



## KILLER LOOKS

AN EXPLORATION OF MARY HARRON'S AMERICAN PSYCHO (2000)

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I do not own *American Psycho*; *American Psycho* (2000) is owned and distributed by Lionsgate Films. Based on the book by Bret Easton Ellis.

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**NOTE:** If I mention any other film or other work of fiction then I will likely spoil it. You have been warned.

There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed... My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no-one to escape. But even after admitting this, there is no catharsis. My punishment continues to elude me, and I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new knowledge can be extracted from my telling. This confession has meant nothing...

**Patrick Bateman**

# INTRODUCTION

It's somewhat difficult to put into words what exactly a 'film' is. It usually has all the typical characteristics: actors and scripts and plots and cinematography, but there are very few events when a film becomes something more. I begin this project in such philosophical territory because it's exactly the right way to introduce a film that isn't exactly a *film*. *American Psycho* has infected corners of the internets; its images are ripped straight into message boards, its most famous lines can be heard echoing through podcasts and it's hard to find many film enthusiasts who haven't seen the flick. It's increasingly difficult to find someone who doesn't at least *respect* the film. What I'm not questioning with this work is not the artistic integrity of the film, that's more than assured. Instead I'm here to simply perform the mundane task of applying some film theory concepts, some psychology frameworks, a few abstract explorations and just try and unearth what makes this film the 'film' it is.

I first encountered *American Psycho* on an internet message board in the form of a small image of Patrick Bateman doing his infamous Huey Lewis bit. I had absolutely no clue what on Earth was going on. I knew it was Christian Bale, but I wasn't sure why it was funny. As the LOLs started pouring in I just shrugged it off as another reference I would never understand, until it cropped up again. *Psycho* launched in 2000 but it seems to have extended its reach far behind its box office window and into the hearts of cultural spheres both on the internet and off it. For many years I had this vague idea of what *Psycho* was about. I then began reading the works of Easton Ellis and I left *Psycho* until last. Over three years ago I finished the book and decided that the film could not be that intriguing or interesting or on any level whatsoever hold an artistic candlelight towards the book. It took a while for me to see it and you'll understand why I'm detailing such an anecdote because, quite frankly, *Psycho* managed to evade me. The first viewing was ended half-way when I became dreadfully sick, the second viewing ended in the first minute when I remembered that people have to sleep nowadays and when the third and final viewing finished I absolutely hated it.

It's with such scorn that I turned again to the origin of my interest in the picture, the internet. I found it to be a celebrated cult hit; a smash hit satire at the Yuppie regimes of the 1980s and some other kinds of socio-political commentary nonsense. I delivered, with almost pleasure, critiques and comments to all of the lovings I encountered and found myself consumed by this film. I had to back up my critiques, these were the days when I still cared what people sat at computers thought about my opinion, and so with cheery cynical wit I returned again to the film. And again. And again.

There was no quality unmasked by my rigid and stubborn approach to the film. In my desire to take it apart and hate it piece by piece I had now fallen for it. I deleted some of my comments, I delivered some apologies in following discussions and from

then on I was one of them. I've flirted with many fansites for various franchises, but the fanbase for *American Psycho* doesn't have an established order or a main pool of messages boards. *Psycho* is much more ubiquitous. The appeal and respect that *Psycho* has for it seems stretched beyond one main port of fandom and out into the four corners of the internet itself. There is no consistent name for a fan of *Psycho*, no legion of Bateman or the Huey Lewis Lover Collective, the strength of *Psycho*'s fans is that they aren't concentrated or clubbed together. It's an infection that has spread through meme culture, message board postings, images and bits and quotes cobbled together, shared discussions, academia and beyond. In many ways *Psycho* has pulled off the greatest magic trick that any film can hope to accomplish; it exists beyond its limitations.

This work is about that. It's about how *Psycho* has managed to crawl under our skin and make us laugh and scared. I trust you've seen the film, because I'm obviously going to spoil it to death (along with various other works). This is not a serious academic work; this is just a young boy with an internet connection who wants to talk about the film in a pseudo-intellectual manner. My previous work, *Tears In Rain*, was intended as a 'fanwork' or a love letter to the film *Blade Runner*. I don't feel the word 'fanwork' applies to *Psycho* as easily, given there's no quick definition for a *Psycho* 'fan'.

This book will detail with the psychological, social, political, philosophical, theological and historical issues raised by the film. I will not be covering the original Ellis work, such literary excavation is beyond my experience and expertise. This is an all-encompassing exploration of this beloved film and this is something I decided to write just half-way through *Tears In Rain*. I felt like *Psycho* deserved the same treatment.

There's a special kind of quality to a film like *Psycho* which is, often, indescribable. I think *Blade Runner* carries the same quality; of being routinely fascinated with the picture. I still return to *Blade Runner* and many other films in a sort of bid to try and unearth the truth. These films somehow increase in quality with every viewing as you lay on layers of meanings and arguments and interpretations. They become richer in your mind.

Whereas *Blade Runner* showed a dystopian science-fiction world full of depressed alcoholic individuals shooting robots in the face, *Psycho* shows an interconnected social system and then takes a baseball bat to this honeycomb network of Yuppie'd relationships. It's a brilliant satire of a certain type of capitalistic society birthed in the Reagan years, the same man that *Blade Runner* took a hatchet to, and I wonder if releasing it at the very beginning of a new millennium means it wasn't just retro-criticism but rather intended to be relevant to many modern day issues. I'm a history student and so, at my core, my pure fascination is the contribution of context to the meaning of anything. This is where we begin with *Psycho*, inside its very title, deep inside its psychological webbing as we unearth the psyche of its hero.

So what is a film? *Psycho* has all the typical characteristics. It's produced, edited, picture after picture, stars and scripts. *Psycho*, however, like many greats before it, has

taken itself from the confines of a screen and into the minds of many. *Psycho* is just one apple among the orchards of film culture, but it has blossomed beyond the simple confines of its mediums.

Are you sitting comfortably?

## **SECTION I WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?**

In which I attempt to unravel the psychology of the protagonist, Patrick Bateman, through mirrors, Freud and other lenses. Section One also introduces the main psychological concepts explored throughout the film, and addresses some issues of Bateman's perception of the world.

## **SECTION II IN TOO DEEP**

This section explores the mentalities of those around Bateman and how they shape our perception of the main hero too. This involves looking at the various groups of the picture: the clique, the lower classes and the women. All discriminate and destroy one another in this dog-eat-dog Reagan world.

## **SECTION III LAND OF CONFUSION**

This final section addresses the political and social commentary underneath *Psycho's* wit. Its attacks on Reagan, commentary on the Cold War, the corrupted American dream and the war on drugs are all covered here. *Psycho*, like its original text, is most definitely a book that's about more than Yuppies kicking each other in the face.

# SECTION I WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

“Inside doesn’t matter” speaks Patrick Bateman. The mind, the psyche and everything underneath the ‘face value’ holds no meaning to the world. *American Psycho*’s approach to the human mind is an unnerving one. It asks many questions of its audience. What drives killers to kill? What drives us in our everyday ambition? Are they the same thing? It touches the same flavours of the brain that the likes of *Macbeth* have so gracefully explored and unearthed. I think it’s an uncomfortable truth that every human being is capable of murder, and *Psycho* positions itself in an ability to answer this question through psychological devices. This section will take a deeper psychological knife to the protagonist, whereas the next section will focus on the surrounding society and the characters in the plot.

There are a few pillars of popular psychology that I’ll use to smash into the mind of Patrick Bateman (Freud for one) but for the most part this is a section that, given its focus on the protagonist, is mostly about the concept of the ‘self’. What makes us human? What separates sanity and insanity? The heavy monologues given by Bateman through the narration, peppered throughout the picture, are somewhat of a guiding hand. There are monologues outside of the narration and these reveal some intriguing pieces about Patrick’s mind, particularly when he begins music discussions and sexual deviances. Here in the United Kingdom *Psycho* carries an ‘18’ rating, I think it more than deserves this. Not because of the gore or the sex or the drugs or the checklist of nasties but rather the psychological fabrics woven throughout, this is a film that can’t be explored without a developed and mature rationale. On its surface it is a satirical, dark, farcical little adaptation of a great novel, but underneath lays an insane root that deserves to be scooped out and examined. And that root is called ‘Patrick Bateman’.

**(I-I) PSYCHOSIS** This chapter mainly explores just how far Patrick Bateman is removed from emotional connection. At some points in the plot he shows genuine compassion and humour, but the final tidbit of narration reveals that he feels isolated and fully nothing underneath. Is this entirely true?

**(I-II) SOMETIMES A CIGAR IS JUST A CIGAR** A little bit of fun as we throw some Freud at Patrick Bateman. Is there a hero inside him? Does he have morals and ego defences?

**(I-III) REFLECTIONS** A key icon throughout the film is mirrors and reflections. I explore the use of full frontal self-indulgent narcissism.

**(I-IV) THE IDEAL SELF** Patrick just wants to “fit in”, conform, but he adopts numerous identities and contradicts his true desires at regular intervals. Does he really want to be “Yuppie scum”?

# (I:I) PSYCHOSIS

While researching the reception to *American Psycho* I happened upon a few words in the CNN review that made me think for a while: "It doesn't really matter. "American Psycho" is seamless in its inability to engage emotionally, message or no message." [1]

Psychosis is regarded as a mental disorder, a psychological anomaly and (most importantly) a bad thing. Removal from the emotion in our reality is what crushes our humanity- at least that seems to be the general societal consensus. The CNN review I've just highlighted refuses to see *Psycho* is a 'good' film because it doesn't connect emotionally with the audience; the film itself suffers from psychosis. I'll confess that I can't see why anyone would bat an eyelid at the ending or why anyone would give a slither of care about the cavalcade of eighties caricatures, although we'll discuss sympathy with Bateman later.

People have spoken about being scared for Jean during her meeting with Bateman, the infamous 'nailgun' scene, and in fact it gives rise to some important questions about the place we live in. Do we have to connect with people emotionally in order to understand them? The world we live in is so saturated with emotion that it begs the question of whether or not we are living in an emotionally-numbed society anyway. Billboards with people smiling, advertisements with the perfect strangers and even cats on the internet seem to be having a good time. I would argue that *Psycho* depicts emotionally-removed folks in order to show the emotional numbness that has come about thanks to materialism and the leftovers of the Reagan economic suppers.

The 'psychosis' that will be the topic of this chapter is not exclusively about Bateman, but rather what he represents. Bateman tries to feed a stray cat into an ATM machine, shoots an old lady, scoffs at the thought of raising children and yet has compassion and commitment as discussion topics, albeit with prostitutes. If the protagonist of this film exhibits the symptoms of psychosis then what is there to care about? He is so out of touch with his human capabilities that the entire point of filmmaking, to create a connection with the audience, is rendered completely null. I'll admit, this was my first reaction. If *Psycho* was intended for a root social parody of cinema itself then it fails to achieve anything beyond shock and awe entertainment and in fact ruins its own artistic messages while doing so. Except, *Psycho* wasn't really intended as 'anything', Harron herself says that *Psycho* is "not a 'message' movie--we're not preaching--but I hope that the film does reveal something about our society" [2].

What does it reveal then? What does *Psycho* actually achieve? Bateman is shown to be a thoughtless emotionless thug who murders people and indulges in hallucinations. The background noise of ambition and constant social outcast is what guides Bateman's continual psychosis. The corporate ladders that the film's main characters all climb and rise all paints a picture of a social battlefield where victory

depends on who you're dating, who you hang out with, what colour you are, what gender you are and even where you eat. The film opens up with a scene at a restaurant, and by the end of the whole picture one of Bateman's associates says that "I'm not really hungry, but I'd like to have reservations someplace."

Where does Bateman fit into this social battlefield then? If he does indeed appear emotionally removed from his humanity then he seems to fit in quite well with his peers. They treat women horribly, that any interesting girl has to make up for how "ugly" they are, and they throw out anti-Semitic remarks; they're just horrible people. Bateman aims to "fit in" and part of his bid to become emotionally removed may be an effort to 'fit in', but the constant drive towards self-destruction has created a serial killer instead.

Bateman speaks at one point to Evelyn that he is "in touch" with his "humanity". To be completely honest, the murdering psychopath of this picture seems to exhibit more humanity than the misogynistic and emotionless hacks that occupy the cut-throat Wall Street world. The film seems to show the main protagonist orbiting around two separate states of mind, the in-touch and the out-of-touch. Different characters place themselves somewhere on the spectrum, but Bateman is the only one who seems to constantly shift and change. In one instance he wants to "fit in" but when given the opportunity by Kimball (when shown a Huey Lewis CD) to play the aficionado and revel in music criticism, he rejects it and instead falls back into a cold and calculated state. There's a feeling you get that Bateman is repulsed by the fact that he is not unique in his love for Huey Lewis and it brings up an interesting question: is Bateman repulsed by his own humanity? As soon as he finds a way to connect with his fellow human he does seem to slide back into a paranoid, cold state. Does Bateman want to be freed from his psychosis? It apparently causes him great "pain" and he wants this pain to be transferred unto others, he calls his killings "bloodlust" and he details at one point that he would "like to play around with" "blood". Bateman does seem to take some pleasure in his madness, at least until the near finale of the film in which he confesses to his lawyer (amid hallucination) to all of his crimes in a nervous breakdown.

There are moments of genuine compassion from Bateman too. He stops himself from hurting Jean, protecting her from himself, and even involves himself in discussing international issues in one specific conversation. He talks about "social concern" and the rights of women, although it's not sure if he's being entirely honest or actually mocking with his eloquent argument about societal issues. Bateman, again, seems trapped amongst a spectrum of mental sickness, as he verges from cured and calm to the self-destructive and vicious killer.

An interview with Christian Bale shows his own interpretation of the ending, the 'confession', and Bale says that "There's no resolution, and his only punishment by the end is his own existence."<sup>[3]</sup> I think it's a largely comfortable interpretation of the character's end. It's interesting to imagine the events following *Psycho*, which Bateman seems to still be trapped inside his self-indulgent torture. He is still purged of all

emotion. He still wants to “fit in” but, as soon as he grows closer to conforming and removing his emotions, he backs off entirely. The business card scene, now utterly infamous across the internet, is a true showing of Bateman’s fragile masculinity and power complex. He feels taken apart, inferior and dwarfed by the business cards and praise that is thrown about. Bateman’s inner monologue tells us: “I can't believe that Bryce prefers Van Patten's card to mine.” It’s not hard to imagine the ‘business cards’ representing something other than your rank and role in the business world.

Bateman exhibits both a refusal to attach himself to reality and yet a desire to conform. He talks of “monogamy and commitment” while staring into the eyes of a prostitute, and that particular scene (with the infamous line of “Don’t just stare at it, eat it!”) unearths the utter narcissism and rotten torture behind Bateman’s mind. He delivers a music criticism while destroying the social comforts of two women, who remain utterly silent while the monster raves. The sex he delivers is accompanied by self-indulgent stares into the mirror while he admires his own physique. He is completely indulging in his very existence, gaining the highest amount of ‘pleasure’ possible. The consumerism commentary and the ‘disposable’ themes that carry throughout the picture all link back to its integral society because Bateman’s mind-set, like the music and media he consumes, is entirely disposable too. The film is punctuated with eighties pop, the music criticism shows eloquence and true wit behind Bateman and he even uses words of “powerful” and “love” to describe his emotional reactions to the songs, but they’re still simple pop ballads. The soundtrack itself and the narration – “I’m trying to listen to the new George Michael tape” – all blend together the interests and tastes of Bateman, but this is simple ‘pop’ that comes and goes. Bateman too seems likely schizophrenic and his phases of psychosis are merely dispensable, just as the pain is too. Bale is right; there is no resolution. I believe the commentary on Reagan’s economic systems that pioneered an empowered ‘stop-go’ capitalist system is made more potent because Bateman is the living embodiment of ‘stop-go’. He flips back and forth like the markets, and this is where the genius social revelations come into play.

Mary Harron wanted to reveal something about our society. At the tip-end of the millennium with the information age blossoming into effect, there was a slight panic, and there still is, that as we strive to become increasingly more connected through our screens that we are losing our abilities to socialize and connect with the emotional existence within ourselves. We have been consumed by consumerism. I believe that the commentary on Yuppie culture within *American Psycho* is too basic to call simply ‘Yuppie culture commentary’. The film takes obvious steps to blur the lines between its protagonist and the culture he inhabits, even having him smear ‘DIE YUPPIE SCUM’ in graffiti on walls. The retroactive commentary on the leftovers of the Reagan administration feel too obvious as well, they literally use footage of Old Ronald to deliver the final confession. What I think that Harron was trying to display through the schizophrenic psychosis of Bateman was a root and natural desire in all of mankind to

remove himself from existence, to be both “within and without” in the words of the great Fitzgerald.

The voyeuristic content throughout the picture, Bateman videotapes his sexual expeditions and constantly uses his faux excuse that he has to “return some videotapes”, all help to deliver this idea of isolation but with envy. Bateman’s lack of emotional connection with his fellow man is a mere phase, and I again reiterate that he is the raw embodiment of the consumerism, creating a heavily relevant message. Our connections with the world are seemingly expendable themselves, we can just delete ‘Friends’ from our Facebook now, and I believe the film combines both the social commentary (with underlying voyeurism) and cultural commentary under the guise of Bateman. *Psycho* didn’t predict the social media revolution, but its showcase of emotional numbness sure reads like some hyperbolic prophecy. Bateman’s music is expendable, his isolation is expendable, he wants to “fit in” and yet is utterly repelled and angered by the yuppie culture he inhabits but, more importantly, his psychosis is *self-imposed*. As much as Bateman tells us that he cannot function with “self-control” he is able to defend Jean against himself, still able to compose himself despite his hallucinations but this is all still torture. Though his “willpower” may wane, it still exists.

It’s easy to see at first glance that Bateman is entirely emotionally removed from the world but, with some prodding, there are layers to his mind. He regularly partakes in acts of compassion and intelligence, even arguing for philanthropy and human ‘good’ at some points and this accurately juxtaposes against his violent indecencies. Bateman is clearly not a perfect human being and his indulgences in serial killing, whether fictitious or not, create him as a confused Yuppie that slides across the psychological ice. The symptoms of psychosis shown throughout, in combination with Bateman’s language, show he is mixed in his emotional connection to the world. The final distant stare of the picture, where he laments on his ‘pain’, shows his reaction to the world, he laps it all up, and in fact *American Psycho* may not be an entirely apt title for the film. I guess *American Confused Male* wouldn’t be so snappy.

## References

1. <http://edition.cnn.com/2000/SHOWBIZ/Movies/04/14/review.american.psycho/index.html>
2. <http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/screen/books/psycho.html> (I believe the interview was included in the Press Materials given out around the film’s launch)
3. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2000/apr/06/artsfeatures>

# **(I:II) SOMETIMES A CIGAR IS JUST A CIGAR**

Freud has been hailed as the founding father of modern psychology. It's safe to say that he wasn't always 'right' in his theories, but his theories are credited for helping in bringing about an entire academic discipline. That's not to say he wasn't right about anything, it's that some aspects of his argument about the human mind and its inner workings just don't hold any relevance when held under modern scientific scrutiny. Some of his theories seem barfed out of literary canon too, which also confuses his further work surrounding philosophy and the common ideals of man. What intrigues me about Freud's work however is that there are some concepts which deal with a more 'layered' idea of the human mind; particularly the popular ideas of ego and id. I am less intrigued and, in some senses repulsed, by his commentary on human sexuality and its development in infancy. In this chapter I will be applying two or three Freudian concepts to their film, perhaps in a reductionist fashion, but it's interesting to consider that under a Freudian perspective that the film may take on much more intricate levels of psychological commentary.

Freud's main theories are buckled into the fabric of popular psychology and so it makes it incredibly easy for anyone to grab a few bits of his writing and start applying it to popular fiction. This is hardly a psychological incision into Bateman's psycho but more of an acknowledgement of the layered nature of the film and its protagonist.

This chapter will probably annoy a lot of psychologists. This isn't meant to be an exercise in psychological examination but just a bit of waxing that might unveil something more interesting about a little film.

Freud is known for his three-part 'ego, id and superego'. The id is the first state to develop and relies on the 'pleasure principle', a primitive outlook that simply seeks pleasure and to meet the needs and wants of the self. The ego then develops which relies on the 'reality principle' and will balance the needs and wants inwardly (of the self) and of the environment (including other people). The last to develop is the superego which is built around the 'moral principle'; consider it the extent of which a human being is generally moral about the world. The ego balances the superego and id, making sure that you is nice to folks but still, well, keeping you eating and surviving.

Throughout the film there appears to be a psychological shift as Bateman goes throughout the different states. When he protects himself from Jean, that he doesn't want her getting "hurt", then he takes the role of the superego in being moral with his own inhumanity. For most of the murdering, Bateman takes on an aggressive, egomaniacal stance that seems soaked in eighties narcissist value. He has violent sex with prostitutes while admiring his physique in the mirror, admiring his own pleasure.

This scene is practically a definition of 'id' when Bateman has managed to defuse both moral and real consequences, becoming utterly absorbed in pleasure.

The film brings the psychological consequences of Bateman's actions into question by the end, as Bateman refuses to accept that anything has changed and that his "confession has meant nothing". The film appears to brutally attack the egomaniacal eighties society, that self-indulgence and wrecked pleasure leads to the destruction of the self. With closer examination, however, the film may be criticizing not the eighties alone but the consumerist mentality that was birthed by it. *Psycho* was released on the fringe of the 21st Century and to make a retroactive critique of American eighties society, I feel, would be a bit of a waste. I think Harron and company, as we'll explore later, did indeed modernize and rejuvenate a lot of criticism to a modern day setting. The Freudian psychology portrayed in the picture appears then somewhat intellectually invalid given Freud's theories are almost a century old by now. I would argue that his concepts carry universal weight and that they can be held under a certain amount of scrutiny.

Bateman throughout the film skips in and out of self-indulgence. At a moment of vulnerability, the card scene, he states that "I can't believe that Bryce prefers Van Patten's card to mine." Freud has a wide range of theories about the sexuality of human beings but, here, I'm not entirely sure if its Bateman feeling his sexual ego is at risk. The cards could be seen as simple euphemism, and it begs the question about how much Bateman truly cares about his Yuppie world. At an earlier point he narrates about being on "the verge of tears" in case a "decent table" can't be found. Bateman seems to be struggling with stabilizing his ego when, at the same time, questioning whether he wants to indulge himself in this egomaniacal wasteland of human existence. The graffiti of "DIE YUPPIE SCUM" in a possible Bateman hallucination brings the question of whether or not we're ever, in the entire film, witnessing Bateman's full psyche on display.

The psychology of Bateman does feel layered in some respects and Bateman admits at several times that he's simply "Not very good at controlling it" (in respect to his willpower) and that "Something horrible is happening inside of me." In these circumstances it could be argued that his 'ego', the balancing act of the moral 'superego' and primitive and violent 'id', is weakened. This is where Bateman's psychological illness stems from, a deep wound found in his weak 'ego'. It's why he dives in and out across the psychological spectrum of calm and collected to violent and murdering.

Bateman admits at several points about being layered, but at one moment he says that "I think my mask of sanity is about to slip". The themes of superficiality and consumerist ideology all blend into this line and mix with the Freudian psychology, the specific part of Freudian theory about the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. The conscious is the surface layer, "the mask of sanity", the pre-conscious

holds memories and information and the unconscious holds all kinds of repressed gooey bits. Bateman is admitting in this sequence that he is about to “slip” straight into his unconscious mind, where the violence and the destruction may hail from. The problems seen don’t appear to be bubbling on to the surface; rather they all seem to reside inside Bateman’s mind. The film does a clever job of having the hallucinations taking place in a cinematic, hyper-realized and somewhat ‘dreamlike’ void. The killing of the prostitute with the chainsaw harkens back to an earlier section of the film in which Bateman performed press-ups to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* playing in the background. The same is true for the hyper-realized sexual activities; Bateman literally immerses himself in pornstar life as he videotapes his sexual endeavours. The hallucinations, stemming from the ‘unconscious’, may have blended with experiences inside of the consumerist culture. Indeed, Patrick at one point laments on the songs of Whitney Houston and calmly talks of one song having deep meanings of “self-preservation” and that even if we can’t empathize with each other we can still empathize with “ourselves”. Bateman tries to separate himself from himself, further evidencing the ‘layered’ mind that he possesses.

Further evidence that the film tries to detail itself with Freudian issues is the conversation involving women and their personalities. The misogynistic Yuppie group tells us that “there are no” women with good personalities and, if they do have them, it’s only to make up for how “fucking unattractive” they are. I see this scene as a direct showcase to the audience just to hate this group and its guts. It perfectly contrasts with Bateman’s earlier comments involving women’s rights. He is able to flip his personality to suit the group as needs be, opening up the layers or pushing them down when he needs to.

Patrick interjects with a story involving Ed Gein, whom one member of the group mistakes for being “Maître d” when in fact Patrick is discussing a “serial killer”. The juxtaposition between the two people, one being mundane and the other a serial killer, heightens the sense of ridiculousness. This is further expressed when Patrick discusses Ed Gein’s thoughts on women. From other reading, it’s apparent that Ed Gein had a lot of philosophy concerning the opposite sex, Patrick simply tells them a small piece about a man who thought two things – “take her out to dinner”, “what her head would look like on a stick”. Patrick is, crucially, asked at one point “What did the other part of him think?” As if Ed Gein has a brain split between states and layers; id, ego and superego. The very fact that Patrick identifies with a split-minded individual gives further evidence that the film is simply an exploration of darker and hidden desires and, indeed, exaggerates and mocks its own exploration at times too by using serial killers, contrasted by simple mundane jobs, as evidence.

I’m not sure we ever see Patrick and his ‘fiancé’ ever have sex, in a deleted scene she outright refuses it[1], but the film goes to great length to show us the other sexual endeavours that Patrick explores. One of the girls, Daisy, tells Patrick that

there's "Something sweet about you." And then during the date with Jean, in which Patrick almost kills her, he tells her that he's "not very good at controlling it" in reference to what could happen, that she could get "hurt". There's a sense that perhaps Bateman is aware that he is both "sweet" and lacking in "controlling" his sweetness away from his murdering side – protecting his superego from his id. The film could then be seen as, above anything, an exercise into the nature of self-control – exaggerating the immoral deeds of the Yuppie culture to murderous levels.

The psychology behind Bateman's actions isn't necessarily relevant to today, although it does explore the nature of a dark side lurking in us all but exaggerates and cakes it on with dark comedic superfluous displays, images and dialogue to the point where Bateman is both victim and murderer. The film, above anything I feel, uses the split mind of its protagonist – id, ego and superego – in a bid to show just how confused Bateman ultimately is. To Mary Harron, and to many others, Yuppie culture was practically a disease. Bateman is a way of showcasing its symptoms, and then making utter satirical fun out of it.

## References

1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2vv\\_wp1hk0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2vv_wp1hk0)

## (I:III) REFLECTIONS

Mirrors and reflections run throughout *American Psycho* like blood. As we peer into Bateman's psyche, we begin to learn exactly what is and what is not real. At least that's what we think. There's many interpretations that there's a supernatural force at work cleaning up after Bateman, which is somewhat of a world away from the book in my opinion, and that there's a clear sense that the film shows Bateman's psyche as simply confused. The use of mirrors and obscured images of Bateman build a bloody picture of the exact mindset that Bateman is undergoing, and this begins right near the film's beginning.

While looking into a mirror, Bateman remarks to the bartender that he'd like to "play with your blood" and calls her a "fucking ugly bitch". Upon first viewing we can think that the music is too loud for her to hear, or that she's simply used to this treatment by the Yuppie scum. What becomes readily apparent with repeated viewing is the use of the mirror. As soon as the camera moves away from Bateman's reflection, everything turns to smiles and drinks. The bartender doesn't look visibly affected by his insults. What this scene could symbolize is Bateman's inner monologue being pried open by peering into a reflection, the true self. Bateman masks himself from the 'true self' throughout the film.

Bateman uses both the Paul Allen and "Marcus" identities in order to get closer to people and eventually murder them, and to also live out his envious fantasies. When he's told that their apartments and lives are "nicer" than his real apartment, then his violent tendencies seem to erupt. I've touched on this before, that while Bateman seems to resent his own culture he still feels that he needs to fit into it somehow, even if that means murdering the naysayers and obscuring his own name through others.

It's also interesting to note exactly when Bateman peers into mirrors. There are instances at the beginning, when he's giving a monologue about his daily routine, and when he looks into a braille menu, another time while on the toilet, a moment following sex, right during sex, before murders such as Paul Allen and so on and so forth. There's one short scene in which Courtney and Patrick are in a taxi and you can see everyone's faces perfectly except Bateman's, whose face is obscured by frosted glass. This is an explicit reminder that Bateman's self-image is crumbling both to himself and to the world and his true face cannot be clearly seen by anyone.

During the 'murdering' scene of Paul Allen we have Patrick deliver his critique of Huey Lewis and the themes and texture of his music. We peer into the thoughtfulness of Bateman, all while he plans a murder. He skirts into the bathroom, puts on a raincoat, chugs some pills and then stares into the mirror. After this he brandishes a fire axe and slays Allen. This comes after looking into a mirror. I think one possible way to read the way that mirrors are used throughout the feature is to see them as an explicit sign, used by Harron, in order to signify that we are now switching into Bateman's world. That we

are peering into the true state of Bateman's mind. The use of mirrors could be seen to be a simple superficial affair, to state just how self-obsessed that Bateman is with his self-image. There are some notes in which this is a credible argument, particularly following his sex with Courtney in which he remarks "You look marvellous, what else is there to say?" supposedly to Courtney, while looking into his own reflection and not even tearing away. I instead see this as Bateman peering into himself, that he is reminding himself that everything is fine and there's nothing to say.

Jaap Kooijman and Tarja Laine, in their critical essay on *American Psycho*[1], argue that "The film *American Psycho* is full of reflecting mirrors and other surfaces on which the spectator gets to glance Patrick Bateman's face. These often vague mirror images--like the one in the metallic cover of the menu in a fancy restaurant--reflect Bateman back his acquired double identities: the one of a fashionable yuppie that he wants to show to others, and the one of a cold-blooded killer and porn star that he wants to believe in himself".

Bateman is seen, in the sex scene with the two prostitutes, instead of looking into their eyes, looking into himself. He admires his muscles. He admires his own body; he looks at his physique and gives this scene a whole comedic flair. There's a sense that even during sex, he is self-obsessed.

I think this is the film's saddest scene.

This is where a man has become utterly lost in himself, utterly lost in his own reflection. Indeed, the mirrors signify the change in Patrick's mental state and we're allowed to peer into his own fabricated hallucinations for a little while, but they also symbolize a whole lot more about our modern culture.

The very psychology behind self-image is something well entangled in the business world of the glossy mags and celebrity culture in which self-image is both sacrificed and celebrated at the same time. Our world is about 'control' and *Psycho* admits itself to be, at the very bottom of itself, about loss of control. The mirrors and reflections are of us, not of Bateman. How many times do you fantasize about murdering your boss? About doing horrible things? There's a psychological term – 'intrusive thoughts' – just stuff that invades our mind and repels us after a simple second of thinking about it. I wonder if *Psycho* is meant as an exploration of the sickest things that the human mind can engineer, and whether or not it uses the mirrors as a note of irony. We're peering into Pat's reflection, but at the same time we're looking at what we're capable of.

There's a certain scene when Patrick is courting Jean to dinner and there's a crossword puzzle reflected in his sunglasses. This is, I think, a nod towards the audience and perhaps to film critics. Behind those eyes lurks a psychological puzzle ready to be worked out, ready to be scrambled and fixed and finished. But so as long as we look into the abyss, so too does the abyss look into us? I have wondered quite lately to exactly why people enjoy *American Psycho*. Is it the thoughtful psychological

exploration, the dark comedic elements, the political and social satire, the aesthetic pleasures, the sex scenes or something else? I think the film means a lot of things to a lot of different people, and everyone sees something differently in that mirror.

This is something that you can probably do yourself. Look at all the scenes and notes in the film where there's a mirror to be found. There's one particular scene which is interesting: when Patrick tries to murder Carruthers in one of the bathrooms. Carruthers spots Patrick in one of the mirrors, and then sees it as a sexual advance. It's important to note this scene because Carruthers stands between Patrick and the mirror, and then soon enough some sexual exploration is involved. Do the mirrors explore more than just violent tendencies and more buried ones? Another Freudian analysis might be worth considering. The phallic object of the chainsaw, the reflections in the blood- one could see the murders as sexual releases for Patrick, something he can't do during actual intercourse because of his self-absorption and retreat from his true sexual desires or otherwise hidden tendencies. He even smokes after killing Allen like a great release has been done.

Does the film argue there's more to Yuppie scum than meets the eye? It has Patrick's friends be a group of disgusting, misogynistic individuals who confuse identities and mix substances for thrills while their daddies throw them up the career food-chain. I don't think it's nepotism that the film lampoons, but the relative inhumanity of the Yuppies. The mirrors that Bateman encounters are simply 'displays', simply opportunities to peer into oneself. The other characters sometimes encounter mirrors, but we spend our time exclusively with Patrick. He is more complicated, much more revolting and much more confused than the other Yuppie creatures. Here's an interesting question: why is Patrick still 'our protagonist'? His psychological breakdown at the end could be one reason, his darkly farcical 'FEED ME A STRAY CAT' hallucinations, his actual 'murdering' of the 'yuppie scum' and other reasons. Patrick is, I believe, not the only one to stare into a mirror and be disgusted or insecure about what he sees. I think we all identify with that want to both conform and strike ourselves as being unique, being both "within and without". Patrick just takes it to the next level.

And that's what the mirrors of *American Psycho* invite us to consider. How we fit in the world. How we look is of no importance, but of how we express ourselves. To Patrick the mirrors are a sign of his true, violent self to rage against the world and the film presents his hallucinations as, in the end, bitter fantasy that comes to fruition. No Yuppies are truly expensed by the film. Nothing is achieved. Patrick simply isn't there, but there's an "idea" of a Patrick Bateman and it's akin to the idea of us.

## References

1. <http://michael-miller.wiki.uml.edu/file/view/A+double+portrait+of+a+serial+killer.pdf>

## (I:IV) THE IDEAL SELF

I have a curiosity with film summaries. I don't think most films can be boiled down to a paragraph, but it's interesting to see how people do it. On the back of my DVD it says "Patrick Bateman is handsome, well-educated and intelligent. He is twenty-seven and living his own American dream. He works by day on Wall Street, earning a fortune to complement the one he was born with. At night he descends into madness, as he experiments with fear and violence." This is apparently the main synopsis by 'Lions Films'[1].

It's interesting as to exactly how other folks summarize the film with one user, on IMDB, telling us that Patrick "kills for no reason at all." And another stating "He's a soulless, modern monster whose zealous materialism and piercing envy fuels his homicidal activities." [1]

I don't agree with any of them.

*American Psycho* explores what it means to 'fit in', about how exactly we take our lives into the ideal. And then it lampoons it. I'm not sure if the film is purely defeatist, which is to say that it shows us that our idealistic visions of ourselves are completely out of reach. It's interesting to find a rather right-wing slayer of a film that simultaneously attacks idealism. Patrick embodies this sense of a search for the 'ideal self', a need to conform and be the best that he can possibly be. From the beginning of the picture he starts this social rampage and throughout the film confirms he is indeed doing all of these deeds in a simple bid to please. It's more interesting to explore exactly who he is seeking to please at the end of all of this.

The film opens in a restaurant as Patrick is surrounded by his Yuppie companions. They all discuss mindless bother and make sarcastic, empty remarks. Then they pay with credit cards. All of them do. Even Patrick throws in the plastic. I think the opening sequence itself speaks of the dichotomous themes running throughout the picture; madness and reality. The blood we see turns out to be the sauce toppings of food. The film repeatedly plays with our expectations anyhow, resulting in the ending sequence in which we question the reliability of Patrick's vision on the world. But it's also funny. Darkly so. We take it to be 'blood' and it turns out to be sauce, madness and reality, and the film is again inserting a poke towards the audience. As much as Patrick sees the world in one way, and seeks to continue to do so, we can't help but join him in some of his madness. We can't help but agree in his secret desires to murder all "yuppie scum".

The pop music, the technology, the pornography; all is dispensable in Patrick's world. I think this is another theme of the film, sheer entropy, but it links precisely to the idea of conformity in the world. Why is Patrick consuming these items, because everyone else is doing so? He doesn't particularly seek pleasure from watching *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, nor does he seek to increase his physique with his exercise

machines – as one of the friends' remarks during the end sequence, they "aren't really hungry" but they'd "like" to just have reservations somewhere. They'd just like to follow the pattern.

Does the film ultimately sympathise with this lifestyle? Does it show them all entrapped in their own decay? Perhaps it does, perhaps it traps us all. The "pursuit of happiness" is perhaps just that. That's waxing philosophically though, not questions for a simple film critic to answer, but I wonder in some viewings of *American Psycho* just who I'm supposed to care about. Jean? Evelyn? Patrick? We seem to discover the true nature of Patrick's warped mind alongside Jean, and we're on the same emotional page of her all the way.

The last shot of the film has us peering into Patrick's eyes. Or are they peering into us? He looks completely absorbed in thought, destroyed and tortured even, but he still stares into the camera. Completely caught in self-consciousness. Christian Bale says that Patrick's entire character is about someone who "puts on his mask in order to perform" and that "Bateman is completely self-conscious"[2] Perhaps he's looking for the true culprit or the person who's spurring him on or perhaps this is another reflective movement. In the Blu-ray edition of the film I can barely make out the movement of the camera as it sweeps into his vision. I wonder if Patrick breaks the fourth wall, and what does that mean for the film as a whole? It's an incredibly self-conscious film already and for it to note the presence of its audience might just be another step of consciousness.

Patrick is asked by Evelyn at one point exactly why he doesn't just quit his job. The job that makes him completely unhappy and drive him to commit these homicidal indecencies. Patrick replies simply "Because I want to fit in." It's interesting he then chooses to write on walls "YUPPIE SCUM" and then murder his fellow Yuppie. I think this is a return to the 'confused psycho' point I explored earlier. Patrick is simply confused as to what the 'ideal self' is and pursuing conformity allows him to flexibly dive in and out of looking at his own culture with disgust while also allowing him to stay within it.

Before 'murdering' a homeless person Patrick remarks that "I don't have anything in common with you." I'm wondering if Patrick is being honest here. This man has no home, and yet Patrick doesn't feel at home in his own apartment, soon after being taunted that Allen's place is "nicer than your other apartment" by a prostitute he then commits terrible violence. However, by showing Patrick's numb reaction to his own violence, Harron may also be showing how, as James Slone argues, "in some corners of Reagan's America, where the homeless and mentally ill were dumped into the streets, dispatching a "lazy" alcoholic might very well be considered a mercy killing."[3]

When given the opportunity to express his discourse on Huey Lewis with Detective Kimball, Patrick denies himself. This bothered me upon first viewing, but I now understand something. As much as Patrick pursues the 'ideal self' with his pursuit of his music interests, taking many lengths to research and construct evaluative critiques of

his pop collection, he still feels insecure in this. He still wants to be an individual, and so when Kimball practically invites Patrick to 'show off' he doesn't bother, he even looks somewhat disgusted. His last bastion of unique quality, his music diatribes, are now becoming 'the mainstream', he is recognizing that the music he loves is mainstream. Keep in mind that this is pop music, you can't get any more popular than pop, and there also lies a crux – Patrick pursues these mainstream ideas and items without recognizing just how mainstream they are, to the point where he's revolted by the idea that other people can be doing the same thing. He wants to "fit in", but he's frustrated that anyone else wants to pursue it too.

Even while murdering Paul Allen he doesn't stop talking about his music, at point ironically commenting that "It's not just about the pleasures of conformity." The monologues involving music criticism reveals a hefty lot about Patrick's inner psyche, and I will certainly return to them at some point.

There is an interesting point to make about exactly how the film positions itself in history. It is, without any doubt, a critique of Yuppie culture and Reaganomics (and general Reagan-ideology in general), but the film was released at the tip-end of the millennium. I'll discuss political/social context in the coming sections, but I think a point is to be made about the influence of film upon Patrick. He does watch *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in the film, but it doesn't seem to have any effect on him. What does seem to have an effect on him is *The Terminator* franchise. He, in impersonating Paul Allen, says "Hasta la vista, baby". Keep in mind the film is set during Reagan's presidency, specifically 1987, and so it's weird to see an early 90s movie reference crop up in a film like this. 'Hasta la vista' simply means goodbye, or 'see you later', in Spanish and so it's plausible Patrick is simply saying it to show off. It's much more plausible to think this is planted in order to talk directly to the audience. Just to what extent does cinema interfere and govern our lives? Patrick is a character in a film, him spouting a nineties catchphrase doesn't even seem that out of place to us. As Patrick states at one point "We can always be thinner." Just exactly he means by 'we' is interesting to note.

Patrick pursues the 'ideal self' with incredible passion. It even leads to his own homicidal rampages which, apparently, were all a result of some psychological destruction. The mind has its ways. I think *American Psycho* makes Bateman's psyche incredibly relevant to us because it is so tortured and confused by the nature to 'fit in', it explores exactly what conformity is to the modern world. It even lampoons it to some extent but, at the end of the day, has the audience in its crosshairs in questioning just who exactly is mad in this world.

## References

1. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0144084/plotsummary>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ILl95A1-jI>
3. <http://www.endofmedia.com/?p=166>

## SECTION II IN TOO DEEP

Many critics have noted a disconnect with *American Psycho*, that its main character is ultimately unsympathetic and deeply tortured to the point of which the audience cannot identify with any of his traits or being. That Bateman himself is the blockade to actually experiencing the film. The tortured and destructive Patrick Bateman is meant to be disconnecting, you're not meant to slot yourself into the character. Much like Nick Carraway of *Gatsby*, who is wealthy and ignores his engagement to a woman back West, and much like the eponymous *Macbeth*, we're not meant to 'care' for the protagonist. We're, in some ways, just there for a ride through their mind. Those bystanders, however, the Lady Macbeths & Gatsbys who dive in and out of the protagonists' mindstreams, they may however hold the key to connection. We may not readily accept Bateman as our hero, if there is any hero in *American Psycho*, and yet the other characters in the film present vastly different views upon the whole world that, in some way, may lend them to become audience cyphers so that we may find some trace emotion to latch on to.

The people Bateman surrounds himself with may, however, be more emotionless than he is. They dive in and out of misogynist, anti-semitic remarks while guzzling their million dollar deals. Patrick is but a figurehead, a caricature of a Wall Street 'murderer', an extended metaphor of a mind that murders the livelihoods of many people everyday but only through an 'Invisible Touch' of economics. There is however a structure of groupings of the film, with the clique that Bateman slots into being one of my areas of exploration. There is the clique, the lower class and the women who dot and help plot Bateman's journey into obscene mad decay.

**(II-I) CLIQUE** The people around Patrick Bateman exhibit their own psyches through different ways. He is within and without a clique of self-absorbed narcissistic assholes. This chapter explores the full egos on display by each of Bateman's associates.

**(II-II) LOWER CLASS** *American Psycho* does include some nods to class-commentary, and Bateman himself explores around the edges of his own class and shows us other folks below his own pay-packet. This chapter explores their views on *Psycho's* society.

**(II-III) WOMEN** The women in *American Psycho* are treated horribly, but their own thoughts and expressions bring about some innocence and well-needed 'goodness' to the film that deserves some commentary.

## (II:I) CLIQUE

There are moments in *American Psycho* when you have to second-guess yourself as to who is the true monster in the picture. It's surely Bateman with his mass-murdering antics and misogynist beat downs, and yet his Wall Street comrades all collaborate together to murder livelihoods every day and are the ones who spur on misogynistic rhetoric. I have come to some conclusion that *Psycho* is simultaneously an exaggeration and subtle ballooning up of the very work that Wall Street does. Wall Street kills lives; Bateman is the one to do it literally. His failing male vanity, psychological torture and eventual descent in numbness are but the metaphorical backdrop to the battlegrounds of worldwide economics. With a twist of a few stocks and numbers, Yuppie folks, like Bateman, were able to carve out an opulent livelihood out of their craft of economic killing. This is why we need to take a look at the minds that orbit Bateman's madness. We need to see exactly how much of a product Bateman is of his environment, and also discover whether or not he truly is the darkest figure in a picture of dark figures.

The very opening scene is territory to explore. This is where Bateman and his colleagues discuss, well, what amounts to nothing. Opening scenes usually establish the tone, message or some piece about the main story. Here we already see caricatured vampires of Wall Street proportions, the sharp critique already obvious within the first few minutes. The story, however, may be somewhat obscured by the message here. We have these suited fiends exhibiting homophobia - "Bateman won't give the maitre d' head" - and diving into straight suited anti-Semitism, "lucky bastard [...] lucky Jew bastard" to which even Patrick says "cool it with the anti-Semitic remarks." Patrick's participants within the disgusting antics of his clique shifts throughout the picture, and in this scene we have already seen one example of his non-complacency to their vitriolic speak.

They complain about how "they don't have a good bathroom to do coke in". The association of cocaine with Wall Street workers is pretty common in any critique, and here is a space in which we see Bateman slightly just riding the waves. He will do cocaine later in the film, and take some pills before 'slaughtering' Paul Allen. Bateman most definitely nods along with the drug-addled junkies, but having a drug habit isn't necessarily evil is it? The association of drugs with disgusting behaviour is somewhat evident though. In this way, we can see the portrayal of drugs in the film as ultimately negatively charged.

In the opening scene we also have one of the main themes of the film established. They mistake Paul Allen - "Is that Paul Allen", "It's not Paul Allen" - showing some kind of social ladder within the top of the tree. Bateman's envy of Allen will follow into Allen's possessions and traits; from his business cards, his reservations at Dorsia, his apartment and his very name "I'm Paul". Allen, himself, is a fairly insipid figure but

not some kind of megalomaniacal villain, he simply represents something beyond Bateman's social capacity.

One could argue that the sole purpose of the 'friends' that Bateman hangs around with is that they present some kind of distraction to Bateman's madness. James Franco actually argues that his comrades are "cardboard cutouts and play dolls that serve no purpose but to distract the narrator from his incurable boredom and the numbness of apathy"[1]. The anti-Semitism, homophobia and political ignorance - "the sikhs are killing like.." - all snowballs towards a giant, neon-like sign that serves to distract Bateman from curing himself. Even by the film's last minutes, in which Bateman, internally, disagrees with their views on Reagan, he is still being compelled to distraction. In this sense, if there is any trace sympathy for Bateman's madness then any chance at curing his madness does not lie with his Wall Street friends. They are folks (specifically Bryce) who choke on their liquor when Bateman rants about "materialism", whether or not he does this genuinely is another chapter altogether, and they are the folks are *pride* themselves in materialism.

Patrick's friends are scared that "SOHO is becoming too commercial" and just nod through saying "Yes I read that". They have a battle of business cards, "very nice", "good colouring", "that's very cool", "that's really nice" whilst simultaneously discrediting each other, "how'd a nitwit like you get so tasteful". Bateman's comrades' material soaked mindsets are, however, also used to show some failures in their amoeba-like disgusting psychology. They may hate gays, Jews and women; but they have been 'infiltrated' by 'the enemy'. Luis, the homosexual who crushes on Patrick, says "that's a wonderful suit" and talks how it "looks so soft" while brushing it. Both Bryce and Luis see materialist value as exceptional, yet it is Luis who sees it as also, perhaps, a sexual trait. This is to perhaps confuse the meanings behind the materialist mentalities, and that; perhaps, there is an element of contradiction within the clique.

The business card scene, which is probably the most famous scene of the film, involves a back and forth dissection of power and reputation. Bateman presents his card, and then the others present their card until we build towards the crescendo of Paul Allen's card. Bateman speaks with pain and almost winces at the sight, filling his face with sweat, as he begins to feel jealousy override his every action. He drops the business card of Paul Allen out of utter scorn and leaves. Clearly, his 'comrades' are presenting a threat to his bubble of ego. Kooijman and Tarja Laine also write that "In order to hold on to his hallucination, Batman "kills" the ones--like his colleague Paul Allen--that present a threat to his hallucinatory identity."[2] His 'friends' are the threats to his very psychology. He has to destroy the ones who attempt to challenge his own insecure image of his god-like self. In the scene in which Bateman almost kills Luis, his other friends ask him "Something wrong?" And yet we do not get the feeling that they care. These are people who mistake people for other people, who throw about names and restaurants with little care. At one point saying that "they're not hungry" but they just

want to still be seen having dinner. They have a self-image to uphold as much as Bateman does, but they do not turn to murder and destruction as he does. In this sense we can see the clique as the source of Bateman's darkness.

There is also the suggestion that Bateman's friends are completely deaf to whatever he tells them. In the final scene, his lawyer is disgusted but only after Bateman has convinced him of his madness. While Bateman is saying "do you know I like to dissect girls" and literally saying "I am utterly insane" in the dinner with Paul Allen, before murdering him, Allen just tells him that he has a "great tan" and even, mistakenly, calls him "Marcus". The amount of times that the clique mistakes another for another shows both their lack of care about humanity, perhaps, but also their lack of care about anything other than the name itself. Anyone can be called Marcus, Paul Allen and even Patrick Bateman; "there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman", only the idea is worth something in the decadent world. Patrick's friends reinforce the psychology not of 'self' but of 'worth' and 'value'. Just like they destroy livelihoods, they also dictate what a 'livelihood' is and, maybe, become the greatest 'villains' of the entire picture.

As well as stressing the 'value' of life, the clique also exploits Bateman's insecurities to their own social benefit. Paul Allen discusses Bateman, with Bateman posing as another colleague, describing him as "loser Patrick Bateman". A lot of people seemingly agree with Allen's viewpoint, Bateman's very lawyer stressing that "Bateman is such a dork", and they seem to all secretly exclude Bateman from the clique. Bateman tells us that he is only trying "to fit in", but the clique doesn't want him. Does his insecurity manifest itself as the violent escapades, is the clique responsible for the torture of both himself and 'others'?

The film uses characters from the clique to showcase what 'normality' possibly is in this Wall Street paved world. Allen, noticing the newspapers across the floor, asks if Bateman has "a dog, a little Chow or something?" Allen doesn't know what we know, that Bateman stomps on homeless dogs in his nightly bloodlust crusades. This token of dramatic irony leads us to believe that 'dogs' are a note of normality, and indeed might further cast Bateman's own loneliness. Luis later asks "Where did you get that overnight bag?" as if such chatter is normal, given Bateman is hiding a body in it. The very concept of 'normal', in the eyes of Bateman's clique, is used as a flagpole to compare Bateman's own mindset against. He uses overnight bags as body storage, he floods apartments with newspapers for the blood from his murders and he also talks about serial killers.

Bateman attempts to place himself inside the clique are mostly unsuccessful. From the parties, dinners, chatter and drug abuse, Bateman never seems to quite 'slot' himself into the clique. He tells Detective Kimball that Allen was "part of that whole Yale thing", while he himself went to Harvard. Bateman tries to describe a social structure where Yale, Princeton and Harvard all collide to create the amoeba-like social suction of the 'yuppie scum'. He places Allen in "that whole Yale thing" while discussing with

Kimball to both leave Allen, himself and his knowledge of Allen in some mysterious territory. The ambiguity of “Yale thing” makes sure it stays exclusive, so as to not invite Kimball in for some small talk of top-notch academia and into the Yuppie world. Bateman while certainly not belonging to the clique completely, attempts to keep certain people out of his circle.

What truly defines the clique, in my opinion, is their approach to women. Bateman, Bryce and others have an incredibly misogynistic approach. They belittle them, talk about their dresses and faces rather than careers, lead them on with money and discuss them like cattle. One of Bateman’s friends even jokes “There are no girls with good personalities”, with the clique all high-fiving and laughing about it. They talk about how a good girl knows how to keep their “dumb fucking mouth shut”, that the only girls with “good personalities” are “ugly chicks”, to which another of Bateman’s comrades agrees - “absolutely” - without noticing the irony. They themselves have zero personality, nodding along to the same opinion and women abuse that they all share. In fact, when Bateman strays from the path and discusses Ed Gein, who the clique takes to be a maître d', the rest of the group looks disgusted. Their talk isn’t that much different from social murder though.

Their ignorance when it comes to women, and general issues around women, is amplified when contrasted with Bateman’s speech very early on in the film when he discusses “issues”, “rights” and, indeed, female empowerment. Bryce and others laugh at the rant, to which Bateman just silently sits there. Bateman does seem to, at the very least secretly, have a much more liberal attitude. He may only “fit in” to their opinions when he deems it necessary, when some part of his deep psychology is in parallel with the others’. The very existence of the clique, and their attitudes towards women, unravels one of the film’s main criticisms; that Patrick Bateman is, at the end of the day, completely distant in every aspect. That he is emotionally void and, as a protagonist, there is zero audience relation. The key to any ‘great film’, in theory, is a protagonist or set of characters that generate sympathy or connection with the audience, it’s why *Star Wars* works so well and why *The Godfather* does too. The tragedy of a character, or the heroic journey of a character, can invite the audience in given that the main character(s) have qualities that we, quite simply, like and affiliate ourselves with. Bateman possesses none of the typical qualities of your usual Han Solo, but neither does the clique. The clique, if anything, does more to alienate the audience than Bateman’s own psychopathic rushes of violent indulgence. Bateman is the one who serves as somewhat of an antithesis to the clique’s proud ignorance, displaying some sense of intelligence throughout the film and, instead of completely nodding to their trends, chooses to still show himself as unique.

The film’s psychological destruction of Bateman does call into question the true intentions when it comes to the design of the protagonist. Bateman’s social attitudes and fairly liberal opinions, peppered throughout the film, do make him easily accessible

to the audience. His psychological torture, social alienation and eventual descent into psychological damnation, or at the very least psyche stagnation, paint him as a figure that is seemingly destroyed by the world. The film's political agenda may be somewhat infused with its psychological commentary, on how killing and violence can destroy a man; how the pursuit of the Wall Street lifestyle will breakdown a business suit wearer. Like *Macbeth* and so many other great dramas, *American Psycho* destroys its own protagonist as a means of ambiguity. Whether or not we are to relate to Patrick Bateman is irrelevant by the end, he has not changed. He remains completely the same; he has achieved "no catharsis". He might as well be dead. In the eyes of the film world, the cliques, who exhibit no worries or anxieties or inner mental turmoil, escape the events of the story without injury. The film, however, throws Bateman's entire psyche and existence into ambiguity; he only exists as "an idea". If Bateman is meant to be relatable in the tiniest aspects, then destroying him, by the end, serves as a point of reflection. The audience's connection, sympathies and allegiances are called into question by the ambiguity of the ending, and the clique doesn't change alongside Bateman. They still remain completely ignorant, misogynist and self-absorbed. The clique and Bateman share the same damnation, but only some of them take pleasure in it.

Bateman's friends are evidently ignorant when it comes to gender, but they're incredibly ignorant when it comes to some basic intelligence. For Princeton and Harvard men, they don't exactly 'get' a lot of things. In the 'drugs' scene, Bateman says "I don't think dyslexia is a virus" while Bryce tells him that "we don't know that". This may be prodding at the AIDs scare, which is mentioned in the film, and the sudden freefall of fear in young, male professionals who had no idea what a sexually transmitted disease was. Patrick's clique are proven further ignorant by their brash male vanity, one literally shouts "CAN YOU KEEP IT DOWN I'M TRYING TO DO DRUGS" and blaming the "faggot" in the "next stall" for stopping him from doing so. Bryce, amongst all the other know-nothings, seems utterly ignorant of his place. The whole clique does drugs, women and all sorts of indulgences surrounded by other groups though. There is a whole collection of ignorance and male narcissism.

Politically, the clique also doesn't seem that knowledgeable. They joke about how "Gorbachev is downstairs" and talk about Reagan at the end, but they're otherwise without any real politics. They don't argue, they merely just get on with their 'Yuppie scum' ways.

The entire ending is incredibly chaotic in how it pits Patrick's fall into numbness while also maintaining the image of the clique. There is no change or sudden epiphany within them; if anything they betray any amount of progression. In the final scene, one of his friends simply dismisses Reagan as a liar, who covers up himself with lies to deny the truth. Whether or not this is trying to parallel with our Patrick or not is debatable, but it's interesting to notice that Bateman disagrees. Kooijman and Tarja Laine argue in

their essay; "In the final scene of American Psycho, entitled "No Catharsis" on the DVD edition, a connection to the "real" world is temporarily established through the television speech by President Ronald Reagan, talking about "mistrust and lies" in the Iran-Contra scandal. However, as Bateman's friends dismiss Reagan as a liar who covers up his "inside" with a false exterior, Bateman's voiceover takes over by stating that "inside doesn't matter." Patrick's view of psychology that the 'inside' of a person don't matter is juxtaposed against the belief of his clique. The clique sees the 'inside' as the truth, that everything else is a lie. Whether or not they 'live' this way is up for debate too. It's interesting to see how Bateman specifically betrays his colleagues' view of psychology, because it truly does set him apart. Whether or not he committed those awful murders and destruction is proved to be irrelevant in the face of the overwhelming psychosis of his mind, and perhaps of his colleagues too.

His friends do care in some places - "tough day at the office?" - but they're otherwise these careless creatures who just bash up things. They call Reagan a "harmless old codger", but his "inside" is black. The clique argues that "some guys are just born cool", that there is a pre-determined social structure. We are all born into our grandeur or decay. Bateman's friends view their very lifestyle as a birthright, and yet, as much as I write about their hideousness, they do notice the threats to their lifestyle. They do take caution when Bateman has outbursts that unravel his own mind, in his references to serial killers, and they co-operate and gossip around missing persons and murderers. The clique also seems relatively insecure in their position. Both at the beginning and end they spout jealousy about anyone who has reservations with "Dorsia", something Bateman lampoons in his 'murder' of Paul Allen - "try getting reservations at Dorsia now you fucking stupid bastard!" - and even at the end they feel their social perception is under threat. None of them want to have dinner but they'd "like to have reservations". It's all about the appearances, all about the superficial qualities and, if they rest for one moment, their place in the social ladder could come crashing down. It's why they take potshots at Bateman - "dork", "loser" - behind his back, because it makes them look cooler. It makes them part of the clique. The clique functions on fear, birthrights, attitudes and ignorance. Their psychology is just as interesting in exploring as Bateman's is, and their true 'villainy' is interesting to show the film's true strength.

The clique of Bateman is some collection of 1980s exaggerated caricatures, and yet they're still proven interesting. Like many other 'groups' of the film, they act as external barometers and moral compasses for us to look at for guidance in exploring the world. Bateman may be a monster, but he may be the least monster in the picture.

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## (II:II) LOWER CLASS

Aside from showing off the classless high class, *American Psycho* also explores the thinking behind the lower class 'fodder' that Bateman comes across. His treatment of the lower classes, and their reactions to his demeanour, reveal some very juicy parallels to the protagonist. As with the clique, the characters around Bateman tell us as much about the protagonist as he does himself.

Bateman's dealings with his laundryfolk reveal a little bit about his viciousness. They react with fear to his "kill you" threat, with the language barrier obfuscating their true response. Bateman's mitigation of the bloodied shirt is that it is "cranberry juice". The scene with the Laundromat in particular is very crucial in arguing whether or not Bateman is actually a murderer or slowly sliding into a fictional world of psychological decay. The reaction of the laundryfolk is far away from the female bartender near the start of the picture, who is unmoved by Bateman's "play around with your blood". As unearthed in Section One, Bateman seems to only have these moments of social illness only when a mirror is present, a painting of the true self, and here in the laundromat there are no real 'mirrors' aside from a few reflections in the window. What we see is a Bateman brandishing his cigar and Wall Street champagne-tongued throat. The Asian folks' reactions to his demonic speech most definitely imbue an element of truth to seeing Bateman as a psychopath. Whether or not it is "cranberry juice" on the shirt is debatable, personally I see Bateman as having lied to himself and deluded himself into this nightmarish horror fantasy with himself as the prime villain, hence why *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* features in the background later on. Christian Bale argues simply that "many of the scenes" are simply "Bateman's fantasies, lead in his own movie; porno movie, action movie, horror movie"[1] Bateman attempts to live out a fantasy beyond 1980s male vanity, and the lower class dwellers are perhaps simple bystanders and victims in the whole affair.

One of the more interesting set-pieces showcasing Bateman's bloodlust is the murder of the homeless man and his dog. The scene takes place in some alleyway that Bateman strolls through. He happens upon "Al" and gives him horrible advice – "get a job Al"- to which Al seems to take positively; "you are so kind mister" "you're a kind man". He pleads with Bateman that "you gotta help me", even after Bateman has constantly tried to push on the issue of why Al is unemployed, not why he is homeless. Bateman tells him that "I don't have anything in common with you" and murders the man, to the screams of his dog, and then stomps on the canine to end it all.

Interestingly, Bateman takes the murder weapon out of his suitcase – proclaiming "you know what a fucking loser you are"- and *then* kills Al, who thinks he is about to be given aid by Bateman. Bateman's treatment of this vagrant and his pet may shatter any audience sympathies with Patrick, and, moreso, lead us to identify more with the lower class individuals that populate the film. In the spectrum of the film's class-

based hierarchy, Al and his dog happen to belong to the bottom of the pile. He is a “loser”, we don’t know exactly why, and he and his dog die without any real reason. Bateman kills them with a suitcase, just as Wall Street, if the metaphor is correct, killed American lifestyles.

Some extreme right-wing commentary might celebrate Bateman’s clean sweeping of the homeless problem, but the film likely has Bateman perform this action to confirm his madness while also engineering a subtle political message. We, the public, have come to expect great things from the business world and the lifestyle attached to the suitcase-holders, and yet they return the favour by killing our own livelihood. Such commentary is especially much more poignant in our post-Recession world. *American Psycho* uses its lower class dwellers as a means to advance political message while reaffirm our connection to characters such as Bateman. We’re less inclined to sympathize with a guy who stomps on dogs.

What intrigues me, however, is Bateman’s absolute refusal to identify with Al. He outright states “I don’t have anything in common with you”, and yet Bateman does actually seem to have some things in common with the homeless. He is routinely jealous of his superiors’ apartments, he is told that his place is “nice, very nice” by Detective Kimball, but a prostitute says “this is nicer than your other place” when they indulge in a night at Paul Allen’s. Bateman also doesn’t reveal his childhood or other pieces of his true home. In fact, Bateman’s numbness at the end might hint to a sudden realization of true homelessness. He cannot find home not in the literal sense but in the extended metaphorical sense; he cannot identify with his own humanity.

“I have all the characteristics of a human being-- flesh, blood, skin, hair-- but not a single, clear, identifiable emotion, except for greed and disgust.”

Bateman defines ‘emotion’ as being the absolute characteristic of being a human being. This likely includes empathy, compassion etc, traits which he does not show in his ‘dealing’ with homeless Al, nor does he really show any ‘human’ element throughout most of the picture. Bateman still has something “in common” with Al, he has no true family or home to speak of.

Our Patrick is still complimented throughout the film by the lower classes. As said, Kimball compliments him of his housing – “nice, very nice” – while he is also told, mid-massage, “what beautiful skin you have Mister Bateman”. This capitalizes on one of the earlier monologues, in which Patrick tells us that he doesn’t use “alcohol” in his aftershave, given it “makes you look old”. The external world compliments Bateman’s own vision of himself, which is a rare happenstance in the film. The lower classes, the people under the crème de la crème, see the “beautiful” just as much as Bateman does, perhaps just as much the clique does. One could most definitely argue that they fall prey to the same superficially-obsessed mindsets that the main groups of the picture do too. They only see what’s on the surface. Perhaps they, like Bateman, see that “inside doesn’t matter”. Jean and other characters, and the stories and talk they tell, however

suggest that the film has mixed messages. Some of the lower class may only see the surface, but others see human emotion, memories and love as ultimately more worthwhile than pristine skin.

It's difficult to pinpoint who exactly 'belongs' to the lower classes. The homeless Al certainly does, as do the laundryfolk, but the waiters and detectives don't completely suit the 'lower class' group. They are, however, in the same space as Bateman's Wall Street clique. In comparison to Patrick's millions, those folks are certainly lower class.

The waiters at Evelyn's party are, funnily enough, dressed as Elves. Bateman is given antlers mid-scene while the waiters carry nibbles around the room. As 'Elves' they perhaps express the production line background of the film's treatment of humanity, or perhaps they are dressed as Elves to establish the hierarchy. They are below the big chief, the jolly old Bateman and company. Their only purpose is to serve.

Other waiters actually have some degree of power. A speech by a waiter, giving details of gourmet food, actually opens the film to begin with. Later on we have Bateman, trying to get Paul Allen all fed up and drunk, who shoots down a waiter who simply asks "would you like to hear the specials". The waiters, however, are given slightly more power past the 'Elves' incident, they actually cackle and laugh when Bateman tries to grab reservations at Dorsia. The very idea of a 'lower class' laughing up at a Wall Street executive, a shoe shiner cackling at 'God' (to Bateman at least) is near social blasphemy. Or at least if you wind history back a few hundred years. Bateman being insulted by someone much lower class than he just amplifies his frustration at his own self, and we can sort of see why he displays such rage around any issue of Dorsia – "Try getting reservations at Dorsia now!" – the entire restaurant represents rejection and frustration to Bateman, all caused by someone of a 'lower class'.

Indeed, lower class folk often inspire change or rage in Bateman. The waiters, homeless and laundryfolk all reveal certain pieces of Bateman's own psyche. Their own fear is interesting, to show how real they see the threat of Bateman is, but their own independent thoughts, their outright dismissal of Bateman away from Dorsia, is interesting. Bateman's need to "fit in" is typified by his want to belong to the social ladder, and that happens to include fancy dinners at Dorsia. The psychology of the 'lower classes' is somewhat mixed. They may be in fear of Bateman in one instance, absolute laughter at his suggestion of reservations in another, be taken back by his 'kindness' and yet their flip-flopping response still holds a moral compass for the film. While we may not identify with the Wall Street plastic folk, we can certainly identify with the plight of a waiter doing his job or a homeless guy just trying to get by. There is indeed some emotional material to hold on to in the film, in the form of the people 'below' Patrick's own wealth and status. Their varied reactions to Bateman, throughout the film, may be signposts for our own reactions.

Detective Kimball is worthy of lengthy analysis. He shows off some clear public perceptions of Patrick's clique. He's the one who says that Patrick's clique is "nice, very

nice”, a compliment that Patrick takes. There’s another instance of familiarity, with music, that Patrick dismisses much later on in the film. Kimball seems to be this nice, gentle and noble person trying to do his job, and he does indeed show us a window into exactly how these people are perceived outside of the ‘clique’.

It’s interesting to see Kimball’s absolute refusal of a drink when seeing Patrick for the first time. He is actually taken back by the whole ordeal and respects Patrick’s time – “thanks for your time Mr Bateman” – and perhaps his position, and “Mr”. Kimball really does appreciate Bateman’s time, he says that “I know how busy you guys can get”. It’s interesting because, well, I don’t think we ever see Bateman and company ever actually doing any work in the film. For all we know they have fancy lunches, ogle the waitresses and make awful commentary. Nepotism is actually directly mentioned in the film, “your father practically owns the company”. The clique seems to be passed on, hereditary decadence, and yet Kimball says that they’re still “busy”. This is the appearance that they give to the public, but the film examines the truth. As much as it rips apart some eighties caricatures, it also delves into the psychology of the yuppie lifestyle, and the violent effects that it can have on the human mind and metropolitan mindset. Kimball may be trying to appear much more grateful for Bateman’s time, but some of his jokes and reactions to Bateman show that he may know more than we think. Harron asked Willem Dafoe to portray Kimball’s reactions in three ways; knowing Bateman had committed the murders, not knowing Bateman had killed and being utterly unsure. Harron apparently mixed all of Dafoe’s takes to leave it ambiguous to give the audience an uncomfortable feeling and response to his character[2].

Harron confirms on the DVD commentary [3] that “We never see him do any work.” Given that she wanted “to stress Bateman's complete disconnection from the world around him, and so when he's left alone, the mask drops, there's nothing there, he doesn't know what to do, he has no role”. The lower class sees Bateman as holding up a job, but after everything has affected Bateman, he has no “role” left, he has nothing. “Inside doesn’t matter” because there isn’t any inside to begin with. He is as lost as the homeless.

Kimball may, however, show a little bit of bemusement when it comes to certain aspects of the yuppie life. Patrick mentions something about the Yacht club, to which Kimball asks, and it seems he had no prior knowledge, “he had a yacht?” Bateman answers that “No, he just hung out there”, “Hung out”. The Yacht Club is just a status symbol, used as a social waiver to show absolute superiority. Much as the clique isn’t hungry but shows up to fancy dinners, they also don’t sail but go to boat clubs. Kimball’s bemusement may confirm some element that the public, in the film, sees some fault in the vanity of the Yuppies. Kimball also confirms another element of the Yuppie lifestyle, and reaffirms one of the film’s core themes of mistaken identity. Not only does the clique mistake one another for one another, the lower class seems to be too. Kimball tries to stitch together the truth, questioning the mistakes that people make – “He mistook a

Herbert Ainsworth” (for Paul Allen). In the dinner scene, Kimball has asked Halberstram by that point, who believes Bateman was partying with him at a club called Atlantis while Bateman was actually ‘murdering’ Paul Allen. A small IMDB analysis also asserts something similar; “Mistaken identity is now working on different two levels; Allen's mistaking of Bateman for Halberstram, and Halberstram's mistaking of someone else for Bateman.”[2]

Kimball’s role as ‘detective’ should lead us to believe that he is the arbiter of truth, and yet he finds none of it. He simply says that maybe “people just disappear” before saying “Thanks for your time Mr Bateman”. Kimball’s role, as a lower class dweller, cannot possibly ever achieve its goal given the social secrecy of the clique. The film presents us a world in which every role, no matter how ‘small’, is in fact ‘false’. The masseuse sees only beauty, the laundryfolk cannot clean cranberry, the waiters are shrugged off and the detectives can’t find any lick of truth.

Kimball still reveals some important pieces of Bateman’s own insecurity. He stresses Bateman’s need to recall where he was at a specific time to “make my job a lot easier” before trying to make chit chat. He talks, himself, about “Huey Lewis and the News”, and the ‘new’ album he just grabbed. Light reflects off the album case and into Patrick’s eyes at this moment. It gives him a glowing look and he seems, at the moment, absolutely disgusted with himself for liking something that someone of a lower class also likes. Bateman lies that he’s not into that kind of music, Kimball says “to each his own”. Bateman’s lie is amplified when we consider earlier that Bateman pushed away his music under his desk; he is insecure about his own music tastes. This is his mask, and yet he can’t wear it in the eyes of someone who wants to find the truth. Bateman does however conform to the ‘lower class’ Kimball in the dinner scene with him. Patrick seemingly doesn’t eat his food, but if you watch closely he follows Kimball’s actions perfectly. Kimball is the first one to salt his food, and then Pat salts his own. We never see Bateman eat, but perhaps sub-consciously he follows the actions of the person opposite. The ‘lower class’, once more, unveils certain pieces of Bateman’s mind we might not usually see.

The Detective still has absolutely inconclusive finds. He finds the evidence is based on things that people “couldn’t be sure” about. He then simply says that he thinks Allen “went a little nutso”, and, in a beat of comically dramatic irony, he laughs that it’s “ridiculous” “to think one of his friends would’ve killed him for no reason whatsoever”, Bateman doesn’t even laugh at first. Only the audience is really clued into the truth. The ‘lower classes’ may be ultimately ignorant to some of the true violence of the clique, but this may be for comic effect.

Misdirection and mistaken identity carry further. During Bateman’s action-film fantasy, after he tries to feed a cat into an ATM machine, a hotel security worker asks “Burning the midnight oil, Mister Smith?” This whole sequence is ripped straight out of Bateman’s imagination, and his subconscious may be imbuing the cliques’ trait of

mistaken identity on to one who doesn't belong to the clique. Alternatively, it could instead be that everyone in this world, even people who don't exist, is guilty of the same mistakes. Bateman, in true Bateman style, goes through a revolving door and takes time to swing back and shoot a janitor in the face. His absolute destruction, throughout the film, of those of a 'lower class' confirm something: they present a threat.

*American Psycho* may be a dig into the head of a Wall Street male who slowly crumbles into numbed ruin, but it most definitely makes a good incision into everyone below Bateman's class, for the benefit of exploring the core character.

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## (II:III) WOMEN

It would be easy to call *American Psycho* a 'feminist film'. It is directed by a female, it employs a number of characters who speak misogynistic lingo and its only true genuine characters that attract sympathy happen to be women. Bret Easton Ellis actually outright identifies Harron's role, saying that "the movie made by a feminist didn't hurt" the film's reception[1]. At the same time, it's easy to call *American Psycho* a film that's strictly about inflating the male ego, a psychological thriller and also easy to call it just about anything. *Psycho* offers us a world that's been removed from emotion, removed from reality, and the women of the picture are, if we're being quite frank, still some of the last true human beings alive.

That isn't true of all of them. Evelyn is largely still trapped within the superficial mindset (though she evolves), as are some other female characters, but Jean, Courtney, the prostitutes and others, the vast majority of the female faces, display genuine compassion and humanity throughout the film.

Indeed, our more sympathetic opinion of the females may be shaped by the treatment of the males of the picture, particularly Patrick. Patrick orders Jean to "not wear that outfit again" and that "you're prettier than that" at the start of the film. As much as Patrick is a multi-layered character, even the film's opening establishes a sense that Patrick's traits are much grander in scope, he still resorts to some near-insults on Jean. We see a world in which girls are told to be prettier than they already are and that they should dress exactly as their male superiors order them to be. It's easy to see why our sympathies can side with the likes of Jean so easily in a world of such brash male vanity.

Evelyn, however, doesn't seem that much of a complex character on the outset. She talks about marriage in casual conversation, to Patrick's annoyance, and concentrates on the smallest of details. She, like Patrick, cares about her place in the social ladder. She says that, of the wedding, "We'll have to get someone to videotape it". The object of the 'videotape' recurs as both an image of psychological retreat ("I have to return some videotapes") and sexual exploitation (Patrick tapes his 'time' with the prostitutes). Evelyn's use of 'videotape' keeps it grounded in its purpose, and yet she still needs someone to tape it, to show it around. She is quite obsessed with appearances. Evelyn does become more complex of a character as the film goes on but we're still shown, throughout, that she may be just as superficial as the swathes of males in the picture.

Courtney, on the other hand, has a character that is mixed. She has a reliance on "psychiatric drugs", she's having an affair with Patrick, he notes how lovely looking she is and tries to condescend her with couples-language. He calls her "pumpkin" over and over, to which Courtney says "Stop calling me pumpkin" in an act of protest. Courtney's psychological issues, she takes drugs and drinks a lot, apparently extend to

some incredibly poignant issues. She cries out that “I just want a child”, “just two perfect children”, channelling some Daisy-Buchanan-like regret. She even tries to start a serious conversation with Patrick – “can we talk?”- But Patrick simply tells her that “You look... marvellous. There's nothing to say.” Patrick’s one-dimensional thinking, in this scene at least, keeps Courtney’s feelings and true anxieties from being expressed. She will be confined to marrying Luis, who, as far as we know, is a homosexual. Her treatment at the hands of Bateman confirms our sympathies side with her.

Evelyn’s characteristics barely evolve in the Christmas scene. She flaunts her “Vietnamese pot-bellied pig”, saying “they make such darling pets”, only shut up by Patrick’s falsely playful “mistletoe alert”. The very notion that a female character is ‘shut up’ by a romantic gesture is, arguably, one of the film’s slight missteps. *Psycho*, however, does often use tropes – the one-dimensional madness of killers, sexual fantasies, stupidity, and comic relief – in order to explore characters. Evelyn’s ‘giving in’ to Patrick’s false gesture shows that their relationship is so strained given it has lost all romantic qualities. She isn’t shut up by the romance of it, but by the surprise that Patrick is even bothering. This is arguably where the complexity begins in Evelyn’s character and her approach to Patrick. She most definitely has a “boy next door” fantasy with Patrick, any chance of living out the fantasy she takes.

The prostitutes, on paper, should be a simple showcase of the film’s horridness or backwards thinking, and yet they’re able to undermine a lot of Bateman’s characters and exploit his insecurities. They don’t really say things – “no”, “not really” – in the first sexual encounter, even looking at each other in a moment of fear when Bateman invites them into his “invisible touch”. They are there, however, to also poke at Bateman’s brain without even speaking. As mentioned in the Bateman section, he discusses “monogamy and commitment” while looking into the eyes of Christie. This is probably a moment of ironic comedy, or perhaps truth in which Bateman may be displaying his true tendencies underneath his Yuppie skin. The prostitutes however reveal Bateman’s sexual psychopathy and absolute narcissism, he isn’t absorbed by their experience but by his fulfilment of sexual fantasy, he becomes the male lead in a porno movie, and so chooses to ogle his muscles and film it all for his excitement. The prostitutes unravel the very myth of male superiority in the film; it’s all one big self-indulgent ruse.

Courtney does something similar; she opens up the faults of Bateman too. When she attempts the serious conversation, she also tries to find some quiet space after their sexual endeavour. She asks “will you call me before Easter”, and holds a teddy bear after having sex. The use of the teddy bear might be trying to pair some childhood longing within Courtney that she wishes for a more innocent relationship or something simpler, less tainted, with Patrick. With Patrick’s dismissal of seriousness, “there’s nothing to say”, it does seem that men, for the most part, are devoid of any meaning or human quality in the film. *Psycho*’s political purpose is fulfilled by how it uses its female characters, to show the lack of qualities in its male characters as well as showcasing

their own abundance of characteristics. Evelyn soon takes on serious thinking around Bateman's relationship, the prostitutes deconstruct Bateman's male vanity and Courtney's innocent soul-searching meets Jean's own independent search for something more than the Yuppie scum on offer.

The film, more or less, shows its psychology of its female characters through quite explicit means. Throughout, they speak much more poignantly and more meaningful utterances than their male counterparts and they even say some pretty culturally relevant things. One model tells Patrick "You think I'm dumb don't you", and that "you think all models are dumb". Someone tells Patrick, however, something quite interesting; "there's something sweet about you." It reminds us that Patrick, for all of his one-dimensional valuing of females, still has some ounce of heart and care about feminism, more than his male colleagues. Of course, some of the females view everyone in one-dimensional ways. Evelyn almost solemnly identifies (in a deleted scene)[2] that "everybody's good looking", that there's almost zero point to Bateman's want for "breast implants" and a materialist world that has already achieved everything. Bateman's take on the whole materialist perspective on women is mixed. We're reminded of his "promoting equal rights for women" rant earlier in the film, which may or may not be his true interior. Bateman, even feigning care perhaps, still displays more humanity than most people. The female characters also uplift Bateman above any other males. It would be tough to label Bateman a feminist 'anti-hero' but in some he can be quite "sweet".

Bateman's entire façade more or less crumbles under Jean. She is looking, perhaps, for something more serious in a relationship. She doesn't use "nice" or simple language to describe Patrick's apartment, Jean instead uses the classical "elegant". She even tells Pat that "I don't want to ruin your willpower", of his diet, and yet she's left oblivious from the Bateman routine. Patrick makes a joke about "Ted Bundy" and his dog, called "Lassie", which seems ripped from a conversation with a clique member, to which Jean seems oblivious to. Jean's bemusement mirrors our own; we have no idea what Bateman is talking about. While Jean is trying to get serious – "Have you ever wanted to make someone happy?" – Patrick still cares about cleanliness, "Put it in the carton". Yet Patrick is pushed to still say that he's looking for something "meaningful".

Female characters often unravel all meaning of the male characters in the film, to the point in which their entire roles seem irrelevant. Patrick tells one model, in a nightclub, that he's into "murders and executions", she mishears and tells him that most guys she sees who are into "mergers and acquisition" don't enjoy it. The 'mistaken identity' theme returns, and it is interesting to note that this presents some threat to Patrick Bateman. He is a killer, arguably crying out for help, and no-one can seem to be able to hear him at any point throughout the film.

*American Psycho*, in how it portrays its female characters, is most probably feminist. Mary Harron says herself "'I think American Psycho is very feminist. It's easy

to believe that because the character is a misogynist, the story is too. But, it was obvious to me there was something going on beneath the horror.”[3]

Evelyn interrupts the possible Jean-Bateman affair by stating “your mine” and her “boy next door”. Much as Bateman tries to play out his fetishist pornography fantasies, so too does Evelyn, possibly, try to live out her romantic-comedy-cuddly-couple fantasy. This ruins the moment with Jean, and by now we have some kind of connection with her character. Her ability to get Patrick to talk about something more “meaningful”, and the very fact that he spares her, out of compassion perhaps, signposts our growing confidence in identifying strongly with Jean. Much as female characters reveal traits in male characters, they are also independent vessels for us to see the film through more ‘grounded’ eyes. The big reveal of Bateman’s sketchbook takes place from Jean’s POV, dovetailing our relationships with Jean and Patrick perfectly.

Patrick’s weird relationships and fetishes are revealed in his next encounter with the prostitute; the meeting of Christie and Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a long-time friend of Pat’s, is introduced to Christie as Patrick’s cousin “from France”. Both mistaken identity and superficiality can be found in Elizabeth – “I’m at Paul Norman’s” “you look really familiar”, “anyway Surf Bar sucks now” – reaffirming traits that belong to Bateman, but Christie actually puts his confidence down, remarking “this is nicer than your other apartment”. The female characters’ abilities to unmask male vanity, pride and masculine ego is possibly the film’s greatest achievement, besides Bateman’s character development, and places it most definitely in feminist territory. While the females are socially unequal to their male counterparts, in *Psycho*’s society, they are more human than them to begin with. Patrick’s fetishes reach much weirder levels when he suggests Elizabeth and Christie engage in intercourse, which involves his ‘cousin’. He’s even called “a lunatic” before, as is the usual case, they all have rumpy pump.

The ability to undermine Patrick’s male ego and confidence extends to his most proud accomplishments too. His belief in his own objects, his apartment, lifestyle, hair products etc., is blocked down by both male and female. Arguably, however, Patrick’s intellectual pieces are also shot down. He remarks, in length, about the lessons behind Whitney Houston’s song, and yet Christie and Elizabeth laugh at his music critique, “you actually listen to Whitney Houston?” This may be a question on the audience’s lips too, how can such a killer still love some great love songs, when he himself has zero appreciation for true emotion. The female characters of the film display the most emotion, while criticizing and laughing at male vanity. They also serve as much more grounded points of view for us to latch on to in a sea of superficiality.

By the end of their relationship, Evelyn does become a more well-rounded character. She pleads “what’s wrong” with Bateman, though does appear somewhat blind to the shattering of their bond, “now are we having coffee”, and even attempts to rationalize it a bit. She says “my friends are you friends”, that “I really don’t think it’d work”. Patrick, adamant on his decision, wipes his hand and says “you can have them”.

Evelyn's own treatment of Patrick; that he is trapped in the fact that they share friends, is viewing the world through a series of social circles, but her final few bits show some truth. She talks about "our past" and tells Patrick "you're inhuman", and we're reminded of Bateman's treatment of her throughout the picture, he at one point calls her his "supposed fiancé." He treats her essentially like a child, who is attempting to fulfil some kind of romantic-comedy prophecy. Evelyn, however, identifies that the two have a "past", they have shared experiences, something which Bateman can't simply understand. Bateman's treatment of Evelyn is arguably more barbaric than any of his imaginary killings, given that he tells her to stop "making this scene".

One of the weirder interpretations is that the female characters may have a degree of supernatural power. The white, hot bloom of Paul Allen's apartment, that Patrick returns to expecting a body and death, and the general uncanny presentation suggests something is afoot. The cold, mechanical dialogue of the woman, "there was no ad in the *Times*", "don't make any trouble, please", suggests some kind of manipulation. It all seems too perfect, that Bateman's murders have been swept under the carpet, perhaps, by this one woman. In the book, it's speculated that she tidies up Bateman's mess in order to make a quick buck in selling the property. The film's eerie soundtrack, the dichotomous clothing of the character and her general language all create, possibly, a different interpretation.

Her possibly supernatural origin undermines both the sanity of Bateman and the sanity of the entire fabric of the film. Throughout this scene, as far as my own repeated viewing can tell, this woman never blinks, even while telling Bateman "don't come back". This could well be some external force giving Bateman another chance, and this is after his massive confession. Bateman is invited in to some chance at redemption, perhaps, by a female character. The absolute crushing of all of his power is complex by the film's end.

As his secretary Gene flicks through his sketchboard, and as Bateman sits down for the film's final bits, we are left with a story which treats his female characters with, ultimately, a big degree of respect. Mary Harron was, supposedly, chosen to dispel all feminist criticism of the work, James Franco agrees: "I would imagine that selecting a female director (albeit a great one) to helm the project did much to dispel any potential criticisms of sexist sensationalism." [4] The psychology of its female characters is overwhelmingly more complex than their male counterparts. The male 'clique' is mostly exclusively used to unravel the character of Bateman, whereas the female characters exercise a degree of humanity, compassion and genuine emotions throughout. *American Psycho* is most probably a feminist feature, and yet it doesn't seem overwhelmingly pretentious or critical or intellectual, in some respects. All characters are perhaps bystanders to Patrick Bateman and the absolute menace that he indulges in throughout.

The female characters are, like the majority of the film, still tied to the greater political message underneath the film's simple crooked social critique.

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## SECTION III LAND OF CONFUSION

For a film as psychologically dense as *American Psycho* to end on Ronald Reagan's Iran-Contra speech is fairly odd. For a film like *American Psycho*, however, oddity is its bread and butter. The film's politics have been debated on, and its true political heart has attracted much debate. Main argument stems around the reasoning behind having a sharp examination of 1980s yuppie culture with the new millennia around the corner. I fundamentally believe *American Psycho* is a deconstruction of the national psychology of the 1980s and how false of a fable that the Reagan era truly was.

In this section, I will explore Reaganism and the mentalities that come alongside it. The psychological poison that the clique on to can be most probably found in the climate of Reaganomics and the heat of Wall Street banking. I'll also take a hammer to see if the film has any judgements or commentary on the era of the Cold War climax, whether or not the true 'victory' is indeed a misnomer in American history, according to *Psycho*. Finally we'll examine the modern American dream, the very myth of America, and ending with the war on drugs, a politicized campaign to rid America of its destructive addictions that deconstructs the very idea of the film's 'reality'.

This section is about the great 'Land of Confusion' (Genesis) and the truth behind the politics and social commentary of *American Psycho*.

**(III-I) "HARMLESS OLD CODGER"** Bateman, by the film's end, seems numb to any commentary on Reagan himself. Inside doesn't matter. Truthfully, however, the film shows how the very ideological culture of Reaganism has practically killed the American lifestyle, reducing it to a thin superficial veneer.

**(III-II) COLD WAR** By the American annals of the right-wing, Ronald Wilson Reagan is typified as the great red, white and blue hero who brought the crushing blow to a decades long ideological and cultural conflict with the Soviet Union. *American Psycho* has this conflict largely as background noise, though its commentary is well worth discussion.

**(III-III) THE MYTH OF AMERICA** The great American dream has been a proud setpiece of American literature for so very long. *American Psycho* shows a corrupted dream, a dead dream, and its effects on society and psychology.

**(III-IV) WAR ON DRUGS** The great declaration of 'healing' America by extinguishing its decay and crumbling addictions is a piece that *Psycho* quite cleverly explores.

## **(III:I) “HARMLESS OLD CODGER”**

Ronald Wilson Reagan was perhaps personally responsible for the ideological renaissance of right-wing thinking throughout the 1980s. His policies have divided historians and yet he still seems to hold a special place in the American consciousness. For better or worse, Reagan will be remembered. Whether or not he was a gift or the devil himself is something that *Psycho* wrestles with. Even as Bryce in the final moments tells us that his exterior is a “harmless old codger” and how “inside” he’s one big liar, we’re led to believe that Reagan may be directly responsible for the wealth of the Yuppie scum we’ve become familiar with throughout the film.

Even in the film’s opener, we’re treated to absolute opulence of the Yuppie culture, their dinner and drinks were only five-hundred and seventy dollars. They even say “five-seventy” without even batting an eyelid. Their absolute wealth, disrespect and intolerance is made all the more weird when considering some of Bateman’s solitary statements, that he himself is “only illusory”, that “there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman.” Bateman addresses the idea of human being material goods. While his intelligence outshines his clique, the commentary behind all this suggests something more complex. Bateman presents both the nod and antithesis to the Reaganist fantasies that we see the clique live out throughout the film. No doubt, their Yuppie lifestyles are of direct result of Reaganomics and the enforcement of trickle-down economics.

Bateman however brings up some interesting points when it comes to relationships and the Reagan society. Evelyn wants them to “get married” but Patrick tells her “I can’t take the time off work”. As discussed before, we never exactly see Bateman and his comrades actually work, if they actually do anything besides glutton and spend, and Evelyn’s sharp “your father practically owns the company” points to the fact that this decadent society is operated within the mechanics of nepotism. Perhaps Bateman feels constricted and defined by the role he has been imposed, and that, at the climax of the American dream, there is no little to be found than there is at the bottom of the great social chain.

The clique flippantly talks about incredibly destructive events. Bryce talks about the “massacres in Sri Lanka” and how “like the Sikhs are like killing like”. Bateman is more reserved in his comment, and his social rant involves a need to “end apartheid for one”. Reagan largely took a neutral role to the apartheid regime, with his best buddy Margaret Thatcher branding Nelson Mandela a “terrorist”. Bateman’s speech explicitly addresses the faults of a society drenched in Reagan fever, that everyone has a duty to “promote general social concern” and not “materialism”, to which Bryce nearly chokes on his drink. Nothing of value, however, is gained from this sole speech. Whether or not Bateman is being truly honest, his delivery suggests it is so, or whether he is playing liberal parody, within a satirical film no less, is left largely ambiguous. These men,

soaked in the fabric of Reagan's America, seem to be walking, corrupted contradictions themselves.

The very idea of "materialism", the pursuit of the golden future and the grand 'equal opportunity' promise that Reagan brought is largely cast aside by the film as a misnomer of American psychology. Patrick asks Dorsia "is it possible to reserve a table" to the absolute cackle of the folks on the other side of the phone. No matter Patrick's attempts, he resorts to stealing Paul Allen's identity and lifestyle, he can never shake the social stigma of "the dork" and "the loser", and his own materialist passion can never be resolved. The film outright suggests that no matter how far we try, we cannot equal happiness with the dollar; which outright strips Reagan's ideas of any relevancy.

There seems to be a few relics of the old world that pass by throughout the film. Almost as a joke, Patrick at one point seems bemused by thinking "is that Donald Trump's car". The Trump family themselves recur throughout the film as mistaken for someone else or whomever. The film may use the Trump family as a symbol of American achievement, and how the clique and American Yuppie treat them almost like famous ghosts that haunt the fancy halls. The Trump family stand as America's finest, and not even the wealthy Yuppies can find them. The Reagan policies which pushed the Trump Empire to its economic peak were the same that robbed of its own identity and humanity too; much of the same happens with Patrick.

Some more clever references are slightly hidden throughout the film. As a slight push of the elbow and a wink, the film has Evelyn cradle a "Vietnamese pot-bellied pig" around the Christmas party. The pig not only symbolizes the contradiction within American decadence, that it is both filthy as much as it is fancy, but perhaps also investigates the 'miracle man' of Ronald Reagan and how he has been able to inflict amnesia upon America's deepest war wounds. Evelyn says "Vietnamese" without anyone batting an eyelid or getting the least bit political, she even holds it around like a gift from the place. The pig shows us that as much as America wants to forget its darker past its wounds can't be healed by a simple miracle man; that we cannot brush our past underneath a clean carpet.

Patrick's murders can pretty much be seen as direct allegory for the grand banking system that allowed America to surge its way past a late-70s malaise and into the exceptionalism that it so 'rightfully' deserved. The financial system itself was a gift from Reagan, and the murders by Patrick (killing prostitutes, janitors, the homeless and rival businessmen) can be seen as showing the true violence that Reagan had inflicted upon the country. As James Franco argues, the "expertly crafted and choreographed murders are apt metaphors for the violence inflicted by the US's financial system in more insidious and subtle ways"[1]

The film itself seems to get very brave in how it subtly pokes and prods at the myth of Ronald Reagan. Patrick, mid-music critique, addresses a song by Genesis called 'Land of Confusion', which he takes to be a song that "addresses the problems of

abusive political authority.” The film’s use of the Iran-Contra (March, 1987) speech as a means to end itself show a cohesive argument. The authority that Reagan commands is being abused, and much as Colin’s artistry – “and I stress the word artist” – unwinds the problems of “abusive political authority”, so too does Harron’s artistry also unwind the problems of the same political authority. Harron presents Reagan as a contradiction: Bateman’s suits and swagger are reflected by Reagan’s silky-smooth demeanour; both ‘characters’ have much darker underbellies.

Indeed, the very attitude of the American Yuppies (and perhaps the American elite in general) is directly parodied. Bateman recalls seeing a musical called “Oh Africa, Oh Africa”, describing it as “a laugh riot”. The continent becomes a laughing stock, a place of great entertainment, for the Yuppie crowd. All of the film is constructed as a means to analyse the Yuppie kids and their cruel inhumanity, their infliction of financial violence upon the world. It’s less about the horrors of an individual and more about the horrors of an ideology, “there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman”. Christian Bale sees that the film was less about the “dark analysis of a serial killer” and more about “privileged young guys in the 80s”, that it was an “analysis of these yuppies” and “trust fund kids”, along with being direct “disturbing comment on men and violence and on capitalism”[2]

Patrick, a person who clearly says that “inside doesn’t matter and that “I’m in touch with humanity”, is more or less a direct incision into the very ‘character’ of Ronald Reagan and Reaganism itself. James Slone comments that “Patrick Bateman doesn’t represent the banality of 80s evil, but rather its vacuity. The culture of Reaganism, with its extreme greed and callous self-absorption” that it “took a destructive toll on the country as a”, he interestingly goes on to say that “With its perfectly succinct coda, “American Psycho” ingeniously suggests that one need not murder to be a psycho.”[3]

The eponymous *American Psycho* suggests a specific type of murderer, one belonging to that very continent. We can immediately assume that it means Patrick Bateman and his literal slaughtering but upon reflection we see the title as more of a role. ‘American Psycho’ can be applied to any one of the members of Patrick’s clique, who bring wrath and destruction to anyone who isn’t within their circle. They literally profit out of the destruction they inflict upon the world. Bateman’s joy, his bloodlust, “I killed Paul Allen and I liked it”, when translated, is the film making a deep, dark cut into the mythology of Ronald Reagan himself. As much as he brought wealth, it was at a cost, as much as he granted Yuppies the chance to enrich the world, they enriched themselves. *American Psycho* shows the absolute true darkness underneath the dirt of Reaganism and how truly harmful the “harmless old codger” was.

It is, largely, retroactive commentary. Obviously, the film deals with the very issue of the Reagan legacy. It uses the Yuppie lifestyle, Patrick’s murders and the flip-flopping genre (action flicks, horrors and pornographic fantasies) as props to deconstruct the fable of the Reagan administration.

The film's final scene is deserved of more close analysis. Bryce is bemused by "how can you be so fucking cool about it", with another clique member saying that "guys are just born cool I guess". Besides the absolute nepotism expressed, "your father practically owns the company", this moment shows that 'coolness' is false. That being a Yuppie, which is a part of the Reagan dreamworld, is false. The entire reality is much harsher. Yet, to Bateman, he sees that "inside doesn't matter" in the face of the thesis that inside does matter, to Bryce at least, Travis Vogan brilliantly summarises that "This final scene links Bateman's apparent schizophrenia to Ronald Reagan's image politics and seeming irreverence for the difference between image and reality." [4]

The marriage of Reagan's character with Bateman's own is explained further by Vogan, who goes on to say that "Bateman's seeming ability to get away with murder through the manufacturing and deployment of his image parallels" Reagan's own ability to "maintain public favour while being involved in scandals and helping create the highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression. "[4] Bateman's murder of Paul Allen is covered up by a property realtor who cleans up after him just so that she can sell it for a quick buck. His confession is taken as a bad joke. All of his explicit murdering are simply swept away, all Luis cares about is "where did you get their overnight bag" rather than what's inside. The lack of recognition is arguably what 'kills' Patrick Bateman in the end, that he cannot be remembered for any of his actions. That no-one cares about his actions. *American Psycho* addresses a world in which the violence of Reaganism is forgotten about and swept under the carpet because, historically, scandal and secrets and ignorance were indeed traded traits of the Reagan eighties. *Psycho* is directly historical allegory of the actions and aftermath of the Reagan sweep.

Bret Easton Ellis says of the story that, quite simply, "I thought it was anti-Reagan" [5]. Boiled down to its frankest point, *American Psycho* is indeed a story that unmask the myth of Ronald Reagan through sharp use of genre, character and psychology. I truly believe, however, that the film goes beyond to directly deconstruct the very history of Ronald Reagan and his place in history. This glorified time in America is found to be a place of sin, decadence and violence by *Psycho*, the film dismantles America's pungent nostalgia for Reagan's eighties – a supposedly better, almost holy time. The film, and book, shows the tragic trick of Reagan upon the national psychology and the ironic bankrupt morality of 'modern' America.

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## (III:II) COLD WAR

History is a weird thing. It's weird to think about how it can interact with literally everything, and how history itself is less of a 'thing' and more of a constant process. From the end of the Second World War until 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a cultural, technological and ideological struggle for, arguably, world dominance. The Cold War is the most expensive war in history and, yet, it is hard to judge exactly how many lives were lost directly in due to the two powers and their constant one-upmanship.

*American Psycho's* coverage of the Cold War is largely background noise, just small references. Upon closer examination, however, there are some clever notes on the Cold War. Reagan's role is particularly well examined and his heroic depiction in the halls of American heroes. As covered, *American Psycho* is, quite simply, anti-Reagan. It's more complex in how it studies the ideas associated with Ronald but it is overwhelmingly against the fabled figure in American history. *Psycho* unravels the myth of America's great bountiful eighties age, and it may perhaps also drip some light commentary on its great victory in the Cold War.

The film's tonal shifts themselves may be direct parody of American feeling in the post-Cold War environment. As the United States began to marginalize all Soviet influence, putting its 'victory' into absolute inevitability, the optimism and warmth in American society undoubtedly increased. All scorn for Reagan was largely removed in the face of his ability to dismantle a decades long war which had consumed the two superpowers. *Psycho* covers the eighties and all of its affairs through a constantly nose-diving tone. At one moment, we have a naked Patrick Bateman slipping into the skin of the Texas Chainsaw murderer, and in another minute we have 'I'm Walking On Sunshine' playing over Bateman's walk to work. The film shows us the dark psychology behind its hero while also showcasing those images of optimism, the overwhelmingly sugary pop music, is in fact false. America's victory is false. America lost its identity in the Cold War climax, and Reagan's supposed grand 'sacrifices', his wit and smooth-talking and economic healings were all vastly detrimental. *Psycho* shows us the truth to America's 'grand' victory.

Bateman mentions some issues in his 'speech' that touch on Cold War issues. He identifies a stronger need to "slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism". The nuclear arms race was largely entering its moribund phase, even by 1987 in which the film is set, as START/INF treaties were being passed through the Kremlin and White House. The wider 'nuclear' issue may be directed, cleverly, at the post-Cold War world. States like China, North Korea and many other nations posed a threat to the nuclear status quo in the world. The issue of "terrorism" also recurred throughout the 90s, and tragically into the new millennia. *Psycho* doesn't predict 9/11, the whole film is hardly prophecy, but it most definitely identifies a darker truth and falsehood to America's role

in the Cold War. It shows that there are problems still to be solved and consequences still to be faced.

The miracle magic of Ronald Reagan came with an ability to spin tragedy into triumph and to heal all old historical wounds. When Evelyn mentions the “Vietnamese pot-bellied pig” she’s carrying, we’re reminded of that quagmire of a conflict. It’s what the nation is famous for in the Western world. *Psycho* shows a world where America’s heart of darkness is swept under the carpet, even turned into a pet. *Psycho* perhaps suggests the end of the Cold War should not mean that we forget about these issues, nor should we see Reagan’s spinning as diminishing the issues of responsibility and culpability.

As covered in the previous chapter, and here, *Psycho*’s use of music for political message is constructed very cleverly. Genesis’ ‘Land of Confusion’ is mentioned by Patrick as how it “addresses the problems of abusive political authority”. Not only is the film a swift kick in Reagan-tinted nostalgia but to any notion of a post-Cold War world that is more democratic and free. *Psycho* doesn’t show us a post-Cold War world in which dictators have won, or that American democracy has been destroyed, but it does hint at larger issues of autonomy and society. Its treatment of materialism is largely retroactive, but its coverage of the Cold War optimism could well extend into commentary beyond the eighties.

I do think the film also, in some abstract sense, links sex with war. It’s a fairly left-field comment, but it’s been written before that all art is inherently political, including sexual intercourse is political. The sex scenes, in which Patrick proudly rides many prostitutes, poses for his pornstar pictures and shoves coathangers into wrong places, could be seen as direct metaphor for the truth behind the American ‘victory. *Psycho* interlinks the victory with male vanity and the peak of masculinity, engaging in the most excessive sexual acts, before then masking it with darker instruments of cuts, bruises and coathangers. Yes, these moments are about the psychology of Bateman and his constant want to escape into fantasies, but the wider political message could be about America’s post-Cold War world. America proudly gave its worth to the world (much as Patrick gives out pleasure) and it did receive much power in return (just as Patrick gains short-term satisfaction), and yet its intentions were much more darker than simple moral goodness, it had a much darker and abusive purpose in its aims throughout the last years of the Cold War, and perhaps post-Cold War too (Patrick’s ‘instruments’).

Interestingly, the film’s clique reduces eighties Cold War diplomacy down to a joke. Bryce tells us that “Gorbachev is downstairs” “signing a peace treaty between the United States and Russia”, that, their friend, is “behind glasnost”. The film’s reductionism could be seen as ham-fisted attempts at displaying historical context, the age of Reagan and Gorbachev, or it could display how irrelevant and even alienating of a concept that Cold War ultimately was, even to the elite. Arguably, however, *Psycho* shows a world in which serious issues are reduced either to hyperbole or to nothing at

all. Reagan is called a “liar” underneath a “harmless old codger”, that he was “born cool”. Patrick refuses to talk serious with Courtney, simply saying “you look marvellous, what else is there to say?” The film outright refuses to discuss its own history, choosing instead to show how self-absorbed that the Yuppie culture has become.

The very element of American responsibility, even to its own citizens, may be literally forgotten in the film. Patrick largely has to; in his mind at least, face responsibility for his killings in his meetings with Kimball. Jean reminds him of the lunch that he has to share with the Detective, and he remarks, almost solemnly, “Thanks, it slipped my mind completely”. Besides the self-absorbed, pleasure-centre of Patrick’s messed-up mind, the film arguably shows us an American who has forgotten to face the consequences of his actions. Perhaps the film directly parallels Reagan’s own wrongdoing, both in the Iran-Contra scandal and beyond. Reagan cut deep into social spending to pump over \$26bn into his grandiose SDI program, an anti-missile policy that had the Russians quaking all the way to forfeiting the Cold War, in some historians’ opinions. *Psycho* shows us a world in which America doesn’t face up to any consequences; that it’s able to get away with anything. Just as the rich get away with murder, so too does America.

*American Psycho* arguably carries a much more complex, and somewhat more universal, statement about ideology. Christian Bale identifies that the film was mostly “disturbing comment on men and violence and on capitalism” [1]. Patrick’s regret-tinged music critique of a Whitney Houston album gives us some insight into *Psycho*’s exact ideological commentary. Patrick tells us that the absolute “universal message” behind Houston’s music is that there’s “hope”, that “it’s not too late to better ourselves”, even when “it’s impossible in this world we live in to empathize with others.” *Psycho*’s caricature of a ‘Fat Cat’ capitalist in the form of Patrick Bateman most definitely marries commentary with character. Again, there is an irony to Bateman’s plea for empathy, he goes on to just slaughter and destroy even after admitting his failure. Even after Reagan admitted fault in the Iran-Contra affair, he was still held responsible for abhorrent actions. *Psycho* shows us an America that even past its Cold War is still pursuing the same old game. Still fighting in the name of capitalism even if it means hurting a few people along the way. It is never “too late to better ourselves”, but the film perhaps comments that zero effort has ever been made.

All the genre blends that *Psycho* undergoes is also done as direct splicing into the myth of American ‘victory’. Patrick’s action-movie fantasy, where at the push of a pistol bullet cars explode, is direct parody of eighties action flicks. The entire genre with its Stallones and Schwarzeneggers was largely engineered to showcase American exceptionalism. In *First Blood - Part Two*, Rambo practically wins the entire Vietnam War on behalf of America. These films were soaked in patriotism, whereas *Psycho*’s parody play is soaked in much more complex commentary. The film shows us the myth of American victory through showing us the direct mythology, the absolute ‘canon’ of

American exceptionalism. All of it is swiftly showed to be 'elements'; guns, explosions, masculine heroes and shoot-outs. All of it is shown to be just as false as the fabled 'victory' that America so proudly proclaims.

It could even be said that when the lobby guard tells Patrick not to "forget to sign in" and Patrick shoots him, that the film is directly showing America's signature on the world is a bullet in the head.

The film may also directly parody some opposing feelings that brewed within the eighties, of an almost nihilistic admittance of pointlessness to the whole Cold War. Bateman actually laughs at his own lawyer's comment that "face it, the Japanese will own most of this place by the end of 90s". The film was released in the 2000s, when Japanese corporations indeed began flooding the US markets, but they didn't 'own' America at all. The very notion of Eastern expansionism is shown to be completely false. The Cold War is what counts and America still has its fair dues to pay.

*Psycho* ends its place in history by showing a Reagan who speaks about how "foreign policy can't be run by committee", about how "we can accomplish more by cooperating". Bryce does outright call him a liar, but the film's ultimate take on Reagan's lies is still debateable. It most definitely is against his character, persona and policies, showing them as dreadfully violent, but it has many comments on his place in the end of the Cold War. The film could be said to be an outright refusal of Reagan's heroic place in ending the Cold War, that he was not the grand arbiter of the ending. It could also be said that the film shows that America has never faced responsibility for its Cold War crimes, even turning its failures in Vietnam into pets and trinkets. The film does show a world where people profit off of violence, so largely we could see the film is commenting on the military-industrial complex and its corruption on America. Its ultimate take on the Cold War is however fairly ambiguous.

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## (III:III) THE MYTH OF AMERICA

“There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman”. There is something very odd about *Psycho* and its relationship with its own metanarrative. The film is incredibly conscious in its use of genre, character and explicit reference to its own existence. Some of the film’s comedic pieces stem from this knowledge. There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, much as there is an idea of America. The grand American dream seems to haunt the film’s backdrop as the Yuppies and grand folk all seem to be living it. They have the wealth, the power, the women and the social laddering. Yet they’re all still so hopelessly without any substance or worth of humanity. If achieving the American dream means sacrificing your own humanity, does that make it such a worthwhile pursuit?

The American dream is delivered as a myth in the film, and is reduced to mundane social laddering. Patrick is “on the verge of tears” upon thinking that he won’t have a good table, admitting that “the relief washes over me in an awesome wave” when they do have a good table. The very upper-class symbolism of ‘good table’ appears mundane, even slightly boring. The myth of the American dream is reduced to nothing but a few social set pieces. Even the ‘women’ that come attached to the great masculinized American dream aren’t perfect. “Courtney is almost perfect looking”, but she’s “always operating on one or more psychiatric drug”, “tonight I believe its xanax”. Patrick’s “tonight I believe” shows that he’s guessed before, that this has become routine for him to see Courtney’s drug use. She has psychological issues underneath her “perfect” exterior. The American dream is shown to be, quite simply, hollow.

Even when happiness is achieved, it doesn’t last for long. Courtney’s pursuit of a husband results in her being “engaged to Luis”, which is apparently “more disturbing than her drug use” according to Patrick. In this social ladder soaked world, it’s hard not to see why. Courtney’s dreams are worthless; she’s marrying “the biggest dufus in the business”. There’s always losers, jerks and dorks. There is no such thing as perfect. The myth of America is reduced to just that; a myth. A ghost. Courtney sleeps around, as does Patrick, to try and search for some satisfaction. Patrick is driven mad, partly in due to the sheer mundane reality of everyday existence in the Yuppie dreamland.

Again, Patrick’s speech shows that there is a bigger dream out there; a world in which we “oppose racial discrimination” and “return to traditional moral values”. The very idea of ‘morality’ in this film, coming from its closeted psychopath, seems almost out of place. Patrick lists world hunger, terrorism and nuclear arms races amongst the other worries of civilization. He suggests there is a greatest responsibility for America, to which Bryce nearly chokes on his drink. To Bryce the American dream is perfect and to the wider clique this is also ‘complete’. Patrick is the odd one out, the one to poke at the truth behind the inane laughter and social laddering. He unwinds the American dream to which they’ve all achieved.

One person who is shown to be achieving the American dream is Paul Allen, whom Patrick absolutely reveres. Patrick fakes Dorsia reservations - "how on Earth did you get reservations", "Just lucky I guess" - in an attempt to appear superior in the eyes of his colleagues, even though most of them "[do] the same exact thing I do." Paul Allen actually gets reservations, "Eighty-thirty Dorsia" and is seen as almost godlike by the group. Even his business card is seen as the absolute. The business card scene could be seen as a simple phallic metaphor, that Patrick's masculinity is constantly crushed as more cards are added to the table, but it could just so easily be seen as the American dream itself. More, more and more. The rage within Patrick boils as he is put down the social ladder, pushed down and down. Here is a man who wants "to fit in", and yet he is constantly shoved out. One could guess that his murders are partly out of sheer social jealousy.

David Ansen actually argues that the very dissection of this dream reduces the film into a 'shallow' festival of nothingness. He says that "after an hour of dissecting the '80s culture of materialism, narcissism and greed, the movie begins to repeat itself. It becomes more grisly and surreal, but not more interesting. Conceptually, this savage cartoon ends up as trapped in surfaces as its shallow antihero: it's all dressed up with nowhere to go"[1]

It's easy to see why such criticism comes about. *Psycho* is most definitely a satire first and everything else second. The film is concretely intellectual even in its most shallowest gorefest points, and the way in which it paces itself could be seen as detrimental to its very existence. *Psycho* is a film and films are meant to entertain. The comedy of the picture, Bateman's psychological dives and the orbiting issues, to me at least, still keep the film on track. The constant dilution and re-evaluation of the myth of the American dream, from what it means to Bateman to Paul Allen to women to beyond, is what keeps it still on track.

The Trump family could maybe be seen as the ghosts of the American dream - "Is that Ivana Trump?", "Is that Donald Trump's car?" - They are people who have achieved the full, complete American dream, and they seem to not exist at all in the film's universe. Patrick is the one who constantly look out for the Trump family, constantly searching for a better and brighter future. In contrast, the homeless folk seem to have no concept of this golden pursuit. Bateman outright refuses to understand basic social concern, simply saying that "Why don't you get a job" to Al. A "job" is seen as a cure, just as it was seen by Reaganheads too. Patrick just thinks that "You got a negative attitude, that's what's stopping you", not identifying the general issues of social mobility that stop the homeless from breaking simple cycles. The myth of the American dream is shown to be an instrument of destruction. For every single person who achieves it, ten more seem to be made to suffer more.

There's even some tragedy to what the hopes and dreams are. Bateman apparently wants "breast implants" for Christmas, and he's a "child of a divorce". He

reduces the latter down to a joke in front of Paul Allen, who smoothly says that “I could’ve gotten us a table” at Dorsia.

Metanarrative recurs throughout the film to showcase its true intentions when it comes to the American dream. Bateman says of a Huey Lewis song that “most people don’t listen to the lyrics”, marrying his music critique with the materialist society. No-one looks deeper or beyond the thin veil of the superficial. The film may also be commenting on itself, and the story of *American Psycho*, that most people probably won’t understand it. Bateman is also talking to Paul Allen, who sees no fault in Reagan’s society; indeed, he’s profited from it. The American dream frustratingly rewards the wrong, according to *Psycho*.

There’s even pointlessness to the whole pursuit of any dream at all. Kimball says that “people just disappear”, Bateman replies “the Earth just opens up and swallows them”. He may be trying to dodge any suspicion of Allen’s murder, under the guise of fancy language, but the larger issues are at work. There’s an outright nihilistic outlook to the whole affair. No matter how hard we work or how long we wait, the Earth can just swallow us up at any time. Bateman sees the only way to sufficiently ‘live’ the American dream is through living someone else’s life - “I’m Paul, how good of you to come”. He attempts to show off while in the skin of another man. It seems those who actually achieve the dream are either ultimately hollow or are outright murdered by those below them. This is a dog-eat-dog world.

Much as music is used as a device to explore Reagan-tinged psychology and the Cold War, it is also used to explore the nature of the American dream. Patrick identifies ‘Invisible Touch’, by Genesis, as being an “epic meditation of intangibility”. It seems that this song, this brief mention of its very title, holds more worthwhile truth to the American dream than any character in the film. The dream itself will always prove illusory, just as illusory as the truth behind Patrick Bateman himself. Jean sees Patrick’s search for a perfect body as misguided, even after he says “We can always be thinner”. Patrick doesn’t even ask himself about the future or his purpose, choosing to instead ask Jean “What do you want to do with your life” and “do you feel fulfilled?” Such questions are not meant for the Yuppie group. In these small spaces of truth, Patrick yearns to hear about Jean’s life. He wants to know that there’s something “serious” outside of the confused dizzying frenzy of his lifestyle, almost as if he is cocooned within diamonds that glitter but do not gleam. Patrick floats within the American dream, ever evading and ever draining of his humanity.

Evelyn’s phone call triggers some other commentary. She sees Patrick as “my boy next door”. Besides the male possession, which itself probably deserves some commentary, there’s an element of truth to arguing that Evelyn herself is attempting to live out some fantasies. As covered before, Evelyn, just as Patrick drenches himself in horror and action film genres, allows her mind to be swept within romantic gestures and

flashy love. The truth behind the American dream is that it only permits us to live out fantasies, but to never fulfil them.

Yet everyone seems to cling on to the dream. Christie, even after getting the cheque and saying that she needed “surgery” after her night with Patrick, still cannot resist the allure of Bateman’s dollars. This is in the same film that opens with a bunch of rich kids remarking that five-hundred and seventy dollars wasn’t too steep for a dinner bill. The almighty dollar is in charge of the myth of America. Patrick kills Allen, whose apartment is “more expensive”. We are led to believe that this warped America attaches literal value to every life, reducing it to cheap material. The dream does not enrich people’s lives; it in fact drains them of meaning.

After the great violent, genre-bending symphony of *Psycho* has ended, we’re led to believe that Bateman’s actions have inflicted nothing upon this world. He remarks himself that “this confession has meant nothing”. The entire film posts its flag in the realm of nihilism, and Patrick’s self-absorption seems to admit that there is no salvation, no hope for him. The American dream, to Patrick, is about much more than “[fitting] in”, it’s about finding a place to fit to begin with.

## References

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## (III:IV) WAR ON DRUGS

Drugs, and references to drugs, spill throughout *American Psycho*. Just in small bites of chitter chatter we can find talk of drug indulgence. Reagan followed up Nixon's grand 'war on drugs' with a crackdown of his own and the film largely sees his efforts as mostly pointless. Indeed, the same American elite who finance, push and perhaps enable this legislation are the very same people who indulge in drug addled behaviour. Bateman doesn't talk about the policies, and the film scarcely mentions drug legislation in general, but the presence of drugs throughout the film warrants comment. Some have commented that the amount of cocaine that the clique consumes creates a washed-out effect. If we live the world through Bateman's head, then perhaps his fantasies are due in part to his drug abuse.

Some of the first lines of the film involve drugging up - "they don't have a good bathroom to do coke in" - and the film almost steps out covered in cocaine. It explicitly references drug use in the first few minutes to establish that this is what the clique does. It isn't done for any purpose of shocking you or creating a 'gritty' version of the world. In part, it introduces you to these characters through their addictions so as to already show that, in comparison to them, you probably have much more of a moral centre.

The most "perfect looking" of the picture are corrupted by drugs. Bateman has "beautiful skin", and he indulges in all sorts, but the "almost perfect looking" Courtney "is always operating on one or more psychiatric drugs", "tonight I believe its xanax". The very crutch of drug use, for everyday life, is thrown away. "More disturbing" than her drug use is her husband-to-be, "the biggest doofus in the business". The great "social concern", that Patrick speaks of, can't be found in Bateman at least. No-one seems to notice that even the most beautiful creatures have psychological issues, and that they need drugs to even operate. Bateman, annoyed by Courtney's dithering, just tells her that "you should take some lithium" as if it isn't harmful. There is no help offered to Courtney, no moral support, and she is largely isolated by the clique and Patrick.

Bateman chugs some pills before killing Paul Allen. The exact meaning of this is debateable. Perhaps Bateman chews down on the pills so as to calm himself into the murdering, or to give distraction. He certainly starts dancing and hopping around, perhaps the film showcases the side-effects of the drugs that Bateman needs. His name is actually on the pill bottle, showing that they've been prescribed. In the novel, he takes two valium but, in the film, it could be anything. One could view Allen's murder as a giant hallucinated side-effect of Bateman's drug taking. This certainly puts something in perspective though. If the very murders are a product of Patrick's drug-addled imagination, then what is truly fact and fiction in this world? Harron notably regrets creating a sense of warped reality and ambiguity, that she tried to present Bateman as ultimately doing the dirty deeds in the end[1]. The drug use may, on top of some minor

supernatural and general psychological issues, introduce some elements of unintentional ambiguity into the film's ultimate truth.

Clique members use drug use as a means to perhaps still insult one another. When questioned about Paul Allen, Bateman says that he was a "closet homosexual who did a lot of cocaine". The use of sexuality slander in combination with calling Allen out on his drug use creates a sharp insult. Not only is he a "closet homosexual" but he also "did a lot of cocaine". Bateman tries to plead to Kimball, and perhaps to us, that Allen did much more drug-taking than Bateman himself. The clique still uses signals and language in order to insult or disguise one-another's drug tendencies.

Drugs are also a space for comedy in the film. The cocaine scene in the bathroom stall, with Pat and Bryce, involves them discovering that "there's a fucking milligram of sweetener", Bryce even saying that he could "sprinkle it" on his breakfast. Bateman simply says that "if we do enough of it I think we'll be okay." The very use of "okay" might show that only by doing cocaine can the clique become slightly more normal, and less anxious with their own existence. It may also suggest that they'll be "okay" in the social sense, that drug taking is still seen as risky but a part of the clique business. Patrick is also saying "enough of it", suggesting that they have to do a "lot" of it. He is avoiding being associated with his own previous accusation of Paul Allen, to Kimball (and us). Drugs are used in both moments of comedy and to reveal truth behind character. Bateman doesn't want to admit to drug abuse because it's just a part of the lifestyle that he belongs to.

If we consider, as said earlier, that Bateman's murders are side-effects to his drug taking, then surely the interpretation that the murders are simple hallucinations, psychological defects, is somewhat strengthened? Bateman's diary at the end, which Jean unravels to her own horror, is filled with the violence we've become familiar with throughout the film. We discover that just as Patrick has lived out his fantasies, so too have we lived out Patrick's. Owen Gleiberman argues that there's also a political point, that there's a link between mythology, dreams and drugs: "Funny, pungent, and weirdly gripping, *American Psycho* is a satire that feels like a hallucination; Harron, working with gleeful precision, mythologizes the moment when America rediscovered the heady egomaniacal rush of conspicuous consumption" [2].

The very idea that *American Psycho* can be diluted down to a drug-frenzied dream may appear disgusting, or indeed insulting, but I would argue that the interpretation enhances both the political and social messages of the film. Any dreams, any hopes, are all contained in this warped version of reality. *American Psycho's* materialistic world, filled with thin-veiled joy and crooked capitalist gluttony, is the exact eighties to which America has denied itself. Reagan administered a grand morphine to the vein of the United States, sedating it away from realizing the reality of its violence that it had inflicted upon the world and itself. That could be what the film uses depictions of drug use for, along with exploring characters, other issues and wider social themes.

It's actually quite hilarious how explicit that people are about their drug use. People literally shout in the bathrooms of clubs "Can you keep it down in there I'm trying to do drugs". The sharp satirical wit of Bret Easton Ellis comes through some of the film's more hyperbolic moments and yet the tender treatment of Courtney shows that *Psycho's* treatment of drug use is multi-faceted and, indeed, comments on both the social, political and instrumental impact of drugs in the world.

With the explicit nature of the drug use throughout the film, the moments in which it is actually masked could be space for commentary. Bryce and Patrick joke about "Gorbachev" to a group of models in a club, confirming, with a tap on their noses and look at each other, that their friend is actually doing cocaine. They deny the ladies any contact with the truth. We never see a female taking hardcore drugs, outside of Courtney who takes "psychiatric drugs" and Elizabeth who tells us she does "coke", but the very element of these drugs being a part of the cliques' world, and their denial of any female contact, stresses how much they truly marginalize women. In pretty much every single aspect, women are skewed or berated by the men of the picture. Elizabeth, Patrick's friend, says that her drug dealer has "peak hours", and says that "I need your services" down the phone. We don't see her take any drugs, as said, but she most definitely does use them. She masks it behind "services", even telling "Harley" to "interpret" what she has said, and with a flick of language she tries to hide her crime. Much as Patrick covers up Paul Allen with sexual slander and accusations of drug abuse, so too does Elizabeth shy away from the truth.

The entire dream-like drugged up quality to the film and to Patrick Bateman in particular, may create a space of, ultimately, ambiguity and perhaps indifference to the ending. If it was all pointless, if indeed there was "no catharsis", then was the film ultimately worth anything? I would argue that by questioning the very reality of Patrick's actions, and the very structure of the film, *Psycho* is suggesting to us to evaluate what exactly we demand from our entertainment, how truly healthy and enriching it has to be. We have just undergone a psychological, political tug-of-war on-screen and, apparently, it has all been for fictional nothing. *Psycho* mirrors its own existence. Nothing has truly come true, nothing in reality will be changed and, yet, without catharsis there are moments of reflection. If Bateman's world is a drug-infused hyper-reality then are we led to believe that this is what the eighties were for America? Just a simple, drugged up era of almost adolescent posturing and violent movement.

Harron identifies that it was actually a "failure" on her part in keeping the film the wrong kind of ambiguous: "One thing I think is a failure on my part is people keep coming out of the film thinking that it's all a dream, and I never intended that. All I wanted was to be ambiguous in the way that the book was. I think it's a failure of mine in the final scene because I just got the emphasis wrong. I should have left it more open ended. It makes it look like it was all in his head, and as far as I'm concerned, it's not." [3]

I would argue through Bateman's sketches, his flip-flopping moods and drug abuse, the film most definitely captures the same ambiguity that the book does. *Psycho* can be read in a variety of ways and that is one of its greatest claim to fame. It has divided critics, audiences and everyone and it will continue to dazzle and surprise. Its coverage of drugs and its use of them, to explore characters and specific issues, is also one of its cleverest highlights. In the end, it's hard to guess whether or not *Psycho* is for or against recreational drug use, since it mostly uses it as a device to explore other pieces.

### References

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# CONCLUSION

I began this book by discussing why I didn't like *American Psycho* and how much that changed. After exploring the film in depth and analysing scenes, dialogue and its literary elements, I believe that I can say, without any shadow of the doubt, that *American Psycho* is a dense modern masterpiece. The sharp imagery of *Psycho* will continue to float across message boards, tumblrs and beyond. *American Psycho* is probably timeless, and so too is the book.

What I wanted to explore, however, was the direct and complex inner-workings of a film that haunts the internet through animated gifs and images. *American Psycho* is a film that has touched and transcended its own barriers of existing as a 'film', and that is honestly what I wanted to conclude with. There is an idea of a film, something illusory, and it is becoming incredibly ever-escaping by the passing of every day. I wanted to use this book as a means to express some post-modernist perspective. Films are now no longer isolated to viewings, to their running times, they have no burst into the very fabric of pop culture. People have quoted films for decades, discussed them too, but never before have specific images, specific set-pieces, been used and modified to be posted across the internet for further amusement. Never before have people ripped pieces of a film out of its context and use it as argument or basic rhetoric. It is hard to go through the internet on a weekly basis and not come across some kind of parallel or quote or some madness from Harron's masterpiece.

This is why I became a writer in the first place. I find excitement in character, in plot and narrative design. *American Psycho*, like *Blade Runner*, was a film in which I could cleanly run through and evaluate, interpret and present arguments and analysis about. None of my readings will be 'true', none of the readings, including Harron's, which you have encountered through will also be 'true'. I however believe that great criticism can encapsulate all viewpoints, or as many as possible, and attempt to evaluate and present them all. I do hope I have done this, and I do hope this reading has been worth your time.

The very idea that further reading can enhance your enjoyment of a film is a concept which escapes me. After finishing *Tears In Rain*, I found that *Blade Runner* could no longer exist as I first saw it. It no longer, to me at least, exists as a story and plot and characters; it's instead a constellation of ideas and issues all joined by its narrative fabric. After writing this, *Psycho* is exactly the same. I have no idea what the effect of 'reading' this book would do to your reading of the film, but I do hope that it's proved useful or the least bit interesting.

People have asked me why I chose another eighties-obsessed flick and, truthfully, it has hard to pinpoint why. Even after all the initial hatred toward the film, and even after discovering its darker 'warmth', it's still hard to figure out why I did this in the first place. *American Psycho*, just like its book counterpart, it a multi-layered film. It is a

well-recognized and fabulous collection of wonderful modern imagery. It is both worlds away from *Blade Runner*, but operates within similar fronts and arguments. Both films are joined only in the time period that they cover, but *Psycho* is the only one of the two to do it retroactively. *American Psycho* could be seen as a simple exercise in cultural commentary, a reflection and evaluation of a time gone by. The attraction of commentating on a commentary was perhaps too good to miss out on.

Across these pages, I've explored the psychology of Bateman, the people around him and the ultimate political and social commentary underneath the film. I strongly believe in film as an artistic endeavour, and that any effort to show how rich and deep the medium is ultimately a worthwhile pursuit. This entire work will no doubt be rough around the edges, but I owe it to *Psycho* and the film industry in trying to explore the meanings and true value of film to our modern day existence.

I do thank you, however, for sticking around while I meandered around arguments and attempted to show my absolute devotion and love for this film's brave exploration. I hope it has been worth your time. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to return some videotapes.

# ABOUT

NATHAN HARDISTY is a teenage-aged something or other who is currently grasping for some kind of meaning in his life. Or some existential like that. He is the author of the video-game analysis eBook series *Up, Down, Left, Right*, the novel *Trimalchio* and the *Blade Runner* film criticism book *Tears In Rain*. His work can be found on Platform Nation, Screenjabber, Destructoid and he is currently an Associate Editor at Flixist.com. He is currently working on the forthcoming finale to the *Up, Down, Left, Right* series, alongside *Tears In Rain 2* and the superhero tragedy novel *Train*. He really enjoys referring to himself in the third person.

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