard Grieco, Pino Luongo, Steffi Graf, Michael J. Fox, Billy Crudup, Marc Jacobs, Marc Audibet, the Butthole Surfers, George Clinton,Henri Rollins, <u>Nike</u>, Kim Deal, <u>Beavis and Butt-head</u>, Anita Hill, Jeff Koons, Nicole Kidman. . . (<u>G</u> 184-5 [emphasis mine])*

Again, the list of names creates a diversion by two incongruous items: Nike and Beavis and Butt-head. The famous brand and the cartoon characters find themselves incorporated to a guest list for a party, which is simply not realistic. Yet the physical location of the list coupled with these bizarre elements provide a clue for what will follow. Indeed, the scene takes place in Chapter 0, Part 1. This is the end of the first part, and the beginning of Victor's downfall in a universe in which fiction and reality are no longer distinct. The presence of Beavis and Butt-head in the list shows that the blurring between fiction and reality has already started: their incorporation into a list of physical "real" people proves it. In the same way do we encounter the name of "O.J.Simpson" towards the end of the same list. This can be seen as a prelude to the violence which is going to appear later.

The last chapter of the first part is a turning point in the story of *Glamorama*. From here, the journey of the hero starts, as well as his downfall. The whole chapter consists of a series of various lists which express the feeling of disconnectedness the character is experiencing. The autonomy of the list comes as a means of helping the narrator telling the story; when Victor is at a loss for words, lists take over since they represent a reassuring way of filling the narrative space, even if the effect on the progress of the story is very small.

Lists and mottos then play a part in relation to the reader. They are a tool the reader can use to apprehend the general problematics of the novel, even if, once again, no hint is provided as to how the reader should use them. They are signs of the underlying structure of the book showing up at the surface of the text only to disappear deeper. Their meanings are not fixed and are affected by the process of fictionalisation: as they root themselves deeper into the narrative, their meaning evolves and ends up detached from their original state to become more meaningful to the text.

The same process is at work on many aspects of the novel: the characters undergo a change in relation to their involvement in the narrative, the narratological point of view

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(Purdue: Purdue University Press, 1992) 94.

itself becomes altered as it fictionalises itself, and the many intertextual references see their meaning displaced by their appearance in the book.

2.3 Confrontation of different levels of fiction in a hypersphere of fictional worlds

Fictionalisation is the process of integrating narratological elements into the structure of a fictional work and their appropriation by the work of fiction. It occurs through several steps: the integration to the work, in our case the novel, of narratological items by the author happens more or less during the actual writing of the book (which includes the various phases of structuring the plot, organising characters, deciding of the point of view and themes, etc.) The appropriation of these elements then may or may not happen. Some strong external elements may keep their autonomy within the novel and resist partaking in the novel's closed sphere. Others will fully integrate the identity of the book, so as to become its representatives.

Several degrees of fictionalisation are possible: some elements will resist appropriation and will be considered as mere accidents at the surface of the text. On the contrary, some will exist only through the novel, and partake in its specificity, thus sharing the strong identity of the text. Finally, others will integrate the plot of the novel and take part in the text, but still keeping a trace of external identity, as it is the case with the intertext.

The text therefore can be seen as possessing multiple facets, and this loss of unity, of identity, results in a new conception of the text. Those various aspects, far from annihilating each other, fuse to produce a work open to multiple possibilities and interpretations. This hyperspere of fictional worlds can then be analysed in a dual perspective. The idea that there might always be an alternative to what we are presented with is omnipresent, and the idea of the double constantly permeates the text.

2.3.2 *Glamorama* as double fiction

The theme of duplicity is extremely present in *Glamorama.* The whole book is placed under the sign of the double, which at the same time accounts for and springs from

the issue of alienation. At the very beginning of the book we already have a hint of the presence of the double: Victor and his girlfriend Chloe are supposed to meet "'At nine-thirty at Doppleganger's.'"(G 14) The Doppleganger is the traditional literary theme of the double as developed by Poe in his story "William Wilson." The Doppleganger is the monstrous double of the hero, bringing confusion and defamiliarization into the narrative.

The hero in *Glamorama* is also confronted to the theme of the double, in more or less the same way. On a first plane, as we have already seen it, the main protagonist of the novel bears a duplicity in his very status as a character. [8] He may be an actor playing the part of his character, the two entities being finally blurred in the confusion between reality and fiction. What is more, his character is progressively replaced in the narrative by what we have defined as a substitute: another actor/character taking his place in the New York scene. The idea of duplicity inherent to the character is illustrated by his astrological sign. Though Victor always insists on the fact that he is a Capricorn, we learn that he is in fact a Libra: "'You're the only sign in the horoscope that's not a living thing. . . You're a Libra, . . .you're just a set of scales.'" (G 467) The Libra is a symbol for duplicity with its two scales hesitating between one side and the other, which is exactly the case here: Victor is hesitating between character and actor, between the story and its movie, but also between the two sides of the story, terrorist or fashion-addict, between the private and the public spheres, even his sexual life is not definite.

The novel duplicates itself through the lens of cameras. Though it starts as a novel, it soon becomes unclear whether we are reading a story or the storyboard of the film of that story. The omnipresence of camera teams transforms the novel into a double-faced entity: the story narrated can be seen as completely different depending on the point of view we adopt. The point of view developed in the narrative itself is not stable since Victor is telling the story as he loses himself in it. The book then offers a double perspective on the events: the first one is Victor's narration, with its blurs, confusions, and hesitations. The other one is the global narrative the reader constructs from evidence Victor has not seen or understood and the events themselves. The reader has a certain distance with the events that the narrator cannot have, being "in the here and the now." Victor's narration is the story of complete disconnectedness and entrapment in a terrorist cell. The construct we can make out of this narrative, what Eco terms as "fabula,"[9] focuses more on the ideas of satire and alienation through the media.

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[8] See 1.2.1.2, p.30.
[9] Eco, *Lector in Fabula* 134 : "La fabula, c'est le schéma fondamental de la narration, la logique des actions et la syntaxe des personages, le cours des événements ordonnés temporellement."

The book itself claims its structure on two different levels. Those levels also take place successively rather than simultaneously within the text. The two quotations serving as epigraph for the novel illustrate this two-headed dimension of the novel:

There was no time when you nor I nor these kings did not exist.
–Krishna
You make a mistake if you see what we do as merely political.
–Hitler

The first one corresponds to the "bright side" of the story, the second one to the dark part. The theme of the double is then announced before the novel actually starts, which hints at the importance of the theme. What is more, the authors of these sentences can be considered as having a double status, real but also fictional. Krishna and Hitler's images have moved into a kind of mythic dimension because of the strength of those images. They belong now in the public sphere of the famous, to a pop culture of sorts. Quoting them at the beginning of *Glamorama* is an interesting move from the author who already plays on the theme of images and the transformation of beings through imagery.

Victor also presents a double image to the reader: his public image and his private one. His behaviour is not the same, as we have seen, in public. A duplicity is established in which Victor cannot present a coherent character or behaviour to the reader or to the other characters. The fact that he is constantly looking for pictures of himself in magazines put those magazines in a position of distorting mirror. The subject, Victor, has to update his perception constantly to stay coherent with the object of the image, which is himself as well but deformed by another level of fictionality. So in the end Victor has to deal with three different perceptions of his character: his private life, his public attitude to look as fashionable as possible, and the public image conveyed by the media.

This vision of Victor is problematic because he doesn't have any control over it: the situation at the beginning of the novel in which he learns that a photo of himself and his lover is circulating around in magazines is quite significant. The alteration of photos as we se it happen in the terrorists' house also implies that he is not in control of his public image and that anyone can do anything with it, which only increases the discrepancy between Victor's image and his character.

His attitude between public and private is also contradictory, especially on the level of sexuality: as seen above, he criticizes homosexuals in public but finds it not a problem to have sex with Bobby Hughes. This provides another version of the figure of the double

rather than a strict opposition: both attitudes coexist in the same character without excluding each other. However, the presence of the camera teams raises the question of the authenticity of such a figure. Indeed, the fact that the reader does not know when cameras are present or not destroys any frame of reference he or she might have. We know that Victor is not indifferent to the presence of cameras, so that his behaviour can change into narcissistic, racist, homophobic, centered on consumption items and fashionable talk. With the presence of cameras becoming only a possibility, the reader cannot trust Victor, because the authenticity of what he is doing is always questionable.

This results first in the limitation of the trust invested in the narrator, and also in the flattening of all the different perceptions of Victor on the same level: since no version is more authentic than the others, anything which is shown becomes equally probable and credible. This dissolves Victor's personality / character into a web of possibilities which cannot be more precise. In the end, the Victor we are left facing is a mixture of three different images, and the image the reader has of the main character of the novel is necessarily altered by the many levels of fiction induced by the media within the book.

2.3.3 Demultiplication of the self through the media: "real TV"

By the many ways *Glamorama* plays with levels of fiction, with trivia and the problems of mediatisation, it can be seen as the parody of a reality TV show.

The label 'reality TV' encompasses a wide range of texts which take as their subject matter real lives, real-life situations and events, and the first-person accounts of ordinary people (non-media professionals). Within this context, the personal, emotional and often intimate revelations of the first-person accounts are the driving force behind the narrative structure of these programmes, supported with actual footage (or dramatic reconstructions) of the events concerned. . . .One of the key elements of reality programming is the juxtaposing of the 'everyday' and the banal with the unexpected and the bizarre. . . .

Reality television is a hybrid form, drawing on (and reworking) generic codes and conventions derived from a variety of sources. . . .What is significant about [it] is the way in which it utilises new technologies (camcorders, CCTV footage and webcams) to convey a sense of authenticity and immediacy to the viewers.[10]

This definition of reality TV fits very well the stylistic and thematic structures of *Glamorama*. Indeed, we have a first-person account of real events where intimate revelations are the driving force of the narration. The juxtaposing of familiar and bizarre

happens with the disclosure of the camera teams, and the novel draws on many stereotyped conventions, as we have already seen it.[11] The presence of those cameras serve both as a defamiliarization tool and, in opposition with Bernadette Casey's definition this time, to show the lack of immediacy of the events shown.

2.3.3.1 "Dramatic reconstructions"

The idea of "dramatic reconstructions", expressed in the abovementioned quotation, is also very interesting to study in the context of the book. It suggests that what we as readers/spectators are confronted to is fake, artificial and built in the awareness of the spectator. This results in the tendency of the text to move towards parody through a self awareness of the text. Such a consciousness appears briefly at a moment when Victor is about to get out of the nightmarish house where one of the terrorist has just died:

> As I stagger through the upstairs hallway I run pas Bentley's room because I can't bear to see what's in it and I'm sobbing but then I suddenly stop when I realize there's a new odor filling the house, overpowering the aroma of shit that hung in it before.
> On my way out I place the smell.
> It's popcorn. (G 420)

This bizarre realization hints at a sudden heightening of Victor's consciousness of the narrative he is being trapped in. The ominous smell of popcorn, in addition to providing comic relief for the extremely violent scene which preceded, opens a new dimension for the novel. Popcorn being traditionally associated with watching a film, a new element enters the narration: there are some spectators. This triggers a whole reflection on reading and on the pleasure taken in violent entertainment in modern society. The intervention of the smell of popcorn hints at our own position as readers, and our attitude toward what we have just read. The violent dismemberment of Bentley in the preceding chapter is done through, and the uncanny appearance of popcorn places this episode in a perspective of considering the novel as entertainment. The uncanny here unfolds when Victor transgresses the traditional boundaries of a narrative by the realization that someone may actually be enjoying what is happening to him, that the narrative space is not a closed system but indeed open to the reader's appreciation, and that it is only a microcosm in the real world.

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[10] Bernadette Casey et al., "Reality Television', in *Television Studies: the Key Concepts* 196-7.

This extract actually fictionalises the reader by means of a metonymy (popcorn is entertainment, to which is reading is assimilated.) This process once again blurs the limits between reality and fiction, and does to the reader what the magazines do to Victor: simplify and distort the image of its object.

The clearer moments of "actual footage (or dramatic reconstruction)of the events" (see quotation on the previous page) occur at moments in which the tone of the narrator becomes flat and descriptive, as is usual with Ellis's prose. The moments of pure description stand in contrast with the themes tackled. Often, this journalistic tone, with very long sentences and minute detailing of every aspect applies to pornographic or violent descriptions:

In the shower Bobby lets me make out with Jamie and Bobby's head is between her legs and Jamie's knees buckle a couple of times and Bobby keeps propping her up with one arm and his face is pushed up into her cunt and she's arching her back, pushing herself onto his tongue, and one of his hands is gripping my cock, soaping it up, and then Bobby starts sucking it and it gets so hard I can feel the pulse in it and then it gets even harder, the shaft keeps thickening and Bobby pulls it out of his mouth and studies it, squeezing it, and then he flicks his tongue over the head and then he lifts it up by the tip and starts flicking his tongue in brief, precise movements over the place where the head meets the shaft as Jamie hungrily moans 'do it do it'. . . . (G 335)

Those scenes are quite frequent in all of Ellis's works, and the affectless tone of the descriptions and the extremely long sentences echo the characters' incapacity to feel emotions. Those passages are completely interchangeable and the length of the sentences implies a fast reading of the words without any emphasis or stress being put. This is quite similar to the opening and closing sentences of *The Rules of Attraction,* which start and finish in mid-sentence, meaning that this is not so important to the speaker and that "it's a story that might bore you."[12]

In those passages, the novel plays on the use of televisual conventions to reflect upon its own content.

In terms of television, [the term convention] refers to 'normal' or established practices understood by both program-makers and audiences. An audience's familiarity with the conventions of television explains the ability to tune in midway through a previously unseen

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[11] See 2.1.1.4, p. 63.
[12] *The Rules of Attraction* 3.

programme and understand what kind of programme it is and, indeed, what is going on. In fact, conventions tend to be so taken for granted that they come to seem 'natural'. [13]

Ellis ironically exhausts conventions by making his violent or pornographic passages almost boring. The predictability of what is going to happen in the next lines renders the situation almost ridiculous. The intertextual encyclopedia of the reader in terms of television conventions is not taken into consideration this time, since those passages do not apparently take place in the public area of Victor's life, thus deleting the need to be noticed and assessed.

The stereotype of the fashion-addict is also extremely developed through the character of Victor. His obsession with clothes and items of consumption, his fashionable talk and his worshipping of famous people put him into a position where parody is always threatening to flood the narrative. The author establishes a parody of the "fashion victim" stereotype, mainly through the description of what Victor does not know about, his lack of insight and vocabulary. He is able to produce extremely sophisticated sentences in his frame of reference, but he is not concerned by anything outside it. We learn that Victor doesn't know what a platypus is, doesn't know what "fraught" means, doesn't know French or any foreign language, is not sure about knowing what AIDS is, thinks the worst thing in the world is "the words 'dot com.'"

The appearance of the camera teams provokes a strong disruption in the repeated series of the "episodes" of the book. The more they appear, the more the reader is invited to reflect on the whole novel as a TV show or a film. Cinematographic devices are used to disrupt the conventions of the novel, this time, so that the issue of images becomes predominant in the novel.

2.3.3.2 Multiple images: cinematographic devices

The narrative of *Glamorama* sometimes resembles closely a cinema script, with the presence of cameras becoming more and more intrusive in the narration, thus changing their status and their role in relation to the reader.

The "narrating I" plays on the perception the reader has of the characters and the scenes, and fabricates textual passages which describe images or the filming of scenes, with the effect that the story of the novel becomes the story of a film. At first, we come

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[13] Casey 43.

across descriptions of places with no intervention from the narrator, as in the beginning of chapter 28, section 1:

> Stills from Chloe's loft in a space that looks like it was designed by Den Flavin: two Toshiyuki Kita hop sofas, an expanse of white-maple floor, six Baccarat Tastevin wineglasses – a gift from Bruce and Nan Weber – dozens of white French tulips, a StairMaster and a free-weight set, photography books . . . (G 39).

This passage could well be seen by the reader as a way for Victor to play with the style of the narration, but the facts that it is described as "stills" already indicate the presence of images. Later on, this form of narration is developed to a larger extent when the cameras show up:

> The camera slowly pans around my apartment, Smashing Pumpkins' "Stumbleine" pours out over the soundtrack: a vintage industrial fan, an empty fish tank, dried flowers, a candelabra, a bicycle, a kitchen custom-made from several kinds of stone, a glass-door refrigerator, a food processor unwashed and stained with the grain and pulp from a health shake, a set of martini glasses. (G 184)

This excerpt serves Victor to introduce his audience to the range of luxury items in his possession, and yet he is not in charge of the description. As he says it himself, there is a camera panning the room. We can (and we do) imagine the visual effects of this panning through the room, which is illustrated for us so that control is kept over what flows out of the narrative. The use of a cinematographic device blurs the distinction between novel and film, anticipating the plot of the novel. The narrative uses on us what it is using on Victor, playing on the possible identification between reader and narrator.

The use of cinematographic details is more and more accentuated as the novel unfolds and Victor becomes more and more disorientated. Those devices take part is his disorientation, since they begin to interfere with the action of the novel. When Victor and Jamie go back to their hotel room after a night out in Paris, they are interrupted by the second and mysterious camera team:

> The door to our room closes behind me and Jamie and I fall on the bed while I'm kissing her mouth and her arms are wrapped around my shoulders. . . . Then someone knocks on the door. Jamie stands up, also naked, pulls on the Helmut Lang overcoat, lazily strides over to the door. She opens it without asking who it is.

> A film crew I haven't seen before enters the room. A large Panavision camera is
> wheeled in, lights are positioned. The AD tells me where to lie on the bed while Jamie confers
> with the director and the script supervisor. The propmaster opens a bottle of champagne, pours
> two glasses. A joint – not a prop – is introduced into the scene and then Jamie's lying next to me
> and I'm lighting the joint. Someone rumples the blanket on the bed and the director calls
> 'Playback' and Jane Birkin starts sighing 'Je T'aime' on a CD and the film crew is just a
> shadow behind the lights and it's so cold in the room steam keeps pouring out of our mouths.
> (G 308)

By interrupting the action of the novel, the camera teams change status. After having been a witness to the events, they become directors of the events, deciding how they are going to happen and changing the story to something else. Their position in the narrative space is difficult to define. At first they look like intradiegetic witnesses to the story of the novel. Later, we witness their transformation into a narratological tool used by the narrator to describe what is happening.

But at the moment when they "enter the room" and change the settings and background of the action, their position changes. They become extradiegetic in the way that their position is one level above the telling of the story, since they know what is happening and when. But to the extent that they are part of the story, they are an intradiegetic entity. Their actual situation fluctuates between those two positions, making the limit between the two worlds impossible to set precisely.

The role of the cameras towards the reader evolves along these positions. At the beginning of the novel they seem to be a normal part of the story and of the world the narrator evolves in. They provide a kind of mock-objectivity when used as a narrating tool, and take part in the satire of the fashion industry. However, when they start interrupting the story to change its components, they become a threat to the narration, a threat to the text, and bear an ominous quality concerning the fate of the hero. The mixing of intra and extradiegetic boundaries make those cameras threatening to the reader's understanding of the story. They become a potentially dangerous metadiegetic tool which is obviously to be linked which the world of terrorism, and provoke an increase of confusion in the reader.

The world of images is obviously a menacing world for the author, who shows on a metaleptic level how confusing and disturbing they can be. The underlying issue in the novel is that images are never a proof of reality or truth, but at the same time they go as far as to constitute another kind of truth, a postmodern self-delusion. In *Glamorama,* this is what happens: the difference between what has happened and what has been pictured as happening is erased, "reality *is* an illusion" (G 9) and fiction is reality.

2.3.4 Lost in fiction?

In *Glamorama,* the plot uses the process of fictionalisation to lose the narrator, while the multiple levels of fiction and images disrupt the understanding of the novel by the reader. The impression conveyed by the text is that the author is experimenting with layers of fiction, trying to see how far it is possible to reach into layers of fiction while keeping a reality effect to the whole. The novel is more or less realistic, in the sense that the actions described are credible. Yet the devices used to tell the story impose a reflection on levels of fiction, mainly through images.

If we take a closer look at some passages, we can see that some imply four or five layers of fictionality being superimposed on one object. For example, when Victor finally manages to meet Chloe at the beginning of the book, the description of the scene is rather surreal while keeping this credible aspect:

> Umberto guards the door at Spy Bar on Greene Street waving flies away with a hand holding a walkie-talkie. . . and in the main room the director, assistant director, lighting cameraman, gaffer, chief electrician, two more assistants, Scott Benoit, Jason Vorhee's sister, Bruce Hulce, Gerlinda Kostiff, scenic ops and a Steadicam operator stand around a very large white egg, mute, video cameras circling, filming a video of the making of the commercial, photographers taking pictures of the video team. (G 99)

Chloe is apparently in for the filming of a commercial, but what we are described is an accumulation of pictures of pictures in a kaleidoscopic way: the advertisement itself is a first level of fiction since it is camera-processed. The other camera team filming the first one adds one layer of fiction to the scene. Photographers taking pictures of that video team goes one step further. Finally, if we consider that the characters are not really "people" but actors playing the parts of characters, we reach a fourth degree of fictionality in the whole scene. Then, the scene itself is described through another media, that of the narrator of the story: in the end, such a scene plays on five degrees of representation, of re-presentation of the events.

Similarly, the mere presence of a "real-life" character or immigrant also implies several degrees of representation. At the beginning is the private side of the famous person, for example Brad Pitt. Then, in our "real-life" world, he already undergoes representation through the medias, be it magazines or television. The entity "Brad Pitt" has then undergone a form of distortion through representation. What is incorporated in *Glamorama*

is this very public image injected into a text of fiction, for it is probable that Ellis does not know Brad Pitt personally. We then reach a third level of fiction. Then, as it is the case in the passage above, this representation of the Brad Pitt entity can be filmed, while the image produced is photographed. Layers of representation then accumulate to a point where the original object is lost in the process.

This is probably what eventually happens to the narrator of *Glamorama*. Through various representations and imaging of his own self, his original character is destroyed, only to be left as pure image. The narrator in section Six of the novel is only the image of Victor, since his character has been invested with a new image. The postmodern idea developed in the novel is that fiction and reality are no longer different. As the character JD states it at the beginning of the novel, "'Reality *is* an illusion, baby.'" (G 9). The image is therefore equivalent to the reality of the character. It is not the personality of the character that matters (since there is hardly any) but the image of this character. Victor is only an abstraction on which an image is superimposed. This idea is in keeping with the theory developed by Stuart Hall about representation:

> In a sense, then, reality has no fixed meaning until it has been represented, and the representations and the various meanings attached to them will change over time and according to whose point of view is being put forward. . . What we call 'reality' does not exist outside of the process of representation. [14]

Victor therefore needs images of himself and the plot itself needs images in order to become realistic. The traditional representation of the diegetic elements of a novel takes place in the reader, and the process of reading triggers the realistic effects of a narration. In *Glamorama,* a representation of the characters and events is already provided within the text, making the role of the reader somewhat obsolete.

However, the reader, if deprived of the power of representation, still stands as superior to the text insofar as s/he intervenes on the moral question raised by the book. It may be possible for the text to try and function as an autonomous system which does not need any exterior intervention for representation, but the symbolic and moralistic sides cannot exist without the reader. The text needs the cultural encyclopedia of the reader to function as a satire. Satire in *Glamorama* appears as the reader goes beyond the "surface of things", and springs from the hermeneutic quest triggered by the text.

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[14] Stuart Hall, D. Hobson et al., *Culture, Media, Language*, London : Hutchinson 1980, quoted in *Television Studies, the Key Concepts*, 201.

The accumulation of themes, details or recurrent patterns reveal, in a kind of epiphany movement, the satire beyond the story. The themes of fashion, terrorism and celebrity reflect upon each other, giving a substance to the whole book by uniting all the incoherent images scattered through the text. From the textual ambiguity of *Glamorama* springs the ironic moral satire.

Part III

The satire of fashion as terrorism

3.1 The satire of the fashion industry.

Glamorama is a book which, through its treatment of the different themes it tackles, is to be seen as a satire. However we are not facing a satire in the traditional Swiftean sense of the word, but we are rather confronted to a postmodern satire in which subject and object are barely discernable, where confusion is widely spread and used as a textual artefact. The satirical side of the novel is also confused and unclear.

The main source of confusion in the satirical approach of the book is that it establishes no clear distinction between what is morally condemnable and what is right to the author. In fact, the author is scarcely present within the text and it is only through his textual and strategic choices that we may discern the presence of the satirist behind the novel. In the traditional conception of a satire, the object of the satire is described in opposition with a morally right entity, usually the narrator (even if the narrator of *Gulliver's Travels* is himself the object of satire), who serves as the point of reference for the reader. In *Glamorama,* however, such a reference point, such a guide does not really exist. The narrator is part of the world he is describing, and even claims to be more than part of it, the paragon of the fashion industry. No distance is therefore established between the subject of the narration and its object, making it a difficult task to perceive what is satirical here.

> Satire falls into two major categories – direct and indirect. Direct satire uses a first-person narrator who either directly addresses the reader or another character in the work, called the *adversarius*.[1]

Such a direct satire is obviously not the point of view adopted in *Glamorama*. Yet the satire is present, and relies mainly on a play on the strangeness of the things the characters do. Though it might seem normal to Victor that he should meet someone called "Yanni [which] means vagina" (G 151), it appears to be too incredible to the reader to be true. In this case, why should there be such a character? Yanni does not really exist as a character, but rather as a symbol. She is only mentioned once or twice in the text, not interfering with the plot at all. However, her character, because of its name, becomes

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[1] Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), 357.

immediately associated to a vagina. She is always introduced as "Yanni. Yanni means vagina," (G 151) as if this was a determining part of her personality.

The result is that she is not considered as a woman but only as some kind of curiosity only worth meeting because of her name. What is more, the insistence on the signification of names echoes the other characters' problems with the identification of celebrities or designers.

This process is at the heart of another type of satire known as the Menippean satire, a form of indirect satire:

> [The Menippean satire is] a type of indirect prose satire punctuated with verse and framed by a loose narrative story. . . Menippean satires frequently feature banqueting scenes or other settings in which extended and ridiculous debates take place. Far from being fully developed characters, the debaters are often little more than caricatures who merely serve to represent the ideas they expound. Particularly in shorter works, this type of satire emphasizes intellectual conflict, and the absurdity of some of the arguments and viewpoints expressed is a characteristic feature. In longer works, Menippean satirists often introduce a dizzying range of facts but subordinate them to some organizing principle or theme, thereby making clear their own general perspective. . . In his book *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye refers to this type of writing, centered around opposing ideas and erudite argument, as "anatomy".[2]

The definition of the Menippean satire corresponds quite accurately to the themes tackled in *Glamorama*. The text is organized "around opposing ideas and erudite argument" and points to the absurdity of its objects. The narrative itself undergoes some phases of endless enumerations or descriptions, and the characters are, indeed, hardly anything more than the caricatures of themselves.

The reification Yanni undergoes is quite present all through the novel, and reveals the more general concerns at the heart of the fashionistas' lives: the need to consume and create items of consumption out of anything possible.

3.1.1 The ultimate conspicuous consumption

The world of fashion in *Glamorama* is presented as being obsessed with two things: celebrity and conspicuous consumption of goods. The problematic at the heart of conspicuous consumption is the extinction of desire Ellis tries to emphasize: most of his characters belong to a young, rich American upper class and they have grown up in a world

already absorbed by consumption society. When writing his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen argued that "… Consumption has gained ground until, at present, it unquestionably holds the primacy, though it is still far from absorbing the entire margin of production above the subsistence minimum."[3] The characters of *Glamorama* live in a world where this statement is no longer true, and where the principle of consumption has taken over every aspect of life. The way Victor talks even presents language as a field of consumption, where the more specialised and specific you are, the more power you represent. The principle of conspicuous consumption is pushed to its extremes: when characters in *Less Than Zero* wondered about someone "if he's for sale," characters in *Glamorama* become cogs in the machine of the conspiracy of simulation, and surrender themselves and their essence of characters to the fictional plot.

What's more, the characters of the novel are for most of them, actually, literally, for sale. The issue of setting the novel within the fashion industry pushes further Ellis's previous idea of buying people. The status of a model implicitly suggests that one is for sale, to use for fashion shows and dispose of him/her afterwards.

At the root of consumption society is the idea that the more conspicuous your consumption is, the more respectable and important you are as a person, as Veblen has shown it.

This is developed in *Glamorama*, especially through the character of Victor. His obsession with names of designers or luxury items only shows that he lacks contact with other people. Since interpersonal connections cannot happen on the level of love or sex (since they have been absorbed in the mechanics of the plot), they necessarily have to expand on the level of conspicuous consumption, since this is the only value in the novel which possesses meaning for the characters. This is perhaps the only code of reference that they all share completely without any ambiguity, which results in a general flattening of the characters' personalities, making them nothing more than consumers who chose who to talk with, what to talk about, in order to make themselves more important in the eyes of the others, an aspect of the book that will be developed later.

The main items of consumption serving as tools pf assessment for this process of acknowledgement are clothes, furniture, food and drugs. The presence of drugs in the items of conspicuous consumption may seem out of place, but Veblen explains clearly that "The ceremonial differentiation of the dietary is best seen in the use of intoxicating beverages

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[2] Murfin & Ray 210.
[3] Veblen 57.

and narcotics. If these articles of consumption are costly, they are felt to be noble and honorific."[4]

In this consideration of things, the consumption of cocaine all through the novel by nearly every character is a external sign of wealth, a status symbol, and even if Victor himself privately admits to his father that he has no money left, what is important is what the others perceive.

As the story unfolds, Victor changes drugs for less instantaneous ones. He is "fed Xanax" by the terrorists and finally given heroin, which as a result invalidates him as a narrator, serving as a means of burying him under levels of fiction, while also provoking the reappearance of Ellis's traditional apathetic prose of blank descriptions.

Conspicuous consumption is at the heart of every action undertaken by the characters. The image Victor conveys of himself is extremely important in terms of social respect, but even more so the image he conveys informs his position in the fashion industry.

3.1.2 Immaterial labor and immaterial characters

The fact that *Glamorama* takes place in the milieu of the fashion industry provides a deeper insight into the problematics of the culture of images in postmodern society. Fashion modelling can be termed as immaterial labor, a term coined by the American sociologist Manuel Castells: it is "the result of the shift from direct production of goods (cultivation, extraction, and fabrication) to the indirect production of consumption services and management expertise (including entertainment, knowledge, and symbol manipulation)."[5]

In the fashion modelling industry, such immaterial labor is associated to the full intensive use of teletechnologies. Teletechnology "refers to the drive of technologies to shrink the time between recording and transmission, making instant communication and information transmission over great distances possible."[6] Fashion modelling takes advantage of the technological situation of a postmodern society, so much that eventually "models' images circulate within a system of images divorced from narrative construction, each image produced to be cut and transmitted outside of a plot or storyline,"[7] while at the same time playing their role of "produc[ing] and manipulat[ing] of feelings, thoughts and ideas – affects – which require

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[4] Veblen 44.
[5] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, quoted in Elizabeth Wissinger, "The Image Exposed: Immaterial Labor in the Fashion Modeling Industry", available from the Internet at http://web.gc.cuny.edu/womenstudies/Text%20Files%5CAwardees_St_Past%5CWissinger.htm 2.
[6] Wissinger 3.
[7] Wissinger 10.

which require virtual or actual 'human contact and proximity,'"[8] a contact provided by the rise of teletechnologies.

3.1.2.1 Victor as an Ellis-ian antihero

The analysis of the fashion modelling industry shows parallels between the structure of this immaterial labor and the narrative devices used in *Glamorama*: the idea that the fashion industry takes advantage of the development of technologies allowing "instant communication and information transmission" is to be paralleled with the situation of the main character of the novel. We have to suppose that he is actually playing his own part in a film being shot and shown at the same time. Time between acting, recording and transmission is reduced to zero, with the obvious effect that images and reality are no longer discernable from one another:

> "the particular logic of the model's body becoming image is one of exposing the models doing more things, in more places, . . . image by image, . . . not only their image for sale, but also images of them working, their personal lives, shopping habits, etc.,"[9]

This aspect of the fashion industry is present in the novel and forms the problematics at the heart of the plot, that a model is never far from becoming an image in anything s/he is doing. What is more, the final twist of the plot develops this idea even further, by making Victor become pure image. This is in keeping with the fashion industry being examined through a work of fiction: fiction being by essence a world of representation, the association of a character of fiction with a job consisting in image production provokes a disruption in the mechanics of representation, which results in the initial object (or subject, since the difference is no longer relevant here) being lost under the overload of representations.

What happens to the narrator at the end of the novel can be seen as a means of satirising the fashion industry. By reducing his main character to a mere flat image of himself, Ellis provides an insight into the culture of fashion and celebrity in our society. He exposes the absurdity of fashion and the consumption of fashionable articles. The hazardous potential of mass media is examined and the concept of simulation is put forward as a never-ending spiral of representation and correspondences.

Victor's search for celebrity leads him to the realization of the absurdity of it all. At first, what he wants is to become the image of himself he sees in magazines and which is known

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[8] Wissinger 2.
[9] Wissinger 10-1.

through the world. When he finally achieves his goal by becoming pure image, he realizes that celebrity is not to become an image, but that it is the quest for celebrity in itself which provides fame.

The disappearance of the narrator into the world of images is quite close to the ending of Ellis's previous novel, *American Psycho*, in which the narrator also dissolves into a world of images and signs:

> and then, when I'm not listening, . . . someone asks, simply, not in relation to anything, 'why?' and though I'm very proud that I have cold blood and that I can keep my nerve and do what I'm supposed to do, I catch something, then realize it: *Why?* and automatically answering, out of the blue, for no reason, just opening my mouth, words coming out, summarizing for the idiots: 'Well, though I know I should have done *that* instead of not doing it, I'm twenty-seven for Christ sakes and this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar or in a club in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the end of the century and how people, you know, *me*, behave, and this is what being *Patrick* means to me, I guess, so, well, yup, uh. . .' and this is followed by a sigh, then a slight shrug and another sigh, and above one of the doors covered by red velvet drapes in Harry's is a sign and on the sign in letters that match the drapes' color are the words THIS IS NOT AN EXIT. [10]

The narrator here is eventually detached from the scene happening and the voice of Patrick only merges into the sign above the door, abandoning its status as character, which also happens to Victor when he merges with the painting in the hotel lobby.

3.1.2.2 Interchangeability and identity

Victor, like Patrick, is defined as a character of fiction exclusively. The presence of immigrant characters immediately states that they have no existence outside fiction. The only way to escape the fictional space of the novel is to become a image of themselves. By abandoning their characteristics and drowning in words and descriptions, they exit their fictional space into another one, a "hors-texte" the novel is not concerned with. This process springs from the consciousness the characters have of their self-fictionality: Victor states at a fashion show that he lives in a world where "all the guys basically look the same: cute head …. Great body, high hair, chiselled lips, cutting edge, naughty, or however you want us." (G 58) The interchangeability of the characters is a main theme in Ellis's works. It emphasizes the predominance of conformism in the modern western world. Conformity represents a vicious circle in which people have to be like the others to be acknowledged as socially worthy, and at the same time need to be different from the others to remain individuals. In *Glamorama*, Victor

does not manage to differentiate himself from the other characters to be considered as an individual with an individual identity. This is emphasized on many occasions and the final hyperbole by which Victor is replaced in the narration provide a satiric look at the culture of conformity.

In *Glamorama* as in other novels by Ellis (see *Less Than* Zero), the difficulty to establish a strong independent identity is emphasised and the names of the characters are only landmarks. Victor realizes that anyone could take his place in the narrative since everybody looks the same, and are adaptable to the reader's wishes.

By addressing the reader directly, Victor transgresses his fictional limits to reflect upon the narration. This metaleptical remark that models are adaptable to the desires of the public is disturbing, since the metalepsis is voiced by a character, which is supposedly enclosed in the fictional space of the book. In this respect, we could argue that it might be the author indicating something to the reader through the voice of his main character.

This process has two consequences: it first alienates the character from his own representation in the textual space, since the author uses his voice. Consequently, the character becomes, only for a moment, an abstraction beyond the text waiting to reintegrate its "physical" form. The characters are then perceived as immaterial entities being only media for the expression of someone or something else, be it actors or the author.

Consequently, this insists on the replaceability evoked in the text: if the author can use his character to reflect upon his work, this means that the character's individuality is threatened and that he can easily be replaced by someone or something else, which will happen in Part 5 when DAN takes the narration into his hands. Victor eventually fails in his search for individualization. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that he wants to open a club of his own with this purpose: "'I just want to do something where it's all mine, . . . where I'm not . . . replaceable.'" (G 79) This project fails, and what could have guaranteed him a kind of safety as a character does not take place, with the result that he becomes totally replaceable and *is* replaced.

The world of *Glamorama* is then focused on the unreality of things. Immaterial labor for the fashion models, absence of characterization and the erasure of the boundaries between image and reality create a fictional space in which everything is hesitant and revolves around the notion of emptiness. The characters caught in this maze of representations do not try and reach beyond it, but stay focused on what is important on the surface, which is conspicuous consumption and the quest for celebrity.

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[10] *American Psycho* 399.

The omnipresence of images and cameras becomes reassuring in a way, since they are nothing more than a natural sign of their increasing fame. Again, the multiplicity of images, representations and distortions is a narratological device which can be compared to the fashion industry in our "real" world, since the culture of images in our society presents us with a range of various realities available to the consumer.

3.1.3 The culture of images and the artificiality of desires

The fashion industry is an environment in which the notion of image is perhaps the most vital thing. The activity of models is primarily based on image and images. Their job is to make pictures. The introduction of the word Dopplegänger at the beginning of *Glamorama* echoes the situation of models in the real world: they are always being duplicated, copied, so that their image is omnipresent around them. Real-life models are in a simpler way in the same situation as Victor in the novel, as they are at the center of a web of images and texts about themselves they cannot control entirely.

3.1.3.1 An ensemble of hyperrealities

A model is an entity used by the fashion industry to create different plausible situations and worlds in order to convey notions designed by them. They are entities, since their own personality and their very person is of no interest whatsoever. They are characters of fiction in a way, and can be assimilated to different notions depending on who is employing them. For example, a model being filmed for a food advertising and a haute couture show is not the same person: the image conveyed depends on several parameters, ranging from the type of make-up used to the angle of the camera filming them. A model is a sign which does not mean by itself, but needs a medium to apply meaning on it and in this respect, the world of fashion is one of representation. It corresponds to Stuart Hall's vision of the system of representation in our society, according to which "'reality' does not exist outside representation", as we have already seen it.[11]

In this respect what is perceived of models is a simulation of reality. Models are the perfect tool for simulation since it is their only possible mode of existence. One of them will become a simulation of a music star for a hair gel advertising, but will also simulate lifestyles or attitudes as it is more and more the case in fashion advertising. Consequently, the perception of

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[11] See 2.3.4. note 22, p.82.

the audience will change depending on how the image was edited, and meaning is provided not so much by the model but by was has be done with the him/her.

As a result, we can say that models stand at the heart of an ensemble of hyperrealities, worlds of simulations which vary ceaselessly according to the employer. The fact that Victor gets lost in a maze of alternate realities is in keeping with the reality of fashion modelling: worlds and characters are created for a photo session, then immediately destroyed to be replaced by others. The dimension of non-awareness in the character blurs the limits between image and subject, so that all the different worlds implied in the creation of Victor's night-club, his travel to Europe, his meeting with the terrorist cell, and his relationship with his father are no longer separate moments of simulations but gather up to build the narrative structure of the book.

Along with the use of the demultiplication of models through representation, Ellis addresses the more general issue of the depersonalisation through the media, and shows the mechanics of desire as artificial means of controlling people for financial purposes.

3.1.3.2 The artificiality of desire

Glamorama presents us with a postmodern view of what desire mean in contemporary society. Through the characters' relationships to each other and to consumption in general, Ellis introduces the idea that "real" desire no longer exists, and that it has been replaced by yet another form of consumption. The fact that characters are always in search of the right brand, the right thing to say or do, or the right attitude raises the following question: are their desires personal, individual, or are they a sign of the absence of desire, a quest after some pre-established absolute desire, and in which case, where or who does this absolute reference come from?

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen adds about the notion of conspicuous consumption that there is a need to show and state the exceptional aspect of conspicuous consumption to a rival or competitor:

> Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his own unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method. The aid of friends and competitors is therefore brought in by resorting to the giving of valuable presents and expensive feasts and entertainments. . . The competitor with whom the entertainer wishes to institute a comparison is, by this method, made to serve as a means to the end. He consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is a witness to the consumption of that excess of good things

which his host is unable to dispose of single-handed, and he is also made to witness his host's facility in etiquette. [12]

A the heart of every act of consumption is therefore a need for acknowledgement by someone else, a need for demonstration in front of the other. Such a vain attitude is extremely developed in *Glamorama*, since Victor and the other characters are constantly confronted to someone else. Their consumption attitude is a consequence of their desire to be acknowledged as reputable or worthy of being famous. In the end, what springs from this state of things is that the characters' desires are not their own. They do not create signs of wealth, but reproduce them from the established canons of conspicuous consumption. And the process goes beyond the mere consumption of items, since relationships with people are also considered in the same way. Damien, Victor's associate at his night-club, shows a perfect example of how rules of etiquette and consumption work in relation to people:

> 'Yesterday I wanted to fuck about twenty different strangers. Just girls, just people on the street. This one girl – the only one who *hadn't* seen the 600SEL, who *couldn't* tell Versace from the Gap, who didn't even *glance* at the Patek Philippe –'He turns to the goons, one who keeps eyeing me in a fucked-up way. 'That's a watch *you* might never own. Anyway, *she's* the only one who would talk to me. . . Needless to say, it was a mildly scary, humiliating moment. It actually bordered on the horrific, but I moved through it. . . Could I actually not be in vogue? I panicked, man. I felt . . . *old*.' (G 45)

This excerpt denotes several things: first, that the necessary condition to be seen as worth speaking to by Damien is to have at least seen a mobile phone, to be able to tell designer clothes from ordinary ones, and to be able to recognize expensive watches, which sets up an exclusive dimension to the attitude of the characters towards consumption.

We can also see in this extract the impossibility of contact between people, since any emotion or immediate feeling is rejected by the intervention of consumer articles and consumerist attitudes. A good person to have a relationship with is therefore someone who can tell the difference between Versace and the Gap. Conspicuous consumption has pervaded all possibility for any social activity, and even talking is no longer possible if the conditions of reputability have not been achieved. The world of *Glamorama* is a exclusive class-conscious world where the only thing one can desire is an item of consumption. What Ellis suggests is that social contact no longer exists, and that consumerism has reached even the most basic social act, talking, and that desires are blocked and dictated by norms of consumption.

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[12] Veblen 47.

The fact that Damien dismisses his "goons" from the conversation because of insufficient knowledge of what is good while including Victor shows the need to have a rival in the quest for absolute possession. To provide the names of rare items of consumption in front of Victor is to provide an opportunity to desire something new. The fact that discourses in *Glamorama* revolve around items of consumption reveals what René Girard calls mimetic desire as being at the origin of the relationship of the characters to what they desire:

La rivalité n'est pas le fruit d'une convergence accidentelle de deux désirs sur le même objet. *Le sujet désire l'objet parce que le rival lui-même le désire.* En désirant tel ou tel objet, le rival le désigne au sujet comme désirable. Le rival est le modèle du sujet, non pas tant sur le plan superficiel des façons d'être, des idées, etc., que sur le plan plus essentiel du désir. . . Le désir est essentiellement mimétique, il se calque sur un désir modèle ; il élit le même objet que ce modèle.[13]

This type of relationship is quite strong and obvious in the activities of Victor and Damien. First of all, they own the same club and are both involved in its construction. This can be seen as pure business, but since Victor seems to attach a kind of personal desire to the construction of a club "of his own", competition appears between them and it seems that Damien stands as a model for Victor. The principle of the mimetic desire also explains Victor's attitude to women, which will prove disastrous for him: Victor's official girlfriend is Chloe Byrnes, but the women with whom he has detailed relationships in the novel are Lauren Hynde, Alison Poole and Jamie Fields. Alison is Damien's girlfriend, so it seems logical that Victor has a relationship with her, since she was designated as desirable by Damien. Lauren is Damien's lover, so again it is logical that Victor should sleep with her. Jamie is Bobby Hughes' s girlfriend. Since we know that Victor stands in admiration to Bobby, it is natural that he should desire Jamie as well. Chloe, in spite of being the official girlfriend, is not invested with desire in the same way as the others. Since she is already in his possession, Victor can no longer desire her, since he only desires what he doesn't have and which others desire.

Therefore it appears that according to Ellis's perception of things, individual desire does not exist and what is termed as desire is the mere reproduction of other people's competition for the same object. Still the question of the origin of the rivalry exists, and we should wonder where the "original" desire comes from. No clear answer is provided, but a mysterious name comes back a few times in the text, that of a mysterious "Mr. Leisure" who throws parties but also takes part in the unfolding of the plot: "The next day production assistants from the French film crew feed me heroin as they fly me into Milan on a private jet someone named Mr. Leisure has

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[13] René Girard, *LaViolence et le sacré* (Paris : Editions Bernard Grasset 1972), 216-217.

supplied, which is piloted by two Japanese men."(G 468) This man is always referred to as "someone named Mr. Leisure" which gives him a ghost-like quality, as if he did not really exist or as if this was a codename for something else. The closeness of Leisure with the theme of consumption as it is present in Thorstein Veblen's book leads us to think that any desire or decision in the novel, any choice and action is under the control of the god-like figure of Mr. Leisure, who represents a kind of comic relief in the story, since everything is done in the name of leisure.

The presence of this mysterious character also helps linking the two worlds presented in *Glamorama*. Fashion and terrorism alike are placed under the surveillance of this Mr. Leisure, and entertainment is the only possible result of the story. The association within the same book of themes as different as fashion and terrorism necessarily links the two in the mind of the reader. The association of violence with fashion creates a tension between the two, resolved in part by the absurd dimension given to the terrorists' story in the novel. We must now analyse the role of terrorism in *Glamorama*, how it ties in with the world of the fashion industry in a process of satire, how can be linked to the plot and the idea of the novelist as terrorist, and finally how Ellis defuses the tension of the plot by pushing it *ad absurdum*.

3.2 The terrorism industry

The confrontation of terrorism and the fashion industry in *Glamorama* brings an implicit comparison between the two to operate as a work of satire. In an interview given to the electronic magazine *Bold Type* in 2001, the author acknowledged there was a connection to be made:

> I think the connection I'm making has to do with the tyranny of beauty in our culture and the tyranny of terrorism. . . The idealization of beauty and fame in our culture drives people crazy in a lot of ways. . . and the psychological toll it takes on our psyche is pretty big. What the media and the fashion world does is remind us everyday that we aren't beautiful enough, that we need to be better-looking, that we will never live up to whatever the physical ideal of the day is.[1]

3.2.1 Fashion as terrorism

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[1] *Bold Type*: interview with Bret Easton Ellis 3.

The fashion culture as it is present in our society can indeed be assimilated to a form of dictatorial terrorism in the sense that it imposes desires on us. More important than advertising and selling goods, fashion dictates the canons of the right thing to do, buy, wear, by manipulating the desires of the viewers. The principle of mimetic desire or triangular desire applies here too, with the media playing the part of the absolute model. What is desired in the media must be desired by the audience. The role of the fashion industry is then to manipulate signs and symbols in order to make their simulation of desire more important than the others.

In advertising what is shown is a seemingly desirable item, usually "desired" by a model or actor. The dimension of simulation present in the media changes the operating mode of the triangular desire: the model, in this case, does not really desire the object, but pretends to do it, so that the subject (i.e. the audience) will react accordingly to the triangulation of desire as it happens usually. The part of the media is then a deceitful one, which Ellis obviously condemns through the obsession his character has towards looks, fame and popular culture. As Victor points it out, "'Fashion may be about insecurity but fashion is a good way to relieve tension.'" (G 141) What is meant by the sentence "fashion is about insecurity" is explained by the author in the *Bold Type* interview:

> The fashion world presents unattainable ideas of beauty to women – and now men – and it takes a strong person to reject them. I think we all fall into wanting to be more glamorous, better-looking, cooler – than we really are and the fashion world feeds off that insecurity.

This links fashion and terrorism in the desire to impose a minority's will on the public:

> Within consumer capitalism we are offered a surfeit of commodities, an abundance of commodity choices, but this image of plenty is illusory. Our desires are mediated by ideas about roles and lifestyles which are themselves constructed as commodities and our 'choices' are propelled by these constructs.[2]

What is more, both need representation to exist and be acknowledged by the public. Without the media, without the culture of images, fashion would not exist in the same way and would not be so present. Similarly, terrorists use the media to pass on their messages, and the very mediatisation of the terrorist act reinforces its significance:

Terrorists succeed when they seize headlines. Yet this very success means that they and their causes are understood in terms set by popular journalism. If television 'coproduced' the Palestinian hijacker of the 1970s, it also ensured that for a global audience a few images and sound bites would constitute Palestinian history. As importantly, the media's incessant repetition of the word *terrorism* has given it an emotional resonance that Thornton's sober definition of strategy, 'The symbolic act of violence,' fails to suggest.[3]

This process is quite similar for fashion and terrorism: the importance they are given by the media transform them into mythic entities, one violent and the other beautiful. What is more, the use of symbols is prevalent in both cases. The terrorists will attack a symbolic target to mark their action. According to T. P. Thornton, the terrorist act is "'A symbolic act designed to influence political behaviour by extranormal means, entailing the use or threat of violence'"[4]. In *Glamorama*, the terrorist cell plant bombs in such places as the Louvre museum, the Ritz hotel or the Café de Flore; though the issue of their motive is quite problematic, as we shall see later[5], their targets might still be representative for something.

Part of the answer lies in the fact that all these buildings are symbolic for the European high-brow culture. What is implied by their fictional destruction is a statement from the author that high-brow culture no longer exists in our society and has been replaced by more trivial centers of interest, mainly television. The fact that the terrorist are all fashion models implies that the fashion industry (and, by extension, advertising and the media) has played an important part in the deconstruction and destruction of culture in contemporary western societies.

While terrorists use symbolism in their acts, models can be seen as using famous brand names as symbols for their purpose. The aim of a model's work is mainly to advertise something. By adding affects and emotional connotation to the names of designers, they help develop those entities as symbols of what is fashionable or not for the whole world. Fashion itself works on a symbolic level, and clothes can even be seen as partaking in the process of dictatorial symbolism.

What the text provides when referring to an item of clothing is a sign, which is composed of a signifier and a signified: the signifier is the word itself, the item of clothing

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[2] Young & Caveney, *Shopping in Space* 104.
[3] Margaret Scanlan, *Plotting Terror, Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction*, (Charlottesville and London : University Press of Virginia, 2001), 5.
[4] quoted in Margaret Scanlan 5.
[5] See 3.2.3, p.113.

is the signified or referent. An item of clothing, especially considering the context of *Glamorama*, is a sign in itself, because it signifies other things than just "garment." For example, when Victor talks about "a tight Gap tank top" (G 195), several things are signified: first, the design and shape of the item. Then, the name "tank top" has a connotation that the person wearing it is someone sportive; the word "tight" infers a connotation of potential for attraction and sex-appeal. Finally, the precision of the brand name points out this item as necessarily relevant. This process is what Roland Barthes calls "assertion d'espèce":

> C'est parce que l'espèce . . . se distingue d'autres vêtements qu'elle se trouve ici immédiatement pourvue d'un sens de Mode : il suffit au [vêtement] d'affirmer son espèce pour signifier.[6]

Designer names then impose a compulsory fashionable side to clothes. When Victor defines a jacket as being a "Matsuda jacket" (G 27) there is an underlying statement behind it that forces the reader into admitting that this item is fashionable, even if s/he does not know the brand.

Fashion is then comparable to a form of terrorism, since it uses a symbolic violence to pass on its ideology. The difference resides in the willingness of the "victims" to submit to this ideology. The fact is that fashion is a determining social factor for people, as Veblen points it out:

> The greater part of the expenditure incurred by all classes for apparel is incurred for the sake of a respectable appearance rather than for the protection of the person. And probably at no other point is the sense of shabbiness so keenly felt as it is if we fall short of the standard set by social usage in this matter of dress. It is true if dress in even a higher degree than of most other items of conspicuous consumption, that people will undergo a very considerable degree of privation in the comforts or he necessaries of life in order to afford what is considered a decent amount of wasteful consumption.[7]

The consequence is that people cannot afford not to follow fashions because they are the sign of the respectability of the person as a consumer. Therefore fashion is a special

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[6] Roland Barthes, *Système de la Mode* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1967), 98.
[7] Veblen 103.

kind of terrorism, since people are more or less willing to participate in the actions of the fashion industry, and will generally approve of it.

In addition to establishing a comparison with the world of fashion, the presence of terrorism in the novel has implications on a more narratological level. It introduces the theme of conspiracy and paranoia into the novel, which are vital to the construction of the narrative and the actual unfolding of the story. What is more these themes raise a question about the liberty of choices and the idea of fate lying behind *Glamorama*.

3.2.2 Conspiracy and paranoia

Terrorism in the novel is closely related to the more general themes of conspiracy and paranoia, since the forced incorporation of Victor into the terrorist cell provokes a defamiliarization of the environment of the narrator. The reader then may expect an explosion or a shift in the roles of the characters scene at any moment in the narration, since Victor is no longer in control of the situation and, strangely enough in relation to the film-like construction of the novel, neither are the camera teams responsible for the filming: "'I'm worried that the project is . . . ill-conceived . . . The writers seem to be making it up as it goes along, which normally I'm used to. But here. . . I think that things will be getting out of hand'" (G 195) This is yet another contradiction of the narration: if there is a script, as we are told several times, how could the writers be "making it up as it goes along"?

3.2.2.1 Fate and the writer as terrorist

The plot of the novel is built around a duality concerning the ideas of fate and choice. The question raised is: how can the "script" of the story work so well if the narrator has not read it?

One should keep in mind that the central idea in *Glamorama* is that fiction and reality are not different, since "Reality *is* an illusion" (G 9) and vice-versa. The fictional (the films, the props, extras, mannequins) is the same as the real: there is no difference between acting in a film and doing it for real. In this case, it seems quite logical that the "script" displays a pre-knowledge of the events: it tells the story of the film(s), and since films and reality are not separate worlds, the script acts like the forerunner of events.

Under these conditions, it is difficult to make out an idea of external fate in the story. Victor was not meant to join the terrorist cell, he decided to accept Palakon's offer and go to Europe, which led him to the terrorists; if he had not chosen to go to Europe, he would not have been caught in the terrorist's nets. However, the whole thing was in the script, so eventually what really happened is that Victor followed his role as a character of fiction within the novel, and that nothing could have prevented him from joining the terrorists.

This vision of things offers a reflection on realism in literature, by imposing a postmodern irony to an otherwise rather realistic text: by erasing the boundary between fiction and reality, Ellis shows his character as not being real, but as belonging to a preconceived structure, the novel, out of which no escape is possible for the character since this conditions his very existence. The realistic aspects of the narration (first-person narrator, present-tense narration, dialogues) are therefore put into perspective as being mere artifacts to make the novel more realistic, while still keeping their artificial quality. This process is both what happens to the narrator of the novel and to the reader: the narrator is confused when artificial elements of fiction are injected into the reality of the diegesis, and we in turn are confused by the deliberate spreading of the fictional and supernatural in a realistic text.

The fact that the novel claims its own artificiality destroys the notion of choice usually possible in realistic texts. The character in *Glamorama* cannot make any choice, since everything is dictated and regulated by the text, and by extension by the author. The writer consequently appears as a double for the terrorists he created, destroying every alternative and way to escape by replacing the real by the fictional. In the novel Victor is trapped when his double takes his place in his life.

On the textual level, the writer entraps the reader into the possibilities of the text by imposing artificial decisions where open choices would normally lay: there was no other choice for Victor but to go to Europe and be trapped by terrorists, since the text creates its own argument by giving a special role to Lauren's initially unimportant hat, by setting characters against him in New York. Plotting terror is exactly what happens in *Glamorama.* The writer imposes his text onto the reader, the text imposes itself onto the characters, no other alternative is possible but to follow what is indicated. The textual plot and the conspiratorial plot unite to dictate their ideology about the impossibility of the open text.

In consequence to this, paranoia is used as a narratological tool that changes both the narrator's and the reader's perception of the text. Victor becomes aware of how the plot

is closing in on him and how he is being excluded from the story, while the reader is reaching for clues to understand the whereabouts of the narration, how it is working and why this is happening to the narrator.

3.2.2.2. Paranoia as a fictionalising device

The theme of paranoia is pervasive in postmodern literature; it is used to blur the reality of events, to put the story into perspective and present the reader with alternative possibilities about what is happening. In *Glamorama*, Victor becomes a victim of his involvement in the terrorist cell, and no longer understands what is happening to him. He seems to be the only character who is aware of the fact that Bobby, Bentley, Tammy, Bruce and Jamie are terrorists, since when he tries to convince other characters they nearly systematically distrust or ignore him. For example, when trying to warn one of the camera teams' directors, Felix, about the intentions of the group, the latter first ignores, then reject him:

> 'There are things you need to know,' I'm saying. 'I've figured some things out and I need to tell you these things.'
>
> 'But I'm not interested in listening to you anymore,' Felix says. 'In fact, nobody is, Victor. . .'
>
> 'But they killed Sam Ho that night, Felix, they killed him,' I say in a rush. 'And there's another movie being shot. One you don't know about. There's another crew here and Bruce Rhinebeck killed Sam Ho – '
>
> 'Victor. . .Bruce Rhinebeck came over this morning. . . and explained the situation. . *.your* situation. . . He says you are under extreme emotional pressure, possibly due to a major drug habit, he also says you tend to hallucinate frequently and that nothing coming out of your mouth is to be believed. . .'
>
> 'He builds bombs, Felix. . .That's all a lie.'
>
> 'I'm terminating this phone call, Victor.' (G 349-51)

The classic situation of Victor is that he is alone and he is the only character who knows the truth about the terrorists, which leads him to be thought insane by every other character. Since he is the only character the reader can rely on, his vision of the events becomes the reader's, and uncertainty prevails since nothing is certain. This adds a changeable quality to most of the elements of the story, which can then be perceived in

different ways. As we have already seen it, the defamiliarization created by the terrorist dimension of the novel endows previous events with retroactive meaning.[8]

What is more, elements of noise such as flies and confetti become more and more present towards the end of the novel, which invites the reader to look for a possible signification they could have. They are related to danger, death and the tension lying behind the terrorist plot, suggesting that the party is over. At times however, those elements are just here for no reason at all; for example, such a thing happens during a discussion with Jamie:

> 'You're looking good tonight.'
> 'The better you look,' I murmur, 'the more you see.'
> 'I'll remember that.'
> 'No you won't. But for now I'll believe you.'
> 'I'm serious.' She waves a fly away from her face. 'You're looking very spiffy. You have the knack.' (G 361)

In this extract, flies only represent textual noise, something designed to make the reader look for patterns, symbols to clarify the situation while no referent is present, thus leading the reader into an empty quest

. But generally, the presence of flies indicates that something important is happening. For example, when Jamie dies, "an eruption of flies swarm into the courtyard in one massive black cloud." (G 426)

The changing status of this noise creates a situation in which the analytic role of the reader becomes absurd, as the absence of reference behind flies or a steaming breath sometimes marks them as pure noise out of which no clear meaning can be made, while it sometimes suggests that a more meaningful pattern can be established.

Paranoia therefore has a fictionalising dimension, since it incorporates into the plot elements which otherwise would have no meaning. The role of some characters is redefined by the process, and their attitudes and words take on new meaning in relation to the text, by becoming a kind of prolepsis: for example, it could be that Alison is warning Victor about what is going to happen when she tells him, at the beginning of the novel: "'Well, *you're* going to take the back way out.'" (G 99)

As a narratological tool, the themes of paranoia and conspiracy are important in the way they interact with the hermeneutic process: they create multiple possibilities,

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[8] See 1.1.2, p.13.

developing the number of possible interpretations of the text. The problem raised by the text in general is that no complete explanation is ever reachable, and that all the different interpretations one can make of the text are always frustrated by a missing element.

The consequence of this is that the global meaning of the text has to be looked for in the "hors-texte", on a nearly metaleptical level which gathers all the problems resulting from the demultiplication of representations and interpretations: the demultiplication of representations, of images and possible interpretations results in an absurd confusion in the hermeneutic process: an overload of images and referents creates frustration and absurdity. An evidence of this process is the terrorist cell. The question of their motive is never raised in the text, but it is probably the main problem the reader is trying to solve through his/her reading.

It seems that the terrorists have no motive but to destroy the heritage of the western culture, and that their action is actually absurd and is far from what would be called terrorism.

3.2.3 Motive and the self-defusing of the plot

The terrorist cell of the novel represents an enigma for the reader, because of the question of their motive. The planting of bombs and the killing of officials can indeed be assimilated to terrorism, but the fact that the bombings and murders are deliberately attributed to someone else sets them aside from conventional terrorism. The terrorists are nothing but textual artefacts designed to trap the hero, and have no political or social claim to make.

They also offer a reflection on the fact that terrorists in contemporary society are also media constructs and that their original aim may be distorted or destroyed by the media. The point is that terrorism itself has lost all the "terror" dimension of the word, and are nothing more than other images offered to the consumer through the television screen.

The lack of a motive for the terrorist attacks in the novel questions their status: since nothing is to be made of the attacks (except perhaps the number of casualties), why do they take place? More than a narratological tool, they are the pessimistic sign that nothing has meaning in an environment polluted by constant mediatization: terrorists' traditional aim is to make themselves heard. In *Glamorama*, terrorists refuse mediatization because it is no longer useful and that actual terrorism is dead, a point which will be developed later. In these conditions, a motive is no longer needed to perpetrate misdeeds.

As a consequence, the problematics of the novel is not oriented towards the power of violence or political conviction, but focuses on the absurdity of too many representations and the alienating effects of constant mediatization.

3.2.3.1 The absurdity of moving through layers of fiction

Glamorama gives a visible side to the media saturation criticized in contemporary society: "the sheer volume of advertisements creates what is often called 'clutter', with so many messages competing for attention that their impact is inevitably reduced."[9] The reader of *Glamorama* is confronted to a myriad of elements to which s/he must pay attention in order to get a global vision of the story. However, the integration of noise into these elements and the meaninglessness of some situations create a growing confusion which is most visible in the seemingly random dimensioning and distribution of the chapters in the last section of the novel. The presence of endless lists, of detailed descriptions and of repetitive patterns and words, as well as the demultiplication of genres, makes of the text a confused system in which the only way "out is in" (G 15), since the novel finishes with the disappearance of the narrator from the text.

The satirical dimension of the novel consequently springs from this absurd situation where images destroy their objects. The culture of images is the culture of simulation, what is represented is necessarily distorted, adapted to fit conventions, ideologies and it is organized according to a certain agenda:

> the organisation of, say, a news programme seems normal and natural but [Marxists] have argued that the selection, construction and presentation of news veils efforts to promulgate a dominant ideology. Democracy is therefore illusory because news, current affairs and documentaries act on behalf of the capitalist state to limit debate and discussion.[10]

Although the political dimension of Marxists theories does not seem to be taken into account, the alienating dimension of media programs is kept, and developed to the point of nonsense: everything in *Glamorama* is related to a form of consumption, which is itself a dictatorial discourse annihilating the idea of individual liberty of choice. What is

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[9] Casey et al. 3.

criticized throughout the book is the loss of identity in a media-obsessed society: every behaviour, every act is regulated and connoted by media texts, thus leading society to a form of struggle for conformism giving the illusion of free choice, since "Our desires are mediated by ideas about roles and lifestyles which are themselves constructed as commodities and our 'choices' are propelled by these constructs."[11] The action of the terrorists could therefore be seen as an attempt at subverting the dictatorship of the hyperreal. By refusing the obvious way of mediatization, their action can be seen as aiming at the construction of a form of identity through the negation of the possibilities offered by a consumer society. The choice of the terrorists is to abandon their public image and to use the hyperreal against itself, by playing with the levels of fiction to the point where they become an absurd Moebius strip.

In the case of Victor, more than choices, it is his existence which is put forward as depending on his choices as a consumer and an object of consumption: misbehaving toward the conventions of consumption might destroy his credibility as "aspiring model of the year." As the story unfolds we realize that mistakes have already been made, and that what is narrated is the process of replacement of his persona, his exclusion from the diegetic world. He has always been behaving in contradiction with his public image, and this opposition can only result in his rejection from and by the system of representation in which he is, which is to say the novel itself. The disappearance of the character of Victor resolves the tension of the story, and strangely enough elevates the narrator to a kind of martyrdom, the martyr of the television generation.

3.2.3.2 The exclusion of the narrator from the diegesis and his redemption

The final chapters of *Glamorama* allows the narrator to exit the narration without dying. Through another twist in the texture of the fictional world, Ellis dissolves his main character into the world of images, since this is what the narrator had been after since the beginning of the book.

Several mechanisms used in the whole text are employed in these two chapters as a kind of nostalgic reminiscence of what happened. "Sinead O'Connor was singing 'The Last Day of Our Acquaintance'" is used as a leitmotiv to hint at the nostalgia of the relationship between narrator and reader, as well as a soundtrack to the sequence which we guess is a filmed moment.

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[10] Casey et al. 8.
[11] Young & Caveney 104.

The narrator is already distant from his own text in chapter Fourteen and he is describing the events from an external position:

> And as the final crashing verse of 'The Last Day of Our Acquaintance' boomed out, I faded away and my image overlapped and dissolved into an image of myself years later sitting in a hotel bar in Milan where I was staring at a mural. (G 481)

The use of the past tense in this chapter indicates that the "narrating I" considers himself to be outside the diegesis: the final scene ("sitting in a hotel bar in Milan where I was staring at a mural") is supposed to be in the present time of the narration, but reality is somehow transcended by the narrating voice who provides a nostalgic description of Victor at the very beginning of his modelling career, a moment standing before the actual narration of *Glamorama* starts: "I was just becoming famous and my whole relationship was about to change." (G 480)

In this passage we also witness the narrator's redemption from his own celebrity-obsessed, beauty-crazed self, through the remembering of the way he considered things before:

> There was no system to any of this. At that point Chloe Byrnes wasn't a real person to me and on that afternoon in the House on Ocean Drive a few decisions had to be made, the priority being: I would never dream of leaving any of this. At first I was confused by what passed for love in this world: people were discarded because they were too old or too fat or too poor or they had too much hair or not enough, they were wrinkled, they had no muscles, no definition, no *tone*, they weren't hip, they weren't remotely famous. This was how you chose lovers. This was what decided friends. And I had to accept this if I wanted to get anywhere. . . I was dealing with the fact that we lived in a world where beauty was considered an accomplishment." (G 480-1)

This shows an aspect of Victor which had remained untold up to now: He used to have a critical perception of the world he now lives in. The narrator we are introduced to at the beginning of the novel is extremely involved into what he is here criticizing here, and this change in attitude is explained by the fact that Victor had deliberately forgotten everything about this moment:

> I might not even remember this afternoon, I was thinking. I was thinking that a part of me might destroy it. A cold voice inside my head begged me to. But I was becoming famous and at that point I had no way of understanding one thing: if I didn't erase this afternoon from my memory and just walk out that door and leave Chloe Byrnes behind,

sections of this afternoon would come back to me in nightmares. This was what the cold voice assured me. This was what it promised. (G 481)

At that moment Victor was facing a decision he had to make: the whole fashion world, embodied by Chloe, was ready to accept him, but he had first to forget the criticising thoughts he could have about the vain and absurd mode of living in the fashion industry.

Since he is now bringing these events to his memory, to reality, we can assume that he has actually understood, again, the problems implied by the life he has been living. No decision about forgetting the events is however made clear, but the mere quotation of Chloe's remark tells enough: "'You want to know how this all ends? . . . Buy the rights'"(G 481) Everything in the world of fashion is for sale, the future of Victor's story included. Victor's redemption is achieved through the realization of his own terrorist aspect: he has adopted the vision of those he is criticizing, becoming part of the system consisting in imposing the dominant ideology onto the world, condemning those who don't fit the pattern into becoming non-entities.

The very last chapter of the book stages the exit of the narrator from the story while setting up a circular pattern to the text. The chapter mainly consists of a description of a tapestry in the Principe di Savoia hotel in Milan. The narrating voice merges with the image and goes beyond what is visible to find a kind of absolute truth. Victor literally penetrates into the world of images he has been linked to and the description becomes omniscient, the notion of physicality of the narrator disappears into another level of fictionality, as the circular quality of the text is installed through the description of the absolute truth lying behind the mountain of the tapestry:

> . . . and a bridge strung across a pass through the mountain will take you to any point beyond that you need to arrive at, because behind that mountain is a highway and along that highway are billboards with answers on them – who, what, where, when, why – and I'm falling forward but also moving up toward the mountain. . . (G 482)

The questions raised in the incipit of the novel, "'who, what, where, when, and don't leave out why'" (G 5) are recycled, in the same order, and we are told that answers are provided to them, which resolves the dramatic tension set up at the beginning of the book by Victor: questions finally find their answers, even if this happens outside the text, leaving a frustration for the reader, only stating that for him/her, the problem and the confusion are still the same.

Victor therefore acquires a superior knowledge, unattainable to readers or even the other characters, because of his realization that he can, at this point of the novel, dissolve into pure image, and therefore become omniscient in the world of images and in his own fictionality. The novel therefore needs to end, since the "narrating I" has disappeared and what is left is a fixed image: "the future is that mountain," (G 582) this is where narration stops, and where the time of the narration necessarily stops as well for all the remaining characters.

The relationship between celebrity and terrorism as it is developed in the novel can also be seen as a reflection of the author on his own life and experience, and the alienating process he describes in the book could also in part be applied to him.

3.3 Celebrity and terrorism: the metaleptic dimension of *Glamorama*

Bret Easton Ellis has admitted in interviews that *Glamorama* was in part autobiographical, and was a reflection on what being famous means and how it can be dangerous:

> This book is, in some ways, me writing about my feelings about being famous. As a writer you're a minor celebrity, but you tend to be written about, you see your name in all places and have your photo taken. . . In many ways this book is a criticism of what's going on in my life.[12]

On a metaleptic level, the novel might be seen as a cathartic description of celebrity for the author, allowing him to discard what was at a point of his life considered as a potential threat.

3.3.1 Autobiographic irony

The attitude of Victor in *Glamorama* and the obsession with surfaces echoes Ellis's experience as far as the construction of identity is concerned. The fact that characters develop their identity or image through name-dropping and the obsession with fashion seems to have been experienced in a way by the author:

La façon dont se déroule ma vie, la manière dont j'ai dû vivre durant ces quinze dernières années, ce n'est pas une vie normale, en particulier quant à la manière dont les gens croient me connaître. Dès lors que vous commencez à être un peu connu, photographié, interviewé dans des magazines, les gens se forment une opinion sur vous, à partir des seules choses qu'ils ont lues ou entendues, uniquement à partir de votre travail ; en fait, vous devenez finalement une personne irréelle. La vie qu'on vous imagine ne correspond en rien à votre vraie vie – voir vos parents, vos amis, avoir des activités normales – et, en un sens, vous finissez carrément par mourir : c'est l'illusion qui a pris le dessus. Il y a aussi, à mon avis, cette idée que les gens un peu connus doivent sans cesse être en représentation, jouer en permanence un rôle. Vous finissez par avoir toute une panoplie de personnalités et oui, la réalité devient une illusion.[13]

This is the type of alienation which happens to Victor in the novel: his personality is constructed by what other people and magazines think about him, so that the "multiple personality" aspect of the process overwhelms him and literally destroys his character. The alternative Victor has to face, that is to say either submit to this lifestyle and lose himself in it or try and find a way to escape it, presented itself to Ellis at the point of his life when he moved to New York in 1989, a rich and famous young writer:

Ellis's move to New York, and his immersion in the 'yuppie lifestyle' of conspicuous consumption, status, and greed, presented the young writer with a dilemma. On the one hand, he was attracted to the glamour of the slick Manhattan inhabited by his friends; on the other, he was a writer who had built his brief but already substantial career to date on excoriating this very 'lifestyle' with acid satire. He wanted to regard the life of the Wall Street trader as mere 'material' on which to go to work as a coruscating satiric author, but he was so close to his subject matter. . . that the danger of becoming his own object of contempt was great.[14]

Celebrity therefore represented a threat to the author who hesitated between submitting to the world of images and status and exorcising it by creating something out of it.

The result of this dilemma was published in 1991 with *American Psycho*, which set up a new tension between Ellis and the public, on the grounds of problems of interpretation. Whereas the novel itself was intended as a satire of the psychological

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[12] "This is Not an Exit", directed by Gerald Fox, Marquee Film and Television production for LWT, 1998.
[13] Bernard Quiriny and Blandine Pinard "Chronic'art : Ellis et les théories des normalités : entretien avec Bret Easton Ellis", formerly available on the Internet at http://www.Chronicart.com/archives/Ellis/normalités.html (link broken), cited 05/06/2001, 2.
[14] Julian Murphet, *Bret EastonEllis's American Psycho: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. 2002), 16.

vacuum of the consumer society in New York, it was seen as the apology of misogynist cruelty and murder because of the violence contained in the murder scenes.

The same tension can be seen in *Glamorama*, in the character of Victor who is offered at one moment the possibility to "'disappear from all this'"(G 142). In the novel the tension is created between an easy life of appearances and the use of his celebrity to integrate a terrorist cell. Though he does not know about the consequences of his trip to Europe, Victor trusts F. Fred Palakon and follows his advice.

One should notice that the name of F. Fred Palakon is an anagram for Alfred A. Knopf, Ellis's publisher for *Glamorama*. A parallel is therefore to be made between the two: the writer pushes the game of fictionalisation even further with his publisher, and this before the novel is actually published. The image of the publisher is that of the omniscient man who holds the keys to all the problems concerning the book. The integration of the publisher into the narrative has an autobiographical resonance in relation to the circumstances of the writing of the novel:

> Quand j'ai commence à écrire *Glamorama*, il y avait de fortes controverses à propos d'*American Psycho*. . . J'étais entre deux éditeurs en guerre pour m'avoir, et un jour, assis à mon bureau, incapable d'écrire, je pensais à ça et à cet éditeur . . . Du coup, j'en ai fait un des personnages du livre.[15]

Palakon is the figure of the man who creates, but also resolves the tension in a situation in which the writer/Victor is engaged and in a way a victim of his celebrity.

The problems caused by excesses of fictionalisation in *Glamorama* raise another metaleptical question: if fiction destroys reality, what is to be made of the work of fiction, which is to say the novel itself? Is it only another "mise en abyme" of fictional levels, or can it represent something more?

3.3.2 Art as an exit

Glamorama raises questions as to the possibility of truth in our contemporary world. If fictionalisation takes over every aspect of our daily lives, as it is implied by the text, is it still possible to find a part of truth somewhere, or is reality dead? Is there a difference between reality and truth?

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[15] Quiriny and Pinard 10.

The main problem springs from the fact that what we consider as reality is no longer real, but hyperreal. To be engaged in the life of contemporary society is to be engaged in the reproduction and recycling of the hyperreal, so that everything we approach has already been distorted by the cultural or commercial hyperreal. Considering the fact that the hyperreal has overcome the real, what remains of the idea of truth?

The final scene of the novel may provide the beginning of an answer to this question: the device through which Victor escapes the narrative space is a "mural", a painting he enters and dissolves in. The following description of the painting states the presence of truth there: "behind that mountain is a highway and along that highway are billboards with answers on them – who, what, where, when, why – . . . the stars are real." (G 482)

Truth therefore seems to exist only in the artistic creation, in the works of the imagination, taking over the ideas exposed by Keats: poetry is truth since it only can overcome death. Ironically, the process is never far from the hyperreal: the image of billboards on the sides of a highway providing the answers to the original questions of the novel is very close to the idea of symbol manipulation, which is a dominant side of the hyperreal world.

The hyperreal is compatible with the principle of truth, and that of the artistic creation, the work of imagination as it is present in the last chapter with Victor seemingly creating what lies behind the mountain of the mural, is the creation of some kind of absolute truth. What is more, the description of the highway behind the mountain could be seen as a metaleptical description of the hermeneutic quest of the reader and of the writer at the same time: the providing of answers to questions can be envisioned from the point of view of the writer, creating the answers as he goes along with his creation, and also from the point of view of the reader, searching for the answers as he reads along.

The author claimed a similar access to truth was possible through art:

> La vérité, pour moi, est seulement dans l'art, dans la création, l'écriture ; ça, c'est la vérité absolue : écrire, par moi-même. Tout le reste est 'trickier', rusé, détourné, épineux. Il est très difficile de trouver la vérité en dehors de ça, dans la vie, car la plupart des gens se cachent derrière l'apparence.[16]

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[16] Quiriny and Pinard 4.

The image of the highway as it is present in the final lines of *Glamorama* echoes to the American myth of the road movie, and to a aspect of truth Baudrillard feels only exists in deserts and highways:

> La vitesse est créatrice d'objets purs, elle est elle-même un objet pur, puisqu'elle efface le sol et les références territoriales, puisqu'elle remonte le cours du temps pour l'annuler, puisqu'elle va plus vite que sa propre cause et en remonte le cours pour l'anéantir. La vitesse est le triomphe de l'effet sur la cause. . . La vitesse créé un espace initiatique qui peut impliquer la mort et dont la seule règle est d'effacer les traces. Triomphe de l'oubli sur la mémoire, ivresse inculte, amnésique. . . Rouler crée une sorte d'invisibilité, de transparence, de transversalité des choses par le vide. C'est une forme de suicide au ralenti, par l'exténuation des formes, forme délectable de leur disparition.[17]

The consequence of the artistic creation as truth is in a way similar to the effects of driving on the highways in the desert: the ultimate goal is oblivion, to forget everything about simulations and artificial symbolism in order to create an abstraction, something personal and true. Creation springs not from a collective consciousness of symbols and rules, but from a personal vision of events, achieved through the erasure of the collective consciousness: the effects of the artistic creation become the cause for the apparition of truth.

This is quite an optimistic view of literature, and the postmodern recycling of previous elements can then be envisioned as the creation of something new. By recycling elements, the writer adds his own will onto them, creating a new layer of meaning, thus changing the perception of the world for the readers. The mere re-using of ancient structures in a text hints at the adaptability of the structures and their universality.

The access to truth is not achieved through a denial or rejection of the hyperreal (since it still constitutes an important part of the cultural world) but can exist within the hyperreal. Creation becomes a portion of truth, since it erases the tracks of previous meaning and reconstructs it by adding a new perspective to it. Deconstruction, in the full sense of the word, is therefore for Ellis the postmodern tool to create truth out of the hyperreal.

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[17] Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* 12.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>

The quest for identity in the environment of a postmodern work such as *Glamorama* raises several questions and problems which address the issue of reality. The main postmodern device used in the novel is the erasure of the boundary between reality and illusion, between the real and the fictional. Although this serves the satirical side of the novel by providing an interesting analysis of the contemporary world of consumer society and the predominance of the hyperreal, it also triggers a problem for the characters of the novel, by imposing on them a status which is both self-conscious and paradoxical.

As a satirical work, *Glamorama* takes advantage of the confusing situation of the fictional space deliberately imposed upon the characters and the plot. The fact that the plot dictates its own movement in the narrative process, thus imposing a temporal and hierarchical development of the events, points to the global spreading fictionalization of life in our "real" society. Alienation in the novel is caused by an over-exposure to he media and the world of images. In contemporary society it is true that lives and events are more and more presented, as well as perceived, as fictional constructs, using notions such as characterization, stereotypes, plot and others through a mediatization seen as taking over every aspect of daily life.

The contemporary world is therefore considered as widening the gap between reality and its fictional counterpart, hyperreality. We have seen how famous people are reinvented through the media, how their lives and their actions become more than what they really are, and how the mere fact of being mediatized transforms the object into something different, something marked culturally which belongs to the public domain, no longer to the individual. The culture of images in contemporary society is the creation of the "universal third person" out of the first and the second persons, subjects and objects.

The mediatization of an object instantly transfers the text used around it into another vision of the object, the object as part of a mediatext. What happens to the main character of *Glamorama* is the result of such a transferring of attention. The object of the mediatext (in the novel, the mediatext corresponds to the "scripts" of the various films being shot) undergoes immediate depersonalization and the transferring of its image onto a "third-person" object, causing the duplication of the subject's image. In Ellis's novel, this movement is complexified by the postmodern twist of the plot which makes the image as real as the subject.

The vanishing of the hero in a terrorist context can be envisioned as the symbol for the apparent death of the subject in contemporary society through media coverage. Individualities and choices are no longer relevant notions, since the global mediatext

dictates its own plot in the way the novel's plot dictates its own narratological realization in *Glamorama.*

Fictionalisation is a means of control over the individual which provides simulacra of choices and possibilities while at the same time alienating the individual from his own desires. Identity is constructed in the same way, through processes of identification which are only the result of the production of the mediatext.

In the context of the novel, the idea of the dictatorship of the plot alienates the main character in a relatively comparable way: his identity is a fictional construct, since by essence a character is fictional. However, this fictionality is made apparent on the surface of the text through the character's language and attitude. The resulting impression is that his identity is an unstable construct of shattered pieces of pop culture and television language. The quotation of songs and the name-dropping he constantly resorts to show the impact of consumer society on the self: while what is considered as specialized or idiosyncratic vocabulary has disappeared from common use, references to advertising or pop songs abound, so much that it is no longer possible to distinguish among the sentences the character employs those who are created by him and those borrowed from popular culture.

The narcissistic attitude of the hero can also be linked to the culture of images he is so immerged in: what images need to make sense, to mean, is representation through the media. Similarly, it seems that Victor needs to be represented to exist fully, both as a social entity and as character of fiction. The narrative itself is seen as a medium through which the existence of the characters is achieved. However, this first degree of representation does not seem to be enough for Victor, since he crosses several levels of representation in his quest for acknowledgement.

The multiplicity of the layers of fiction establishes a parallel between the "real" world and the world of *Glamorama.* The lives of the characters depend on the way they are represented and the quest for the perfect public image finally alienates them from their own desires. In contemporary society, the alienation of desires is a necessary by-product of the overload of information delivered by the media about how to behave, what to wear, drink, do, in order to fit the image of the "universal third person." Within the hyperreal of consumer society is therefore another layer of fiction brought on by the media, who distort and adapt their objects to suit their ideological and narrative aims. The absurdity of the terrorist action in the novel springs from the same statement: terrorists need the media to relay their motives, but the fact that the media take possession of their objects and

transform them into trivial items of consumption makes the principle of terrorism obsolete and absurd.

The narratological pattern of the novel itself is motivated by the plot. When the theme of conspiracy and paranoia is introduced into the novel, it needs a fictional maze to develop in and to achieve its purpose. The fact that the conspiracy is organized on the level of the fictionality of the novel is typically postmodern. The self-awareness of the work of fiction makes it seemingly autonomous and prevents any external intervention from taking place.

This autonomy nonetheless raises a question as to the status of the characters: if they are conscious of the fictionality of the world around them (as most of them are), they are also conscious of their own fictionality, and as a consequence their very existence within the fictional space is questioned, on the verge of being destroyed. If characters of fiction know that what surrounds them is illusory, they necessarily realize that they are also illusory beings, which would bring them to the negation of their own existence, and to the destruction of the fictional work.

By playing on the status of the characters and giving them several planes of existence, Ellis duly avoids the self-destruction of his story, but places the fictional space of *Glamorama* into an infinite, kaleidoscopic perspective of infinite possibilities. This allows the construction of a reflection on the status of people in our "reality." In the same way we are possibly to be considered as actors playing our own part in a fictional world where codes, conventions and representations have to be understood and played with.

Art is finally presented as the only way to escape out of the myriad of fictional worlds of the novel. The underlying idea is that Art transcends the problems raised by the interpenetration of reality and fiction, by uniting them totally in an absolute truth. But the works of art themselves can be considered as products of the hyperreal: the references used in the artistic creation spring from the artist's imagination and perception of the world, and this imagination has necessarily been directed and, if not dictated, at least suggested by the hyperreal, and the result of the artistic creation is nothing but another means for fictional realities to spread and reach new frontiers.

In such conditions, the search for reality can be seen as obsolete, since every aspect of life has been added a hyperreal level, from what we perceive of the world to what we actually do. We could even wonder whether a satirical work is still possible in a postmodern world, and whether it still carries the social values attached to the notion of satire, since morality partakes in the global construct of reality through the media. Along

the same lines, the notion of identity is questioned since it is no longer an individual and personal value. What is stated by the satire *Glamorama* is the end of the individual, and the emergence of a system of single particles moved by the same impetus, an impetus dictated by the media and advertising. By putting forward a form of awareness of the process, the novel suggests, besides the fact that alienation through fictionalisation is dictatorial and seemingly inescapable, that the cynicism springing from the satire brings a form of resistance to the progression of the Disneyfication of the world. The underlying idea of the novel may be that the real no longer exists, that truth as an absolute ideal has disappeared, but also that it is the role of the writer to subvert the mechanics of the hyperreal to deconstruct it and, if not provide truth, at least trigger an awareness of the situation which could create individualization and identity through resistance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS