



Issue Eight

"I am the fucking reaper"

Glamorama, Schizophrenia, Terrorism

Angela Woods, University of Melbourne

If we can say that madness has come to occupy a "common place" inside culture and specifically "inside" cultural theory, [1] the figure of the schizophrenic exists at the intersection of three distinct theoretical trajectories in contemporary literary and cultural studies. For the psychoanalytic critic, each schizophrenic symptom encodes a psychic secret, and invites decryption of the kind Freud and his successors made famous in their analyses of the Schreber case. [2] For others, such as Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, schizophrenia marks the limits of subjectivity: exiled to a "psychotic abyss outside the symbolic domain," [3] the schizophrenic designates that which is beyond the intelligible. In contrast to Freud's 'readable symptom' and Butler's 'unreadable sign,' Marxist and post-Marxist theorists read the schizophrenic as 'a sign of the times,' as the exemplary subject of postmodernity. In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, [4] Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," [5] and Jean Baudrillard's *The Ecstasy of Communication*, [6] specific psychopathological processes in schizophrenia are deployed to diagnose a distinctive psychic structure, one inextricably linked to Western culture in the late twentieth century. These theorists, I suggest, have reinvented the "sacred symbol of psychiatry," [7] positioning the schizophrenic as both postmodernity's anarchic revolutionary (Deleuze and Guattari) and its obscene victim (Jameson and Baudrillard).

How, then, has the literary imagination appropriated schizophrenia, and to what end? *Glamorama*, [8] the latest novel by celebrity Brat Pack author Bret Easton Ellis, confronts the reader with a disorienting portrayal of the depthlessness and detritus of consumer culture from the perspective of its Gen-X icon, *YouthQuake* cover-boy Victor Ward. A quintessentially postmodern text, *Glamorama* has been all but ignored by the academy, [9] and seemed to baffle if not bore most of its major newspaper reviewers. Described variously as "overripe [and] cynical," [10] "vacuous and inconsequential," "bloated [and] stultifyingly repetitive," [11] a "morose, vaguely autistic parody ... heavy with the sense of waste," [12] the apparent consensus was that Ellis had nothing much to say about celebrity culture. [13] My concern here is not to stage a recuperative reading of the novel but to examine in detail its schizophrenic logic. The mildly psychotic jet-setting College student of Ellis' second novel, *The Rules of Attraction*, [14] has become, by the opening of *Glamorama*, a clearly schizoid New York celebrity. Victor more than fits the symptomatological profile of a postmodern schizophrenic: he is irreconcilably fragmented, subject to affective fluxes, overexposed to the sensory stimuli of postmodernity, and immersed in its perpetual present – in short, a figure lacking in self-definition and thus incapable of political action as it is traditionally conceived. As a supermodel It-Boy, Victor is certainly a 'sign of the times' (indeed, Ellis has described him as the epitome of all that is "annoying and repellent" about men of his generation [15]). But Victor's good looks and schizophrenic attributes – instrumental to his success as a model – further enable him to become a highly effective terrorist. And in recasting the schizophrenic as a model-slash-terrorist, Ellis demonstrates that he in fact has a great deal to say about schizophrenia, fashion and terrorism in *fin de siècle* America.

This article takes as its point of departure an analysis of how Deleuze and Guattari, Jameson and Baudrillard use schizophrenia to explain subjective experiences of postmodernity. Ellis exploits the symptomatological profile of the schizophrenic advanced by these theorists, but radically alters its symbolic function. Without attributing a political agency to the schizophrenic predicated upon sanity, rationality, or even intentionality, *Glamorama* portrays the schizophrenic as an exemplary terrorist, and in so doing, suggests that terrorism operates through a schizophrenic logic not unlike that of the celebrity fashion industry. Seen through the eyes of our schizophrenic narrator, terrorism is, like fashion, staged for the camera and dependent on the dissemination of the altered photographic image for its effect. These effects are registered only at the level of individual corporeality, they have no political outcomes, no intention or capacity to threaten or destabilise the capitalist world order. Although the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington have arguably demonstrated otherwise, Ellis pre-empts Baudrillard's analysis of 9/11 by implying that terrorism is not a weapon in ideological, religious or political struggle against the late-capitalist system but a symptom of "*triumphant globalization battling against itself*." [16] Victor, as a schizophrenic model-slash-terrorist, not only reflects but actively perpetuates this battle, and *Glamorama*'s unrelenting depiction of the suffering endured by its casualties clearly indicates that it is not a merely rhetorical one.

the schizophrenic in cultural theory

Regardless of whether Ellis himself is an avid reader of cultural theory, it is clear that his take on postmodern subjectivity is both indebted to and critical of the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Jameson and Baudrillard. For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is a process of ego-loss; a liberation of desire from the tyranny of Oedipalisation into vibrations, flows and fluxes; a deindividuation of the subject conceptualised as an endlessly reassembling desiring-machine. In the words of Mark Seem, schizophrenia produces "*orphans* (no daddy-mommy-me), *atheists* (no beliefs), and *nomads* (no habits, no territories)." [17] Deleuze and Guattari offer the following portrait of the schizo:

These men of desire – or do they not yet exist? – are like Zarathustra. They know incredible sufferings, vertigos, and sicknesses. They have their spectres. They must reinvent each gesture. But such a man produces himself as a free man, irresponsible, solitary, and joyous, finally able to say and do something simple in his own name, without asking permission; a desire lacking nothing, a flux that overcomes barriers and codes, a name that no longer designates any ego whatsoever. He has simply ceased being afraid of becoming mad. He experiences and lives himself as the sublime sickness that will no longer affect him. [18]

It is the premature or sudden ending of this desiring-process which "creates the artificial schizophrenic found in mental institutions: a limp rag forced into autistic behaviour, produced as an entirely separate and independent entity." [19] 'True' schizophrenia is here unambiguously associated with freedom and the transcendence of neurotic, Oedipalised structures of family and social organisation. Superficially, the effects of this schizophrenic process at first seem to mirror those of capitalism which, for Deleuze and Guattari, continuously deterritorialises social codes, releasing the libidinal flows of previously over-coded social formations. However, unlike the interminable decentring of schizophrenic desiring-production, capitalism continually 'reterritorialises,' recodes and re-establishes the "interior limits" of desire, such that, despite their similarities, "schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death." [20] Deleuze and Guattari portray the schizophrenic process as an exemplary model of social and political emancipation [21] because it releases desire that is perceived to be subversive, revolutionary and true to itself. [22]

Anti-Oedipus is one of the earliest and certainly most romantic accounts of schizophrenia as theoretical topos, a celebration of the dismantling of Oedipal identity at odds with the more pessimistic prognoses of Jameson and Baudrillard. For the latter, the schizophrenic is the casualty of consumer culture, a non-subject incapable of effecting change, more of a "limp rag" than a "free man" joyously living out "sublime sickness." Painting an explicitly Lacanian picture of schizophrenia, Jameson describes it as a snap in the signifying chain through which subjectivity is constituted. [23] The schizophrenic, unable to grasp the temporal structure of language, is "reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time." [24] Speech, and by extension subjectivity, becomes nothing more than a "rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers." [25] The surface reigns supreme, and the pathological fixation upon the mysterious affective charge and dazzling materiality of the signifier abolishes all action and intentionality. [26] As John O'Neill observes, without memory and hence identity, "action, project, and orientation collapse in the literal, nauseous, and real present," [27] and political efficacy is an impossibility.

Although Baudrillard is notoriously uninterested in the concept or possibility of political efficacy, his description of the schizophrenic as the "obscene victim of the world's obscenity" [28] is perhaps the most pessimistic of all accounts of schizophrenia. Like Jameson, Baudrillard writes of a late-capitalist age in which the "triumph of the simulacra" [29] ensures the abolition of transcendence and depth, but here its schizophrenic exemplar is a "pure screen," an "immanent surface" across which communication networks simply flicker. [30] Bereft of psychic depth and flattened into two dimensions, distinctions between interior and exterior, cerebral and corporeal, even human and automaton, become defunct. No longer even a figure as such, the schizophrenic is characterised by a terrifying overexposure to the hyperreal, "an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate him [*sic*], meeting with no resistance ...". [31] Baudrillard's is a vision of a final reification – the schizophrenic-as-terminal effectively signals a termination of political subjectivity.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the schizo is potentially the "death" or end of capitalism; they attribute to the schizo if not a heroic agency, then certainly an unparalleled capacity to challenge the "system" by pushing beyond its limits. Conversely, for Jameson and Baudrillard schizophrenia is itself eschatological, a way of diagnosing as pathological the effects of capitalism on the subject, now irredeemably disconnected, isolated and ineffectual. What is in dispute here is less schizophrenia's symptomatology than its relationship to the capitalist social order, and Ellis' portrayal of schizophrenia in *Glamorama* directly addresses the tensions between these cultural theorists. Ellis, by recasting the schizophrenic as a model-slash-terrorist, makes a new claim regarding the schizophrenic agency: the schizophrenic is not detached from and is incapable of altering the world, but acts in a way which fails to resist, arrest, or otherwise alter the global circulation of capital. Victor's acts of violence in *Glamorama* are not those of an autonomous and self-determining agent, but belong, Ellis seems to suggest, to a mode of subjectivity symptomatic of the decentred networks of power in the global economy.

victor ward: profile of a schizophrenic model-slash-terrorist

At no point in *Glamorama* is Victor explicitly recognised or labelled as clinically schizophrenic. Ellis is not concerned with psychiatric verisimilitude, rather, his first-person narrator is, at the level of symptomatology, a dramatisation of cultural theory's topoi of schizophrenia. *Glamorama* locates the schizophrenic at the "apex of consumer society" [32] – the perpetual present of the celebrity modelling circuit. It is a world in which the unrelenting imperative to be 'in' prescribes a constant shift to the next commodified incarnation of cool, the absurdity of which is captured in Victor's opening proclamation: "Out is in. In is out. [...] If you need this defined for you, maybe you're in the wrong world" (15). Like the world Victor inhabits, the text is a dizzying montage of 1990s ephemera. *Glamorama*'s endlessly circulating lists of celebrities, sound bytes, slogans, brand names and pop references capture what is for Jameson "the supreme formal feature" of postmodernism, namely, "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense." [33] Victor is the Gen-X incarnation of this superficiality: beautiful, vacuous, and endlessly adapting to the latest fluctuations in style. His speech is best described as "brain-dead bricolage," [34] his knowledge is confined to pop music statistics and A-list celebrities, his modus operandi is the cultivation of cool and his maxim: "The better you look, the more you see" (27, 56, 254).

The novel opens as Victor's life begins to disintegrate. Accepting the mysterious offer of an expenses-paid trip to Europe to locate his supermodel ex-girlfriend, Victor finds himself the newest recruit in a network of model-slash-terrorists whose political allegiances are never revealed. Spatial and temporal co-ordinates are scrambled following his departure from New York – he is constantly assailed by characters claiming to have seen him, or seen photographs of him, in places he has no memory of visiting. What begins as an apparently unsubtle comment on the interchangeability of homogenised, plasticised fashion icons [35] becomes steadily more complex and conspiratorial until, by the end of the novel, even Victor's most intimate acquaintances provide compelling but contradictory accounts of his whereabouts. As a model, and as a terrorist, Victor exists as much through the image as he does 'in the flesh'; vindicating Žižek's claim that today the camera's gaze provides for each of us an "ontological guarantee." [36] However, when, in the age of simulacra, the effect of the photograph operates independently of the 'truth' of the negative, this ontological guarantee expires. The digital manipulation of the image can proceed indefinitely: "Lips are digitally thickened, freckles are removed, an ax is placed in someone's outstretched hand, a BMW becomes a Jaguar which becomes a Mercedes which becomes a broom which becomes a frog which becomes a mop which becomes a poster of Jenny McCarthy ..." (357) However, as another model-slash-terrorist points out, this process is far from trivial: "You can move planets with this... You can shape lives. The photograph is only the beginning. [...] Were you there or were you not? It all depends on who you ask, and even that really doesn't matter anymore." (358) The implosion of the opposition between reality and simulation is a defining feature of both fashion and terrorism as they are portrayed in *Glamorama*. Hyperreality, Ellis suggests, does not annihilate the capacity to act, but it radically alters the way in which the consequences of any action are perceived. "I was told I was destroying lives," another model-slash-terrorist says of her cover-girl career, "but it didn't touch me because no one we knew was real" (311). Action, for models and for terrorists, appears to be predicated upon their failure to be 'touched' by its consequences; an autistic, affectless detachment from the world not unlike that which is characteristic of schizophrenia.

Ontologically insecure, addicted to psychiatric drugs and bereft of an intellectual arsenal, Victor has at best a feeble grip on his own reality, but it loosens steadily as his involvement in violence increases. Exacerbating this is an alteration in his "image-existence": the sudden appearance of a film crew recording and directing Victor's 'performance'. No explanation is offered, Victor just accepts the constantly changing scripts, foreign cinematographers, acting coaching, and the special effects of the terrorism scenes as his new reality. After planting a bomb on the Paris Metro, for example, he dispassionately observes: "Various shots of people blown apart, extras and stuntmen thrown off the lightweight steel car and onto the tracks. Shot of body parts – legs and arms and hands, most of them real – skidding across the platform" (319). As the violence escalates and another, unrelated crew appears to film the explosions (295), Victor becomes increasingly incapable of mapping his multiplying filmic realities, and the reader is tethered to his confusion. Scenes start being shot without him and continue beyond their scripted parameters (311); plots conflict (315, 329); the first film crew abandons the project only to become part of an explosion filmed by the second (350); and finally, Victor's narrative voice collapses with the inclusion of 'objectively' narrated scenes (from 304) and the intrusion of an unidentified narrative voice (from 340).

Clearly, *Glamorama* is not a realist novel about the making of a terrorist action film: too much occurs off-camera for the presence of these film crews to provide a complete, or adequate, rationale for the terrorist activities. The film crews can be more persuasively interpreted as schizophrenic symptoms: complex and contradictory delusions that defend Victor from the reality of the terrorist acts in which he participates. (As Andy Warhol is said to have quipped, "If it gets too intense, just pretend it's a movie.") The more ominous the terrorist conspiracies, the more extreme the violence, the greater the number of film crews required to account for it, and the more inconsistent and desperate Victor's delusional systems become. Paralleling the breakdown of his delusional schema is the dysfunctionality of his memory and the increasing distortion of his perceptual faculties. Virtually all spaces are freezing (from 15); confetti appears everywhere (from 88); an unseen man whistles 'The Sunny Side of the Street' (from 114); the apt lyric, "We'll slide down the surface of things," intrudes on his thoughts (from 144); flies cluster everywhere despite the cold (from 172); his limbs start

periodically falling asleep (from 303); finally, the smell of shit begins to overwhelm his fly-filled and freezing celebrity haunts (from 316). These are not clues but a deluge of random symptoms, and the ominous opacity of these signifiers complements their vivid hallucinatory intensity. Victor's schizophrenia speaks itself through a narrative which affords the reader no respite from this chaotic flux, nor any vantage point beyond it.

indeterminacy, schizophrenia, and terrorism

Whether one follows Jameson's, Baudrillard's, or Deleuze and Guattari's diagnostic criteria, Victor is, symptomatologically speaking, an exemplary postmodern schizophrenic. The most striking effect of a schizophrenic narrative voice is that it immediately renders meaning undecidable in the text; that events might in fact be figments of a psychotic imagination utterly destabilises the delineation of reality from representation, truth from delusion. *Glamorama* relentlessly exploits this indeterminacy. Take, for example, a scene at the height of Victor's European trauma, in which Chloe (another ex-girlfriend) tells him that they conceived a child days ago in New York. Is this amnesia, deception, mistaken identity, insidious hoax, or simply fantasy? The 'truth' of this narrative twist is impossible to determine. This implosion of the distinctions between fact and fabrication, self and other, mannequin and corpse produces an excess of unconvincing conspiratorial and filmic plots, and Victor's schizophrenic over-proximity to this unstable world of surfaces ensures that he can neither know it nor critically distance himself from it. Any attempt by the reader to fathom the real-world politics of terrorist plotting in *Glamorama* would seem to be futile, for our narrator thinks "that the Gaza Strip is a particularly lascivious move an erotic dancer makes . . . that the PLO recorded the singles 'Don't Bring me Down' and 'Evil Woman.'" (314–5) Towards the novel's end, Ellis pushes the diegetic dysfunctionality of Victor's schizophrenia to breaking-point: our narrator now co-exists as Victor Ward and Victor Johnson, and their trans-Atlantic telephone conversation is the climax of ontological crisis. Is the 'real' Victor abandoned – psychotic and terrified – by his director in Italy? Or does our narrator return to America, maintaining his involvement in the terrorist network as the son of a would-be presidential candidate?

So difficult is it to differentiate image, reality and delusion in *Glamorama* that one critic claims, "by the end of this interminable novel, the reader is too numb [and] too bored to really care about such distinctions." [37] However, as David Bennett argues, "to say that the meaning of a text is indeterminate . . . is not to say that it *signifies* indeterminacy." [38] *Glamorama*'s schizophrenic narrative frustrates any causal explanation of Victor's actions as a model-slash-terrorist, but in so doing, draws attention to their symbolic significance. In *Glamorama*, the schizophrenic does not signal the death of subjective agency, nor the death of capitalism, but the birth of a new kind of fragmented subject whose disintegration is not a private, pathological affair, but a spectacular collapse symptomatic of the consumption-driven, media-dominated, digitally manipulated hyperreality of the postmodern. In this subjective mode, fashion and violence are indistinguishable and indeed, interdependent:

... she suddenly looks like she's shot through with something like pain or maybe something else like maybe something by Versace ... (142)

I finish reading an article about new mascaras (Shattered and Roach are the season's most popular) and hip lipsticks (Frostbite, Asphyxia, Bruise) and glam nail polish (Plaque, Mildew) and I'm thinking, genuinely, Wow, progress. (168)

... the catwalks seemed longer, the paparazzi were both more and less frantic, girls were wearing bones, bird skulls, human teeth, bloody smocks, they held fluorescent water pistols, there was serious buzz, there was zero buzz, it was the epitome of hype, it was wildly trivial. (408)

Victor's inability to define what is 'in' and what is 'out' results in the confusion of glamour with gore and physical beauty with depravity. His schizophrenia renders him neither ineffectual nor anti-capitalist, but rather a model whose terrorist actions fit seamlessly with the postmodern aesthetic.

Glamorama was published two years before the events of September 11, 2001. Were it published today, it is highly probable that it would be dismissed as scandalous, redundant, un-American and completely incommensurable with the ways in which terrorism is experienced, executed, conceptualised and fought in the twenty-first century. For Ellis, both fashion and terrorism generate "insecurity" and "fear." [39] Like Baudrillard's description of fashion, terrorism here becomes "crazy, viral [and] mediationless" because "it never passes via the mediation of meaning." [40] The terrorist violence of *Glamorama* operates without identifiable logic or structure; its motives cannot be definitively attributed to any political position, left or right, pro- or anti-Government. However, I would argue that portraying terrorism as postpolitical is no accident or failure on Ellis' part, but a way of suggesting that these acts are consistent with the ideology of postmodernism. To go a step further, if Ellis implies that terrorism is not only not in conflict with postmodern culture, but in alliance with it, then should terrorism be interpreted, following Jameson, as part of "the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world"? [41] This rather audacious claim – that the proliferation of terrorism, like fashion, is predicated upon US capitalist imperialism – is advanced with typical ambiguity in the novel. On one hand, the involvement of *Glamorama*'s model-slash-terrorists in

every conceivable conflict, from Northern Ireland to Libya, is, as it turns out, indirectly engineered by Victor's father in his bid for Presidential pre-selection. Victor realises that this American network has created and therefore disarmed all opposition: "There are no other factions. They *are* the faction" (377). However, true to the schizophrenic undecidability of the novel, reading it as a politically-committed social satire is not unproblematic. Victor's throwaway description of his father as a mere "contrivance ... [a] plot device" (36), suggests that the conspiracy of his imputed power is either what Jameson might describe as Victor's degraded attempt at cognitive mapping, [42] his paranoid-schizophrenic delusion of persecution by an omnipotent father, or even Ellis' way of satirising the conspiracy-theory worldview.

Jameson urged his readers to take up a political position on postmodernism, reminding them that "the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror." [43] The politics of Ellis' postmodern text may not be immediately or directly accessible, but *Glamorama's* obsessive focus on blood, torture, death and horror is unambiguous. While *Glamorama* fails to interrogate the political complexities of terrorism, Ellis condemns terrorism by cataloguing, in nauseating detail, its horrific effects on the body. The reader – beholden to Victor's schizophrenic disorientation – is unable to determine whether these acts are, in terms of the diegesis, 'real' or simulated spectacles, and this indeterminacy arguably makes their brutality all the more disturbing. Mirroring the schizophrenic assault on speech, bombings literally transform coherent streetscapes into a "rubble of signifiers," a rubble of body parts, building materials, and commodities. Reduced to grisly fragments, bodies are conflated with random artefacts of late-capitalist lifestyles, as typified in the tableau created by an airline explosion:

... the smell of rot is everywhere – coming off the dismembered feet and arms and legs and torsos propped upright, off piles of intestines and crushed skulls, and the heads that are intact have screams etched across their faces. [...] For some reason the majority of the passengers on this flight were under thirty, and the debris reflects this: cell phones and laptops and Ray-Ban sunglasses and baseball caps and pairs of Rollerblades tied together and camcorders and mangled guitars and hundreds of CD's and fashion magazines (including the *YouthQuake* with Victor Ward on the cover) and entire wardrobes of Calvin Klein and Armani and Ralph Lauren hang from burning trees and there's a teddy bear soaked with blood and a Bible and various Nintendo games along with rolls of toilet paper and shoulder bags and engagement rings and pens and belts whipped off waists and Prada purses still clasped and boxes of Calvin Klein boxer-briefs and so many clothes from the Gap contaminated with blood and other body fluids and everything reeks of aviation fuel. (440–1)

The terrorist act reassigns a corporeal referent to the commodified image of the body, only to annihilate any meaningful distinction between body parts and blood-soaked designer goods. Similarly, in the terrorist torture chamber, bodies are merely objects to be fragmented, dismembered and dispersed. Initially, Victor is unable to distinguish the abject from the plastic: "I'm smiling, confused, weirded out at how focused Bentley seems and shocked at how gruesome and inauthentic the waxwork looks" (283). Later, helpless and hysterical, he watches his poisoned girlfriend become (with a perverse nod to Deleuze and Guattari?) a body without organs, as her insides liquefy and gush out of her vagina. She dies before the appearance of the film crews (430) – testimony to the fact that these terrorist acts are so horrific that they continually violate the parameters of any script or plot, whether political, cinematic or schizophrenic. Whether as spectator or perpetrator of these actions, Victor is incapable of rationalising them, but he consistently registers their effects on other bodies and is acutely aware of his own physical reactions (tears, vomit, laughter, insomnia, numbness and panic). Ellis, via his schizophrenic narrator, repeatedly reminds his reader that terrorist acts, whatever their political intention, have devastating effects on embodied subjects.

... and to what end?

"It is the tactic of the terrorist model," writes Baudrillard, "to bring about an excess of reality, and have the system collapse beneath that excess of reality." [44] The schizophrenic model-slash-terrorist in *Glamorama* certainly brings about an excess of reality (a proliferation of images and corpses, an abundance of inconclusive explanations, a multitude of narrative voices) which dramatically intensifies ontological insecurity. The spread of "insecurity" and "fear," however, in no way threatens, let alone collapses, "the system." There may be no indisputable despotic mastermind behind Victor's terrorist tactic, no ideology, no reference to a locus of power beyond culture itself, but his acts do not depend on a preconceived political strategy, or even a firm grip on reality, to be brutally effective. Like Deleuze and Guattari's schizo, Victor exists in a dynamic relation with his environment, perpetuating the schizophrenic process of deterritorialising or breaking down 'neurotic' structures. Yet the anti-Oedipal agency of the model-slash-terrorist is reabsorbed by the capitalist "system"; there is plenty in the novel to suggest that terrorism, like modelling, is entirely compatible with its ongoing operation: "We're at a dinner party ... and it's all rather subdued since a small percentage of the invited guests were blown up in the Ritz yesterday. For comfort, people went shopping, which is understandable even if they bought things a little too enthusiastically" (360).

So how does this story end? If capital circulates inexorably and terrorism continues unabated, can the schizophrenic

model-slash-terrorist be redeemed, restored to some semblance of a cohesive self, or reconceived as oppositional? The penultimate scene of *Glamorama*, Victor's recollection of the day he committed himself to the pursuit of celebrity, offers only this tongue-in-cheek response to such questions:

"You want to know how this all ends?" Chloe asked, eyes closed.
I nodded.
"Buy the rights," she whispered. (481)

Less glib and more cryptic is the novel's final scene. Victor, transfixed by a mountainscape mural in a hotel bar, finds himself dissolving into the image, "surging forward, ascending, sailing through dark clouds" (482). Sublime self-dissolution is all that awaits him: "The future is that mountain" (482). Despite attributing the schizophrenic an agency unimagined by Jameson or Baudrillard, then, Ellis appears to share their fatalistic view of postmodernity's schizophrenic subject. However, while there is no way back from schizophrenia, it is portrayed in the novel as in some sense a choice and not an inevitability. In order to become an all-American It-Boy, Victor made a promise to himself "to be harder, to not care, to be cool" (481). It is a promise that leads him to terrorism via modelling, that leads him to become "the fucking reaper" (446). *Glamorama* is a striking literary portrayal of how a commitment to dispassionate superficiality makes the postmodern schizophrenic an obscene and anarchic agent of the capitalist system. And once that commitment is made, no alternative political subjectivity within or beyond it can be envisaged.

[1] Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis*, trans. and the author Martha Noel Evans, with the assistance of Brian Massumi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 14-16.

[2] See Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," trans. James Strachey, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. XII (1911-1913) (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1981). See also David B Allison, Allen S. Weiss, Prado de Oliveira, Mark S. Roberts, ed., *Psychosis and Sexual Identity: Towards a Post-Analytic View of the Schreber Case* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

[3] Jacques Lacan, quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 273.

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1982).

[5] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146. July/August (1984).

[6] Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Bernard and Caroline Shutze, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Columbia University, 1988).

[7] Thomas Szasz, *Schizophrenia: The Sacred Symbol of Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

[8] Bret Easton Ellis, *Glamorama* (London: Picador, 2000). All in-text parenthetical references are to this book.

[9] With the exception of Walter Benn Michaels, "Empires of the Senseless: (The Response to) Terror and (the End of) History," *Radical History Review* 85. Winter (2003), and Sheli Ayers, "Glamorama Vanitas: Bret Easton Ellis' Postmodern Allegory," *Postmodern Culture* 11.1 (2000).

[10] Robert Plunket, "Glamorama," 2 February 1999, *The Advocate*, Date of Access: 24 February 2003, <http://www.advocate.com/html/books/0299_glamorama.asp>.

[11] Daniel Mendelsohn, "Lesser Than Zero," 24 January 1999, Review, *The New York Times*, Date of Access: 24 February 2003, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/01/24/reviews/990124.24mendelt.html>>.

[12] Owen Richardson, "Glamorama," 1999, Review, *The Age*, Date of Access: 5 November 2001, <<http://www.theage.com.au/books/archives/easton.html>>.

[13] James Blount, "Glam Slam," 17 February 1999, *Flagpole*, Date of Access: 23 February 2003, <<http://www.flagpole.com/Issues/02.17.99/lit.html>>.

[14] Bret Easton Ellis, *The Rules of Attraction* (London: Picador, 1988).

[15] Ellis, quoted in Harvey Blume, "Portrait of the Artist as a Social Satirist," 10 February 1999, *Atlantic Unbound*, Date of Access: 24 February 2003, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/bookauth/ba990210.htm>>.

[16] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), p. 11. Italics in the original.

[17] Mark Seem, "Introduction," to Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. xxi. Italics in the original.

[18] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 131.

[19] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 5.

[20] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 246.

[21] George Ritzer, *Postmodern Social Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), pp. 125-7.

[22] Anthony Elliott, "The Dislocating World of Postmodernism," *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 148.

[23] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 72.

[24] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 72.

[25] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 72.

[26] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 73.

[27] John O'Neill, "Religion and Postmodernism: The Durkheimian Bond in Bell and Jameson," *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique*, ed. Douglas Kellner (Washington: Maiseonneuve Press, 1989), p. 148.

[28] Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, p. 27.

[29] Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, p. 105.

[30] Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, p. 27.

[31] Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, p. 27.

[32] Jay McInerney, *Model Behavior: A Novel and 7 Stories* (New York: Alfred A Kopf, 1998), p. 36.

[33] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 60.

[34] Elizabeth Young, "Life in the Lottery of Cool," *The Guardian*, 16 January 1999.

[35] For example, in the first 48-hour section of the novel, Victor is repeatedly told he has been in Miami the week before (p. 11, 25, 80) and at the Calvin Klein show the day before (p. 18, 60).

[36] Slavoj Žižek, "Big Brother, or, the Triumph of the Gaze over the Eye," in *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, ed. Thomas Y Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 225.

[37] Michiko Kakutani, "Fashion Victims Take Terrorist Chic Seriously," 5 January 1999, *The New York Times*, Date of Access: 23 February 2003, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/01/03/daily/glamour-book-review.html>>.

[38] David Bennett, "Parody, postmodernism and the politics of reading," *Critical Quarterly* 27.4 (1985), p. 35.

[39] Bret Easton Ellis quoted in Blume, "Portrait of the Artist as a Social Satirist."

[40] Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), p. 70.

[41] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 57.

[42] Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 356.

[43] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," p. 57.

[44] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, p. 18. It should be noted that Baudrillard is not making a reference to fashion here, but examining terrorism as a paradigm.

[Copyright © Monash University 2003. All rights reserved.](#)

[about](#) | [current issue](#) | [archives](#) | [acknowledgements](#) | [submissions](#) | [contact us](#) | [links](#)

This page has been approved by the [Colloquy Editors](#).

Last Date Modified : 04 May 2005 - [Caution](#) - [Monash Home](#)