



HAL
open science

Reading the Body in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991)

David Roche

► **To cite this version:**

David Roche. Reading the Body in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991): Confusing Signs and Signifiers. Groupe de Recherches Anglo-Américaines de Tours, 2009, 5 (1), pp.124-38. halshs-00451731

HAL Id: halshs-00451731

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00451731>

Submitted on 6 Sep 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



GRAAT On-Line issue #5.1 October 2009

**Reading the Body in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991):
Confusing Signs and Signifiers**

David Roche

Université de Bourgogne

In Ellis's scandalous end-of-the-eighties novel *American Psycho*, the tale of Patrick Bateman—a Wall Street yuppie who claims to be a part-time psychopath—the body is first conceived of as a visible surface which must conform to the norms of the yuppies' etiquette. I use the word "etiquette," which Patrick uses (231) and which I oppose to the word "ethics" which suggests moral depth, to stretch how superficial the yuppie's concerns are and to underline, notably, that the yuppie's sense of self is limited to his social self, his public appearance, his self-image, which I relate to D. W. Winnicott's "false self."¹ Ellis's yuppies abide by the gospel words of Donald Trump (109-10), TV hosts David Letterman (395) and fictitious Patti Winters (29), *GQ* (31), *New York* magazine and the *Financial Times* (108), and that authoritative guide to good restaurants, "the trusty Mr. Zagat" (32). These texts decide not only of how the yuppie must act and what he should wear over his body, but also of what he can put into his body and what he can put his body *into*.

René Alladaye has noted "this domination of surfaces," "identities blurring, so that you end up not knowing who's who" in the novel (93, my translation) The same words are more or less used to introduce different characters: desirable women are described as "big tits, blonde, great ass, high heels" (30); cool yuppie acquaintances are described as being tan and fit and wearing suits, cotton shirts and silk ties (87). The slight variations, like the almost imperceptible differences between Patrick's

friends' business cards (44-5), point at the impossibility to perfectly conform to the etiquette, something which often fills Patrick with "nameless dread" (264), an expression he uses eight times.² The etiquette clearly represents, then, a desire- and anguish-producing law³ which fashions matter into desirable or abject bodies, making these bodies, as Judith Butler would have it, matter.

For the yuppies of *American Psycho*, one's identity is not so much represented by one's appearance as it is one's appearance. After "one night of binging," Patrick concludes: "All it comes down to is this: I feel like shit but look great." (106) Consequently, the point of keeping fit and working out is not to feel good but to look good (236), and Patrick takes the idea of sculpting his body very literally, comparing his "chest" to "steel" and his "pectorals" to "granite" (370). Completely reified, the body is placed on par with the other elements that make up one's appearance, for instance a girl's "big tits" and "high heels." These signs, which are required to certify someone's health and desirability, are made readable thanks to the reading grids provided by yuppie Scripture.

My argument, here, is based on an idea suggested by Lacan in *Séminaire XX : Encore* on the relation between sign and signifier:

Je veux terminer en montrant par où le signe se différencie du signifiant.

[...] Le signe n'est donc pas le signe de quelque chose, mais d'un effet qui est ce qui se suppose en tant que tel d'un fonctionnement du signifiant. (48)

[...] c'est bien d'une subordination du signe au regard du signifiant qu'il s'agit dans tout ce que j'ai avancé. (93)

In *Bodies That Matter* Judith Butler takes up Lacan's idea and explicitly relates it to the body and to the notion of performativity.

The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified as prior*. This signification produces as an *effect* of

its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification. (30)

What I want to show is that there is a confusion in the way the yuppie-psychopath perceive bodies and, more generally, matter. In short, the body is perceived as a sign *of something*, as proof of the validity of the etiquette, when it is actually an *effect* of the signifier, i.e. of the etiquette that has fashioned it. For example, a girl's "big tits" are seen by the yuppie as a sign of her desirability, but they are constituted as such by the etiquette.

What makes *American Psycho* so interesting is the extremes to which Ellis carries the thesis that the law fashions the subject: in the end, the yuppies' obsession with bodies, image and images, appearances and signs only emphasizes the predominance of signifiers, discourse and the symbolic order which constitute the former as meaningful in postmodern culture. In short, the novel's excess makes the invisible workings of what Foucault called "power" excessively visible in its representation of 80s New York, by condensing the yuppie and the serial killer into a pregnant metaphor of consumer society.⁴ Indeed, after showing how the yuppie fashions his body according to the etiquette, thus fashioning himself, I will go on to argue that Patrick's second identity is intended to be a reaction against the predominance of surface in the yuppie world. "Being a psychopath" would represent a quest not only for depth, but more specifically for an original sign that would make things, including the subject, matter, so to speak. That Patrick carries this quest out on the female body will be seen as symptomatic of the paradox underlined by Luce Irigaray, that the female body and female sexuality have always been seen as un-

representable, inexpressible, as a gap or a lack, so that their being represented in phallic terms is a means of filling the gap of absence of signification. Irigaray argues, through the example of Freud, that, in the end, the feminine is always conceived of in masculine terms: “Un homme moins la possibilité de se (re)présenter comme homme = une femme normale.” (26-7) She describes woman as man’s double, as “raw material”: “[c]et inconnaissable et qui ne possède pas l’existence en soi” (201), “[la femme] serait le support, l’espace d’inscription, des représentants de l’inconscient ‘masculin’.” (138) Matter, which has always been associated to the feminine (246-7), is thus the surface onto which the phallogocentric symbolic order has inscribed meaning. I will argue that the relation between the penis and the phallus stands as a paradigmatic example of this confusion between sign and signifier, the phallus, if “it is not the penis” (83), representing nevertheless, as Butler argues, “an idealization of a body part” (73).

Patrick’s quest to go beyond the surface is thus an essentialist one, as it is the quest for a matter that would originally signify prior to the symbolic order. I suggest it is a quest for what Clément Rosset calls an “idea of nature,” i.e. the idea that there remains something once one has set aside the effects of artifice and chance.⁵ But what the psychopath’s practices will ultimately reveal is the absence of revelation, of signification, the body showing itself to be matter and nothing but matter, an instance of what Rosset calls the “anti-nature,” “essentially a denial of nature and a universal assertion of chance” (55, my translation), that is to say matter which defies the laws of nature and reveals their artificiality, hence underlining the artificiality of what Foucault would call the techniques and discourses the serial killer, like the etiquette, subjects it to.

In the second chapter, “Morning,” Patrick Bateman represents his yuppie self as an actor in a TV commercial for shaving products.

Once out of the shower and toweled dry I put the Ralph Lauren boxers back on and before applying the Mousse A Raser, a shaving cream by Pour Hommes, I press a hot towel against my face for two minutes to soften abrasive beard hair. Then I always slather on a moisturizer (to my

taste, Clinique) and let it soak in for a minute. You can rinse it off or keep it on and apply a shaving cream over it—preferably with a brush, which softens the beard as it lifts the whiskers—which I’ve found makes removing the hair easier. It also helps prevent water from evaporating and reduces friction between your skin and the blade. Always wet the razor with warm water before shaving and shave in the direction the beard grows, pressing gently on the skin. Leave the sideburns and chin for last, since these whiskers are tougher and need more time to soften. [...] One should use an alcohol-free antibacterial toner with a water-moistened cotton ball to normalize the skin. (27)

What is at stake in this excerpt is the idea that Patrick’s self-image is textually-constructed. Whether consciously or not, the narrator clearly attempts to transpose one medium to another, film to text, with these “close-ups” of Patrick’s body hair and skin. But their being placed between dashes or in apposition underlines their very textuality and thus the impossibility of perfectly conforming to scripture. These “close-ups” grotesquely emphasize Patrick’s obsession with clearing away his body to make it into a perfect surface, as well as the very impossibility of this enterprise. The narrator becomes a voice-over in the process of fashioning the character into an actor, hence losing authority over his own text by becoming an element of the commercial. Patrick is, then, reified by the discourse he cites as character and narrator. The speaking “I” progressively makes way to a disengaged, impersonal voice, while the character’s personal experience (“I’ve found”) merges with a protocol that can work for anyone (or at least for any yuppie); the words of advice of the “I” become imperatives issuing from an unidentified enunciator while the disengaged pronoun “one” significantly appears in the sentence dealing with how to “normalize the skin.” If subjectivity is first put in brackets, it is then entirely evacuated as it gives way completely to the etiquette discourse. In any case, this merely brings to light the process of subjection as the etiquette was speaking through

the “I” to start with.

Interestingly enough, this discourse which dictates a recipe for fashioning the body does so in the name of the body: each stage of this protocol aims at facilitating the process of purifying the bodily surface, but paradoxically, the protocol can also be harmful. This excerpt very literally suggests that consumer society fashions bodies all the while founding its normative discourse in a corporeal truth which precedes it, a process which is, in this example, authorized by the commercial discourse, for the voice-over attempts to impose the idea that the protocol is born from experience, and thus self-discovery. What makes the etiquette, and the consumer society for which it is a metaphor, so powerful is that, all in all, the subject willingly applies and recites these discourses which he has in front of his very eyes, remaining completely blind, however, to the fact that his body cannot be the proof of the truth and of the validity of the etiquette since his very words are constructing this matter that is his body into an effect of discourse. This type of very visible power might be more dangerous than the invisible “regimes of power” Michel Foucault analyzed.

The same process informs the construction of the body of the other as a potentially “unhealthy” body. I have argued in *L’Imagination malsaine* that, for Ellis’s yuppies, the other is seen as a “foreign body,” and women appear particularly “unhealthy” because they can sexually transmit diseases – the yuppies never worry about passing diseases on to others (34). The relationship between the unhealthy nature of the female body and the derivative of the phallogocentric law Patrick has interiorised is clearly illustrated in the serial killer’s horrific practises, especially in one of the novel’s most disturbing passages, the “Girl” chapter, where Patrick perverts the “normal” (read, heterosexual) coupling between a man and a woman by replacing the man’s penis by a rat, an animal which is contiguously related to disease and vampirism.⁶

The rat hurls itself against the glass cage as I move it from the kitchen into the living room. It refused to eat what was left of the other rat I had bought it to play with last week, that now lies dead, rotting in a corner of the cage. (For the last five days I’ve purposefully starved it.) I set

the glass cage down next to the girl and maybe because of the scent of the cheese the rat seems to go insane, first running in circles, mewling, then trying to heave its body, weak with hunger, over the side of the cage. The rat doesn't need any prodding and the bent coat hanger I was going to use remains untouched by my side and with the girl still unconscious, the thing moves effortlessly on newfound energy, racing up the tube until half of its body disappears, and then after a minute—its body shaking while it feeds—all of it vanishes, except for the tail, and I yank the Habitrail tube out of the girl, trapping the rodent. Soon even the tail disappears. The noises the girl is making are, for the most part, incomprehensible. (328-9)

With this horrible experiment, mad scientist Patrick Bateman seems to want to demonstrate that female sexuality, metonymically represented by an anonymous society woman who inverted traditional gender roles by “com[ing] on to [him], hard” (327), is by nature unhealthy. Significantly, Patrick, who imitates naturalist discourse by observing and attempting to explain the rat's behavior—the structure of the sentence underlines that the hypothesis (“maybe because of the scent of the cheese”) precedes the empiric observation of the body—insists on the fact that the rat penetrates the woman without his intervention, as if the rat were “naturally” attracted to the woman, when it is actually Patrick who has placed the cage next to the woman and “purposefully starved” the rat, a piece of information whose weight is reduced by its being parenthetically intimated. By inserting a Habitrail tube, Patrick constitutes the woman's body into a home for a domestic rodent, in other words, into a cage for the unhealthy.

Patrick is also responsible for penetrating/endowing this anonymous woman with an unhealthy penis substitute, the rat becoming a metaphor for the unhealthy male penis, which is paradoxical since for the yuppies, the unhealthy is exclusively other and primarily female. Indeed, Patrick seems incapable of conceiving of a sexuality other than one based on the male model of penetration, and this even if he

considers lesbianism as “totally disease-free” (287).

Not only does this scene underline that the yuppie endows a powerful woman with an unhealthy penis, but more generally, it also imparts that he conceives female sexuality in terms of penis envy and female power as a derivative of male power – the parallel between power and sexuality is established through the adjective “hard” and the pun on “came.” (327) Obviously, as the rat penetrates and withdraws from the woman’s body, it stands for a grotesque parody of sexual intercourse, but this act also perversely mimics the conception of a male child. The rat, with its tail “as long as a pencil and twice as thick” (309) recalls the little boy who, in Irigaray’s reading of Freud, represents “a substitute of the penis, desired by the woman as such and nothing more”⁷ (117, my translation). The rat represents thus both an unhealthy penis and the child of an artificial insemination with Patrick in the part of the castrating father in spite of himself: it is only after he has “use[d] a chain saw” to “cut the girl in two” that he “notice[s] where the chain saw took off about half of [the rat’s] tail” (329), so that dismembering the unrepresentable and abject female body means dismembering the substitute for the penis used to represent it.

What is at stake here is, then, the meaning ascribed to the female body. Patrick’s experiment aims at making the female organs and orgasm visible with the rat’s tail sticking out and “its body shaking while it feeds.” The reversal instigated by Patrick is, from his point of view, reassuring because it gives meaning to the female body by reinstating the primacy of the phallus thanks to a penis substitute. But Patrick’s “technique” turns against him as a new reversal reinstates the unreadable female genitalia. The long sentence which describes Patrick’s reversal is brutally cut off by two sentences without secondary clauses: the female body loses all (phallic) meaning while the (penis) tail disappears, as does the “incomprehensible” female discourse which drowns out the (death) orgasm of the woman in mystery. Later, the woman’s dead body will seemingly subvert Patrick’s experiment by suggesting ingestion rather than penetration: “Her vagina has discharged a brownish syrupy fluid that smells like a sick animal, as if that rat had been forced back up in there, had been digested or something.” (344, my emphasis) The alliteration in [d] relates the female orgasm (again represented in masculine terms) to assimilation, which

suggests that what, for the yuppie, is horrifying about the female body, is its capacity to transform the foreign body which penetrates it. The focus on ingestion, notably through the comparison to "syrup," also suggests, on Patrick's part, a fantasy of a return to a pre-oedipal state prior to discourse, a state Patrick is cut off from by the discourses he is subjected to. This dead female body, which nevertheless seems to live on, represents, here, the contingency of matter deconstructing the dominant discourses and techniques which have fashioned it, a contingency Patrick cannot put into words.

Not only is the novel's violence an "act *in* language," as Julian Murphet suggests (45), but it is from the start *discursive* insofar as it appears as a consequence of the yuppie's subjection to discourses which fashion his desire and which he recites. I disagree, then, with Julian Murphet when he suggests that the narrator reaches a sort of "literary flair" in the violent passages (45). Patrick's "compulsive" prose is always literal and, unlike Ellis's text, not literary. The most horrible act of torture in the novel is also the scene which best underlines the horrific consequences of absolute subjection to the law: it is an artifice (an imitation of Nazi practices, if one believes Ellis who repeatedly insists on the fact that he did not invent anything in the horror scenes) effected by a subject who is trying to found his truth in the corporeal (matter having always been considered in feminine terms, according to Irigaray) to which he gives a meaning (phallus) by representing the unhealthy nature of the other in masculine terms (penis). It is in this sense that I see the couple penis/phallus as offering a paradigmatic example of the confusion the subject makes between the sign and the signifier.

In any case, Patrick's phallogocentricity explains why he subjects his victims to forms of torture that can be likened to castration. When he blinds a homeless man, he compares the pierced eye to an egg, relating castration to an emptying of a body-productive female body: "His eye, burst open, hangs out of its socket and runs down his face and he keeps blinking which causes what's left of it inside the wound to pour out like red, veiny egg yolk." (131) Not only is the egg, unlike the woman's womb, visible, but its yolk is here made visible and is also eatable. This, of course, can be related to what I said above concerning Patrick's pre-oedipal fantasy. In

another scene, Patrick tears out the tongue of Bethany, “a girl [he] dated at Harvard and who [he] was subsequently dumped by” (211), and who repeatedly puts him down verbally.

She tries to cry out again but she’s losing consciousness and she’s capable of only a weak moan. I take advantage of her helpless state and, removing my gloves, force her mouth open and with the scissors cut out her tongue, which I pull easily from her mouth and hold in the palm of my hand, warm and still bleeding, seeming so much smaller than in her mouth, and I throw it against the wall, where it sticks for a moment, leaving a stain, before falling to the floor with a tiny wet slap. Blood gushes out of her mouth and I have to hold her head up so she won’t choke. Then I fuck her in the mouth, and after I’ve ejaculated and pulled out, I Mace her some more. (246)

Once it is no longer in its place in the woman’s mouth, the tongue, which, for Patrick, seemed to represent a sign of this woman’s discursive power, becomes momentarily the sign of her impotence: Bethany will not be able to call out for help, nor can she use her tongue as a weapon anymore. Only once taken out of its context, Patrick rejects this abject piece of flesh which temporarily defies the laws of nature by sticking to the wall before falling to the ground. The “stain” on the wall is a sign of nothing more than the passing of this tongue which has landed there because of Patrick’s quest for meaning. The tongue is, then, no longer a sign of the woman’s discursive power; it is, for an instant, a body which signifies nothing, a body which does not matter. As the etiquette the yuppies abide by limits itself to a conception of the body as a surface, the inside of the body is meaningful to Patrick. While the latter has described with naturalist rigor the protocol to follow, the tongue is merely a matter which represents, if it be possible, Rosset’s “anti-nature.” And it is probably to fill this lack of meaning, this matter which does not matter, that Patrick immediately performs a perverted version of his “natural” reproductive function. Patrick’s obsession with “fuck[ing]” the mouths of his female victims is an extremely literal representation of the male subject’s desire to mark the unrepresentable feminine lack which he represents anyway in masculine terms. Ironically, Patrick’s act can hardly be deemed “natural” in relation to the phallogentric law, fellatio with a dead body

being a non-reproductive a form of sexuality. Moreover, Patrick's own practices too are artificial, as the verb *Mace*, derived from a brand name, suggests. Patrick's practices are merely the repetition of practices he has learned by watching pornographic and horror films and by reading real-life biographies of serial killers (92). Even more ironic, perhaps, the horror and animality associated to feminine lack persists even when the castrating tongue has been extracted: "the mouth opens and not even screams come out anymore, just horrible, guttural, animal-like noises, sometimes interrupted by retching sounds." (246)

As the body is considered only in terms of surface, it will come as no surprise that everything which can penetrate it will be seen as a disturbing foreign body. This explains why the latter is always described in phallic terms: it is the only way for the yuppie to represent and apprehend the other's power and especially to *make the non-representable visible to better neutralize it*, to punish it and protect oneself from it by eliminating specific body parts. In an article on *Glamorama*, Françoise Buisson compares Ellis's style to John Barth's "literature of exhaustion" and talks of "literature of evisceration." (91, my translation) It is indeed possible to speak of exhaustion at a diegetic level (the exhaustion of wanting to conform to norms) and at the level of the reader's response (the exhaustion of reading such a repetitive text). Evisceration suggests an attempt to *empty* the text of its signifiers as the psychopath empties the body of its blood. Indeed, for Patrick, any part of the other's body – blood (290), intestines (344) – is potentially unhealthy, so that, in the end, he has no choice but to eliminate the whole body: the psychopath puts a victim's "head [...] in a tin pot on the stove in an attempt to boil any remaining flesh [he] forgot to shave off" (345), in the same manner as the yuppie tried to shave himself perfectly in order to conform to the standards of etiquette. As his practices increase in frequency and violence, Patrick seems to be pursuing a sort of quest for an original sign which would justify the etiquette his identity is founded on. But even when he turns the body upside-down – as with Tiffani who, like Kafka's Gregor Samsa, lays "like a roach on her back" (305) – or inside-out, the body reveals no founding "idea of nature." When he disembowels the sharpei, "drag[ging] itself around in a circle, its tail wagging, squealing" (165), the living-dead animal, which condenses the notions

of devouring and phallogocentric sexual representations⁸, becomes, like bitchy Bethany's tongue or the anonymous woman's vagina, a body which defies the laws of nature. What I have been calling the "anti-nature" is, then, nothing more than a sign of itself, or rather it isn't a sign at all, except if the subject re-fashions it, making it signify, which is, in the end, what Patrick seems to do with the head of one of his victims:

My apartment reeks of rotten fruit, though actually the smell is caused by what I scooped out of Christie's head and poured into a Marco glass bowl that sits on a counter near the entranceway. The head itself lies covered with brain pulp, hollow and eyeless, in the corner of the living room beneath the piano and I plan to use it as a jack-o'-lantern on Halloween. (300-1)

Emptied out, the prostitute's head recalls the poster of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) where a psychopath murders licentious teenagers in a Main Street America town. Reproducing this image may be a way for Patrick to give meaning to this body and, in so doing, to construct his identity by "citing" a well-known slasher film. He will be even less subtle in a later passage.

The office Halloween party was at the Royalton last week and I went as a mass murderer, complete with a sign painted on my back that read MASS MURDERER (which was decidedly lighter than the sandwich board I had constructed earlier that day that read DRILLER KILLER), and beneath those two words I had written in blood *Yep, that's me* and the suit was also covered with blood, some of it fake, most of it real. (330)

In the end, Patrick chooses to represent a generic type rather than refer to the specific killer from Abel Ferrara's film (1979) for fear the reference go unseen and his identity as a psychopath unrecognized, his colleagues not being familiar with serial killer culture so that they confuse the names of various killers, both real and fictitious (153). If his secret identity is supposed to set him apart from the other yuppies, who readily acknowledge that Patrick is "*always* bring[ging] them up" (153), this differentiation is compromised because the figure of transgression he constitutes

himself as is just borrowed from another set of pop culture texts. Patrick's making the distinction between "fake" and "real" blood underlines the fact that this excerpt shows just the opposite, that is to say, for Patrick, "being" or "representing" a psychopath or a yuppie comes down to the same thing: the true self and the false, social or performing self are one and the same, or rather, there is no true self; identity, the self-affirming italics underline, is a discursive construct.

In the end, evisceration leads nowhere at the diegetic level, but it does not lead the reader anywhere either: it is not exhaustive but becomes, rather, exhausting. Signs, like blood and ink, just keep on flowing, so that even the end of the novel is "NOT AN EXIT." (399) Reading *American Psycho* is no more cathartic than "being a psychopath" for Patrick. The reader, like the psychopath, has no choice but to get rid of the textual body and put it back on the shelf, just as the psychopath gets rid of bodies, storing them in another apartment in Hell's Kitchen and "keep[ing] the men's bodies separate from the women's" (249) to preserve some order and coherence in his world.

WORKS CITED

Alladaye, René. "De Bateman à Bacon : surface et profondeur dans deux romans de Bret Easton Ellis." *e-rea* 1.1 (hiver 2003): 92-8. <www.e-rea.org>.

Baelo Allué, Sonia. "Serial Murder, Serial Consumerism: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991)." *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* 26 (2002): 71-90.

Buisson, Françoise. "Glamorama de Bret Easton Ellis ou le panorama du chaos esthétique : l'hétéroclite comme mode d'éviscération de l'être." *Annales du CRAA* 26 "L'Hétérogène et l'hétéroclite dans la littérature, les arts et les sociétés d'Amérique du Nord". Pessac: MSHA, 2001: 81-93.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993

Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991.

- Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum de l'autre femme*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Le Séminaire livre X : L'Angoisse (1962-1963)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Seuil, 2004.
- . *Le Séminaire XX : Encore (1973-1974)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Seuil, 1975.
- Murphet, Julian. *Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho: a Reader's Guide*. New York, London: Continuum, 2002.
- Roche, David. *L'Imagination malsaine : Russell Banks, Raymond Carver David Cronenberg, Bret Easton Ellis, David Lynch*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008.
- Rosset, Clément. *L'Anti-nature : Éléments pour une philosophie tragique*. 1973. Paris: Quadrige / PUF, 2004.
- Winnicott, D. W. "Distorsion du moi en fonction du vrai et du faux "self" (1960)." *Processus de maturation chez l'enfant : Développement affectif et environnement*. Intro. et Trad. Jeannine Kalmanovitch. Paris: Payot, 1978: 115-31.

NOTES

¹See Winnicott's "Distorsion du moi en fonction du vrai et du faux "self" (1960)."

² Patrick says he is "unexpectedly depressed that [he] started this." (45)

³ In *Séminaire X : L'Angoisse*, Lacan says the following: "la norme du désir et la loi sont une seule et même chose" (232). I would add the norm of dread as well.

⁴ See Sonia Baelo Allué's essay which explains the relationship between the serial killer and the serial consumer, the practises of the serial killer representing a sick allegory of consumer society.

⁵ Clément Rosset soutient que "[l]'idée fondamentale du naturalisme est une mise à l'écart du rôle du hasard dans la genèse des existences : l'affirmation que rien ne saurait se produire sans quelque raison, et qu'en conséquence les existences indépendantes des causes introduites par le hasard ou l'artifice des hommes résultent d'un autre ordre de causes, qui est l'ordre des causes naturelles. On sait seulement que la nature est ce qui reste quand on a de toutes choses biffé les effets de l'artifice et du hasard : nul ne précise ce qui reste ainsi, mais il suffit, pour que se constitue l'idée de nature, qu'on tienne pour acquis qu'il y a quelque chose qui reste." (20)

⁶ Patrick describes the rat as vampiric, "hissing at [him], baring its sharp, yellow rat fangs" (309), while rats carry the plague in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922).

⁷ Irigaray says “Alors rappelons : que l’enfant sera le *substitut du pénis*, désiré par la femme à ce seul titre ; que l’envie d’un enfant du *même sexe que le père*, d’un même que lui, sera attribuée à la femme ; que l’homme gardera le monopole de l’*activité* dans le coït ; qu’il marquera de *son nom propre* le produit de la copulation ; que si la mère se doit de suffire aux soins du nourrisson, de satisfaire à ses besoins élémentaires, l’enfant sera introduit par le père, et par identification au père, *aux valeurs* les plus appréciables, les plus cotées ; que l’homme-père sera le garant *des systèmes de représentations, des idéaux, des intérêts sociaux, de l’exercice de la loi*; etc. Et que, si la femme reste la condition indispensable à la (re)production *matérielle* de l’enfant, elle sera, autant que faire se peut, soumise aux projets de l’homme quant à celle-ci.” (117)

⁸ The dog’s name is Richard and Dick is short for Richard!