

## East is (not) East: the Strange Authorial Psychogeography of Bret Easton Ellis

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In the first chapter of Bret Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park* (2005), the author, or, rather, his pseudoautobiographical protagonist, "Bret", relates his experience of travelling around the USA on a promotional book tour. Humorously mythologising the real Ellis's reputation as a member of the hedonistic 1980s "Brat Pack" of New York writers, which was emphasised by early critics of his work as indicative of a lackadaisical attitude to his craft, "Bret" cuts a notably shambolic figure. At one point in his account of the tour, "Bret" refers to email updates sent to his publisher by the "drug cop" hired to monitor his conduct on the road. Some of these, such as the succinct missive "Berkeley; angry drug dealer was found choking writer due to 'lack of payment' in alley behind Barnes & Noble",<sup>1</sup> are particularly noteworthy due to their invocation of two key features of *Lunar Park*'s narrative: the consistently problematic nature of the figure of the author, and the even more problematic nature of the space in which he finds himself. Appearing in an opening chapter which sets the scene for a text in which "Bret" will retire to the suburbs to attempt to dry out, live a comfortable family life and resume productive writing, whilst in fact ultimately being confronted at all turns by ghosts from his personal and textual pasts, this parodic device serves an important function. Specifically, it practically, and spatially, contextualises the often derogatory critical opinion

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of Ellis's (and so, by extension, "Bret's") authorial persona, and his early fiction, which is more thoroughly outlined elsewhere in the chapter. Of the critical response to *American Psycho*, for example, "Bret" at one point notes that "I was taken seriously. I was a joke. I was avant-garde. I was a traditionalist. I was underrated. I was overrated ... I had orchestrated the controversy. I was incapable of orchestrating anything".<sup>2</sup> While "Bret" here refers to the notorious controversy surrounding the publication of *American Psycho* (in summary, pre-publication leaks of its more lurid content prompted media-based outrage, resulting in the novel being dropped by Simon and Schuster),<sup>3</sup> it should be noted that even in more academic critical contexts, Ellis's fiction did not initially elicit overwhelmingly positive readings.<sup>4</sup> Certain early academic critics, such as John W. Aldridge, straightforwardly dismissed the import of Ellis's writing: of *Less Than Zero*, Aldridge, writing in 1992, remarked that "surely, no other novel in recent history ... has concerned material that is indeed so much less than zero in dramatic content and thematic meaning".<sup>5</sup>

A number of slightly later studies, while notionally more generous in their assessments of the content of Ellis's writing, nevertheless orientated their readings within an already accepted rhetoric foregrounding its affectless aspects, lending it a certain cultural currency despite the apparently vacuous nature of its content. Both Elizabeth Young and James Annesley published, in 1993 and 1998 respectively, important and influential readings of Ellis's early writing, identifying Ellis as a principal exponent of "blank generation fiction", a concept still frequently remarked on in readings of Ellis. Both critics identify Ellis as representing a society where the increasing prevalence of consumer culture has rendered identity, as traditionally delineated, no longer representable. Young suggests, for example, that "Ellis is describing a world where even the most extreme attempts at individuality are doomed because personality itself has become commodity".<sup>6</sup>

While critics today have developed alternate approaches to Ellis's writing and the way in which it addresses broader social and theoretical concerns, there nevertheless remains a strong conceptual focus: "blankness" has not been forgotten, but rather incorporated into broader political and social critiques which tend to privilege Ellis's voice, and to some degree overlook the more localised, self-consciously playful aspects of his texts.<sup>7</sup> Particularly, new interpretations of Ellis's fiction often consider the concept of authorship in light of the critical heritage outlined above. Annesley himself has more recently drawn attention to Ellis's self-conscious authorial practice. In a recent discussion of celebrity authorship in *Lunar Park*, he comprehensively considers both the critical context surrounding Ellis's early fiction and the (fictional) authorial processes outlined in the novel, ultimately echoing the influential perspective he initially outlined in *Blank Fictions* with the concluding assessment that in the novel "answers can only be found by skating on the surface, not by diving into the depths".<sup>8</sup> Other recent critical approaches would have authorship as a nuanced practice which allows the concept of identity to be considered at a metatextual level.<sup>9</sup>

This article would suggest a third way to approach Ellis's writing and so to uncover the perspectives on authorship and identity which it initiates: that is, through consideration of the way in which Ellis's protagonists negotiate problematic space. Indeed, Ellis invests a lot of meaning in the physical geographies which provide the backdrops to his novels. The opening of his debut novel, *Less Than Zero* (1985), is arguably one of his most widely recognised textual constructions: "People are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles". Thus, with the first sentence of his first novel, Ellis initiates a disjunctive relationship with urban space echoed in writing subsequently.<sup>10</sup> The expression of fear to merge becomes a repeated refrain throughout *Less Than Zero* as its protagonist, Clay, lurches about the city of his youth, and is often understood as emblematic of the kind of disaffection and alienation typical of the privileged, discontented young people who populate the novel's pages; they

are, literally, afraid to merge, both with each other and with society in general. From this point, *Less Than Zero*'s unsettling of space and identity develops. Clay subsequently notes that the expression of fear to merge is "the first thing I hear when I come back to the city",<sup>11</sup> anchoring an apparently generalised observation to a particular time and place. It is worth noting here the context of Clay's return to Los Angeles: in an exemplary textual realisation of the East/West opposition he has come back to the city for the Christmas break from the small, East Coast liberal arts college he now attends. It quickly becomes apparent that, both psychologically and physically,<sup>12</sup> he is removed from his contemporaries, and this is emphasised as he drives round the city he used to call home, registering apparently increasingly affectless responses to the urban environment he encounters – of Wilshire Boulevard, for example, he notes that "there always seem to be too many cars and old people and maids waiting for buses and I end up looking away and smoking too much and turning the radio up to full volume".<sup>13</sup>

It is upon this premise – the re-encountering of previously familiar physical and mental geographies and the resulting difficulties of narrative adjustment – that the novel hinges, despite Clay's subsequent insistence to a friend that "things aren't that different" out East.<sup>14</sup> In particular, *Less Than Zero*'s most evocative representations of place come when, in italicised passages set apart from the rest of the text, Clay mentally re-charts geographically-specific memories of his past: in the first of these, a recollection of skipping school and driving out to Palm Springs "to remember how things were" is triggered in the narrative present when his father asks if he would like to spend Christmas there.<sup>15</sup> The idea of psychogeographical flashbacks being prompted by allusion to place or sense in the present is revisited throughout *Less Than Zero* and Ellis's canon more generally, and, particularly, in *Lunar Park*. Notably, this novel introduces a further factor to the negotiation of space, place, and identity, which figures as a significant preoccupation of Ellis's later fiction: that is, the

practice of authorship. Specifically, “Bret’s” relationship with the space he inhabits, in which he writes and has written, clearly marks him as a figure of problematic authorial status. The remainder of this article will focus on the ways in which this relationship between space and place, writing and author, develops in Ellis’s later fiction. Expanding and revising readings of Ellis’s early writing which interpreted its preoccupation with space as necessarily limiting, with the casting of characters adrift in the “non-lieux” of Los Angeles,<sup>16</sup> a city which “owns and spawns” its residents, was a given,<sup>17</sup> it will explore the physical and ontological configurations of Ellis’s late-period authorial protagonists, arguing that the space in which authorship is practiced always, for Ellis, impacts strongly on the formation of both author and writing.

It is worth beginning such a reading by turning again to “Bret”, Ellis’s most distinctive writerly protagonist. *Lunar Park*’s opening chapter illustrates the disjunctive relationship with urban space which had, at the start of his career, found “Bret” at the centre of the aforementioned “Brat Pack” of writers, whose constant presence on the late 1980s New York City bar and club scene resulted in their mythologisation on a global scale. As “Bret” details, the prevalence of the group led to a situation whereby “the New York as well as the national and international press became entranced”,<sup>18</sup> eventually allowing that he and his contemporaries had “invaded the world”.<sup>19</sup> Such an account subtly implies that a productive and self-reinforcing relationship with his immediate surroundings can enable an author to positively orientate himself within the far broader space within which he is read. This perspective is ultimately revised in *Lunar Park*, however, when “Bret’s” negotiation of various emotionally formative events, including fatherhood, drug addiction, and bereavement, prompt a more problematic relation to urban space, anticipating the narrator’s move away from the city to “the anonymous suburbia of the Northeast”.<sup>20</sup> Ellis, here, initiates *Lunar Park*’s many references to the space in which the figure of the author and the practice

of authorship are constructed, precisely through illustration of the way in which this space is, for “Bret”, determined by the critical context in which he initially existed. That this was itself linked to his parallel geospatial context suggests that Ellis, whose novel consistently toys with notions of “Bret” as being of dubious literary reputation, stresses the possibility that the authorial figure is writing himself into a context which develops beyond the origins of affectlessness which initially facilitated it.<sup>21</sup>

*Lunar Park*, in this way, is underpinned by the renegotiation of critical heritage from a spatial as well as temporal distance, and is particularly illustrative of the impact of this process on contemporary authorial practice. This is evident, for example, when Ellis’s “Brat Pack” contemporary, Jay McInerney, visits the narrator’s home in the “posh suburbs”,<sup>22</sup> occasioning a disjunctive comparison between “Bret’s” current situation and his geospatial, and authorial, pasts. This echoes the ways in which negotiations of space impacted on the formation and articulation of the narrative identities of Ellis’s earlier protagonists. *Less Than Zero*, for example, presents Clay’s apparently affectless narrative within a psychogeographical context in which it might have previously been more coherent. As already noted, Clay’s narrative is frequently punctuated by italicised flashback sequences which, usually following a synaesthetic trigger, propel it from listless description of the geographical present to more deliberate orientation within the psychogeographical past. Moreover, the entire novel could be read as a geographical flashback – its final words, “after I left”, figure what has previously appeared to be a delineation of contemporary geography as remembered – underlining that, for Ellis, the narrative present and the geographical past are often intertwined.

Before considering this issue in more detail, it is useful to expand upon the kind of physical and mental geographical environment in which Ellis operates. Particularly, it is worth clarifying exactly what can be understood by the term “psychogeographical” in relation

to his work. It is impossible to address the subject of psychogeography without referring to the *flâneur*, the nineteenth-century explorer of the city – and of Paris, specifically – who drifted through the streets in a concerted aimlessness, observing and noting the irregularities of the environment he encountered. The role of the psychogeographer has subsequently been expanded and developed by a number of writers and thinkers, notably Guy Debord, whose definitive 1955 essay “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography” stressed psychogeographical thinking as a way in which to explore the interaction of behaviour and the urban environment. Debord called for the investigation of “the arrangement of the elements of the urban setting, in close relation with the sensations they provoke”.<sup>23</sup> This foreshadowed the work of Michel de Certeau, whose study *The practice of everyday life* features a chapter on “Walking in the City” which Americanised and expanded the definition of psychogeographical relations to urban space. Following de Certeau, it was no longer only the *flâneur* who could negotiate meaning in the city, but also the voyeur, a more detached figure whose relation to urban space is conducted at something of a remove (from the top of the World Trade Center, to give de Certeau’s most famous example).<sup>24</sup> This perspective also recalls the figure of the stalker, an allegedly more manic and uncontrolled *flâneur* of a kind foregrounded by Baudelaire, who believed that the modern city he inhabited, with its increased levels of noise and danger to the pedestrian, prohibited the whimsical kind of *flânerie* practised by his predecessors.<sup>25</sup>

None of this might seem of particular relevance to Ellis, whose depictions of urban life are equally not commensurable with the contemporary British delineations of psychogeography in, for example, the bleak urban landscapes of J.G. Ballard or the more whimsical musings of Will Self.<sup>26</sup> Not all contemporary definitions of the psychogeographic are alien to the kind of textual cartographies fashioned by Ellis, however. In an essay entitled “Desert spectacular”, which, fittingly, appears in an edited collection which treats the subject

of the *flâneur*, and strongly evokes American geography as perceived by Baudrillard, Zygmunt Bauman foregrounds a kind of urban space in which deserts and malls sit side by side. For Bauman, the practice of *flânerie* is easier to participate in than not: “Post-modern *flâneurs* make daily or weekly visits to shopping malls, the local churches of the *flâneurisme* creed, avoiding as much as they can all contact with the streets in between, the hunting grounds of their ancestors”, he notes, and so an altogether new kind of *flâneur* is arguably born.<sup>27</sup>

As already noted, *Lunar Park*, more than any of Ellis’s previous fictional output, demonstrates the ways in which these concerns pertain to narrative practice and authorship more broadly. “Bret’s” move from the chaotic urban environments of Los Angeles and New York City, where he has worked and enjoyed the trappings of his success, to the anonymous suburbia of Upstate New York, where he has begun, at the novel’s opening, to live a remarkably nondescript family life, occasions a significant psychogeographical shift (“for me, the party had ended”, “Bret” notes presciently after the Halloween party at his new suburban home).<sup>28</sup> In what is often read as a gothic parody which makes light of Ellis as an authorial figure, drawing on extensive metatextual material in order to do so (“Bret” is, for example, stalked by a student called Clay who bears an uncanny resemblance to Christian Bale in his role as Patrick Bateman in the film adaptation of *American Psycho*), there is a far more psychogeographically-specific element at work.<sup>29</sup> This is evident from the first pages of *Lunar Park*, where “Bret” collates the opening sentences of his first four novels, foregrounding his intertextual bias. While this initiates the self-conscious authorship which will characterise the remainder of the novel – something which its self-proclaimed first line, “you do an awfully good impression of yourself”,<sup>30</sup> foreshadows – it also, specifically, underlines the role played by geography in these metatextual, authorial fashionings. Aside from the infamous opening of *Less Than Zero*, the openings of *The Rules of Attraction*

(which specifically emphasises the location as “Camden” college, subsequently defined as being in “New Hampshire”), and *American Psycho* (which, like *Less Than Zero*, opens with a textual refrain – “ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE” – in this instance, specifically located as being “on the side of the Chemical Bank near the corner of Eleventh and First”),<sup>31</sup> give very particular accounts of the locations of the narratives to follow. Moreover, the introduction of these East Coast textual sites is shortly followed by a highly evocative account of the protagonist’s life in L.A. (where he authored his first novel, although it was inspired by a creative writing class he took at his college out East),<sup>32</sup> hinting at the way in which physical and textual geographies will collide throughout the novel to literally dislocate its author-protagonist.

One of the ways in which these geographies clash is through the use of flashback sequences of the kind deployed in *Less Than Zero*. The presentation and content of these is, however, significantly more problematic in *Lunar Park*. In a passage remarkable in its acknowledgement that urbanite Ellis is “happy” in the “fragmented and rambling” suburbs, and also in the concession that, once this happiness is attained “everything I had learned started to disappear” (here, “disappear” is a charged term, recalling the opening of *Less Than Zero* and its psychogeographical implications),<sup>33</sup> “Bret” begins to be confronted with relics of his past life in LA, which frequently trigger textual lapses of the kind described above. The first of these flashbacks comes when, in the parking lot of the typically East Coast college in which “Bret” now teaches, he notices, not for the first time, a car very similar to the one his father had driven during his youth. He notes how

the intriguing coincidence brought a brief rush of memories – a freeway, sun glinting off the hood, staring out the windshield at the twisting roads of Mulholland while the Go-Gos blared from the stereo, the top down and the palm trees swaying above me ... the memories vanished once I parked in my designated space ....<sup>34</sup>

The specific geographical situation here, with the movement of the car stressing the postmodern nature of this *flânerie*, is tempered by the repeated observation that these are just “memories” – and memories which “vanish” or, perhaps, disappear, almost immediately. Almost immediately, however, “Bret” relates that, in fact, “it all resembled something extremely enticing, and again I was taken back into the past, to my years at Camden”.<sup>35</sup> The allusion here to being involuntarily “taken back” into the past is suggestive of the involuntary psychogeographic situating which troubles Ellis’s authorial status throughout the novel. The re-introduction of Camden means that the metatextual framework of Ellis’s previous novels is once again foregrounded. “Bret” might be in “the middle of nowhere”, but it does not follow that he is in affectless space.

This problematisation is extended several pages later, when “Bret” is visited in his office by Aimee Light, a student from the college who is writing her thesis on his work (and whose name is a variation on that of Amelia Light, a victim of Patrick Bateman’s, who appears in an unpublished version of *American Psycho*, as is clarified later in the text). Light’s appearance highlights once again the novel’s unwieldy meta- and intertextual context, and also the repeated re-emergence of “Bret’s” authorial and textual past in his psychogeographical present. Here, Ellis notes how

Kissing her, I kept tasting lip gloss, which took me back to high school ... and I was making out on a chaise longue next to a black-bottomed pool in Encino and Foreigner’s “Feels Like The First Time” was playing and her name was Blair and the delicious, slightly fruity odor of bubble gum was drifting into the office now and I was lost until I realized Aimee had pulled back and was staring up at me....<sup>36</sup>

There are several points to note here. The idea that “Bret” “was making out on a chaise longue” transforms this flashback from simple memory to actual experience, figuring Ellis

the writer as a novelistic character, and vice versa. Interestingly, furthermore, the West – specifically, Encino – has come alive in a nondescript Eastern college office, disrupting spatial coordinates significantly. The author’s problematic textual position is further stressed by the subsequent reference to “Blair”, who is Clay’s girlfriend in *Less Than Zero*: “Bret” is author and character, East and West. That the “odor of bubblegum” apparently begins to permeate the office is suggestive of a kind of synaesthetic explosion occurring and actually transfiguring this geographical and textual past into the present. This, above all, stresses that the text’s metafictional recollections have a very real relevance in the psychogeographical present; having pervaded the physical space he now occupies, “Bret’s” textual past cannot be dismissed. While “Bret” eventually snaps back into his typical narrative role – coming to, and finding himself locked in the original embrace – the passage nevertheless initiates a re-reading of Ellis’s self-conscious textuality. Once again, physical geography serves to prompt, and contextualise, the lapse into unsettling psychogeography which “Bret’s” acute awareness of the space of his authorial practice permits.

The unconventional delineation of tense in *Lunar Park* has previously been subject to critical attention: Philip Seargeant, approaching the text linguistically, highlights the way in which the narrating Ellis of the novel frequently and deliberately conflates tenses in order to emphasise his own dubious – and artificial – status as a narrator.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the passage Seargeant finds most illustrative of this tendency is an exchange between “Bret” and his children, which itself stresses the problematic nature of the suburban space he inhabits, revealing (although not for the first time) the worldliness of the children that simmers beneath the idealised veneer of suburbia.<sup>38</sup> This is pertinent, he feels, because “it consists of two temporally separate episodes, one of which is embedded within the other in the form of a memory” which, ultimately, conveys “something of the cast of the character’s state of mind”.<sup>39</sup> Although Seargeant’s reading stresses the notion of straightforwardly disrupted

narrative perception and the relation of this to the uncanny in the novel,<sup>40</sup> the phenomenon he identifies mirrors the geo-synaesthetic flashback technique in the above passage: the narrator is embedding one geographical memory within the present space he literally occupies and this, naturally, says something significant about his “state” of mind, both literal and notional. Again, the act of narrating and its geographical location are inextricably linked.

There are numerous similar textual slippages throughout the novel, but none more telling than its climax, in which “Bret” travels back to LA, occasioning a physical shift into textual territory he had previously only encountered mentally. It is there, in his boyhood bedroom (which overlooks the San Fernando Valley, invoking the kind of psychogeographic voyeurism referenced by de Certeau), that he is inescapably confronted with his textual past: reading a private draft manuscript of *American Psycho*, “Bret” realises that various characters with whom he has related throughout *Lunar Park* have been entirely of his own creation. This realisation, on the West Coast, of the highly unorthodox authorial and psychogeographic landscape he inhabited out East, epitomises the awkward writerly terrain he has been at pains to depict. The opening of this most geographically problematic of passages indicates the disruption of tense and place which will follow:

Not only was my bedroom just as I had left it as a teenager but it was also Robby’s room as well. I had stayed here often when I visited L.A., after I made the move to Camden and then to New York, and over the years part of this space overlooking the San Fernando Valley had slowly transformed itself into an office, where I stored old manuscripts and files on shelves built into a walk-in closet.... I finally located what I was looking for: the original manuscript copy of *American Psycho*.... I sat on the futon beneath the framed Elvis Costello poster that still hung on the wall and began flipping through its pages.<sup>41</sup>

The room is initially established as a space both infiltrated by, and completely distant from, the author. That it is “just as” it was during his teenage years implies an ability, on his part, to fully mentally and geographically re-negotiate that space, and yet this suggestion is

immediately tempered with the observation that the room “is” also that of his son, Robby. While this is significant in that Robby’s room in the suburban, Eastern family house is the site of many of *Lunar Park*’s supernatural occurrences, it is most important to note that it suggests a displacement of both physical and mental geography: the author is attributing his own, supposedly unchanged, West Coast habitat to his son, whose life has been lived in the East Coast suburbs.<sup>42</sup> Here, once again, a geographical opposition prevalent throughout Ellis’s fiction is textually enacted, and, to extend Seargeant’s understanding of Ellis’s deployment of memory, two temporally and physically separate places, remembered and experienced, combine to create an entirely disrupted psychogeographical authorial space. This is emphasised with the next sentence, which stresses Ellis’s past relationship with the space, his physical separation from it and how this led, apparently involuntarily, to a situation in which the space “transformed itself into an office.” The room in question, representative of the psychogeographical terrain of the author’s past, mutates into a more writerly space as he physically moves East and establishes himself as an author<sup>43</sup> – although it should be recalled that, as the “Bret” of *Lunar Park* would have it, his debut novel was written “quickly in an eight-week crystal-meth binge on the floor of my bedroom in L.A.”<sup>44</sup> This, presumably, is the same bedroom he occupies at this textual juncture, indicating a return, again, to particular psychogeographical territory.

With this in mind, the casual reference to the Elvis Costello poster, which closes the passage, gains particular significance. Costello and his music are repeatedly referenced throughout *Less Than Zero* but, most notably, a poster of the musician hangs in Clay’s bedroom, and his image haunts the protagonist at various points in the text.<sup>45</sup> This allusion, then, further problematises “Bret’s” psychogeographical positioning within the room: he has written in and of it, seen it become a writerly space despite and because of him, and found it unchanged and yet belonging to someone else. It is a room of his own in the most

problematic of senses, and it is unsurprising that, while reading there shortly afterwards, he realises that he himself has authored, in an unpublished manuscript suggestive of private authorial space, the shadowy detective, Donald Kimball, who repeatedly features in his narrative.<sup>46</sup> As past and present mental terrains converge with this realisation, “the room turned sharply”.<sup>47</sup> Seargeant’s notion of the interpenetration of memory and the present in *Lunar Park* is, in this way, spatially realised, with “Bret’s” psychogeographical domain literally turning on itself as his textual past and present collide in a very particular authorial space, which is anything but straightforward or affectless.

This psychogeographical space is perhaps not quite as particular as it might seem, however, as, particularly in Ellis’s later fiction, both office space and the sprawling urban environment of Los Angeles are frequently foregrounded as problematising the process of writing. As already outlined, certain critics have highlighted the psychogeographically unsettling nature of Ellis’s L.A.: most notably Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud, who characterises the city as “an ambivalent area in which people are cast adrift, wandering like ghosts in some kind of existential nowhere described by Michel de Certeau as “un théâtre de passants”.<sup>48</sup> Although the sense of spatial malaise Vincent-Arnaud describes is most evident in Ellis’s earlier fiction, its impact upon the practice of authorship is evident in sections of *Lunar Park* and, more markedly, in *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010), suggesting again a productive reassertion of apparently affectless textual contexts in Ellis’s later fiction. *Imperial Bedrooms* opens with the observation that “They had made a movie about us. The movie was based on a book written by someone we knew”.<sup>49</sup> Most reviews of the novel have interpreted this opening as a disorientation, re-contextualising the narrative milieu of *Less Than Zero* with a view to *Imperial Bedrooms*’ status as its notional sequel.<sup>50</sup> What it also provides is a representation of the kind of textual – and geographical – terrain in which Clay operates, with the amalgamation of the discourses of “movie” and “book” hinting at the intellectually-fraught

landscape that is to unfold as the novel progresses. As at the opening of *Imperial Bedrooms*, Clay is returning from a spell out East, this time as a moderately successful scriptwriter in New York City.<sup>51</sup> His status broadly parallels that of “Bret” at the opening of *Lunar Park* as an author of dubious critical appeal, dislocated from his primary creative environment, so suggesting a similar disruption of the aspects of authorship, space and identity raised by that novel.

As well as foregrounding the problematic nature of Clay’s own status as an author – *Less Than Zero*, without this retroactive correction, could be assumed to be his text – the opening also highlights the chasm between his project and that of the notional author who has just been introduced. It is soon revealed that Clay, although a scriptwriter, had his ambitions of authorship thwarted by the spectral author in question. In one notable passage, which highlights the compromised authorial territory in which Clay self-admittedly functions, he details how “I had wanted to write that first novel the author had written after I finished reading it”, suggesting both suppressed ambition and direct inspiration towards authorship.<sup>52</sup> The broader intellectual framework in which Clay operates also emphasises the kind of writerly identity he represents: he is recognisable from, as he puts it, “a movie based on a book”. This phrase invokes the paradoxical nature of intellectual life in Los Angeles highlighted by Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*, his influential study of that city. Recognising what he describes as the supposed “destruction of intellectual sensibility in the sun-baked plains of Los Angeles”, Davis allows that this has nevertheless given rise to “the world capital of an immense Culture Industry, which since the 1920s has imported myriads of the most talented writers, filmmakers, artists and visionaries”<sup>53</sup> – note that these individuals were drawn to, not created by, L.A., which now implicitly saps their creativity.<sup>54</sup> L.A. is, for Davis, a city which provokes and is hostile to creative intelligence, where capitalism thrives and is also subject to an extensive critique.

At the centre of the negative side of L.A. is Hollywood, the machine which chews up and spits out authorial talent: Davis namechecks Fitzgerald, West and Faulkner as writers whose proven novelistic talents were eclipsed by their involvement with the Hollywood machine.<sup>55</sup> Rather fittingly, Davis subsequently notes that L.A. “has come to play the double role of utopia and dystopia for advanced capitalism”<sup>56</sup> – and, it might be useful to add, for creative writing of any kind. The contextualisation Davis provides allows Clay’s opening statement – and subsequent expansion upon his writerly ambition – to be understood in context: Clay arguably represents the thwarted writerly consciousness of Hollywood, doomed to submission and re-presentation (as implied throughout the novel, his scriptwriting, for the most part, it is not original, but involves, ironically, adaptation of novels for the screen).<sup>57</sup>

In contrast, however, his past, as a novelistic character (and, in *Imperial Bedrooms* details, as an alumnus of Brown and a very recent former resident of the more implicitly intellectual New York), can be understood as literary. Clay is representative, essentially, of both the strongly authorially creative and existentially barren sides of L.A., and, having returned to this intellectually problematic landscape after establishing himself as a successful writer out East, exemplifies the psychogeographical disorientation occasioned by the clash of those two milieux; affectlessness and (authorial) creativity again occasion spatial disruption. Sonia Baelo-Allué has remarked that Clay has an “active part” in the “exploitative system” of Hollywood, which he does;<sup>58</sup> however, his literary pasts, as (aspiring) author and character, render his reversion to stereotypical affectlessness problematic.

The collision of disparate psychogeographical terrains is, once again, most evident in the supposedly writerly territory of the office. Around halfway through the novel, Clay refers to the (in)action of “sitting at my desk pretending to work”.<sup>59</sup> This remark, which clearly defines the office as a space in which authorial practice is no longer carried out effectively, signals the point in the text from which the narrator’s writerly authority is most consistently

problematised. Much earlier, Clay had returned from a drunken night out to find that things in the room had apparently been rearranged, the first of many instances of the hostile external environment of L.A. infiltrating the apartment he had previously thought to be at a remove from the hustle and bustle of the city, given its position high in the Hills.<sup>60</sup> In this way, the text recalls the disrupted space inhabited by “Bret” in *Lunar Park*, with rooms and houses morphing and reconfiguring themselves, and in so doing dramatically problematising the mental and topographical location of the author inhabiting them.<sup>61</sup>

This enacts the approach to distance and urban psychogeography popularised by de Certeau, in which the city-dweller, perched atop the likes of the World Trade Center, becomes a “voyeur”, transforming “the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes”.<sup>62</sup> Notably, the apprehension of removal from a text is here at odds with the inextricable nature of psychogeographical space and the practice of writing evident in *Lunar Park*.<sup>63</sup> Clay has previously been described as a “walker” in the postmodern mould: from the novel’s opening, he is pursued as he cruises the city’s streets,<sup>64</sup> indicating the sense of disrupted space or even, as de Certeau would have it, of “lacking a space”<sup>65</sup> which the urban environment frequently impresses on Ellis’s author-figures. Depicted here in a transient position, maintaining loose appearances of creative practice within a focused environment (the office) and detached voyeurism within a broader milieu, Clay’s self-situating emphasises the negative impact on the practice of authorship which his geographical shift has already occasioned: from the creative via the affectless to the sinister.

In this way the office, initially figured as a working environment, becomes a site in which authorial identity and the debauched broader Hollywood context collide, invoking Davis’s conceptualisation of the dual creative conditions of LA. By this point in the text, Clay has begun a relationship with a young actress he met at an audition for the film for which he adapted the script. Again, here, writerly and cinematic contexts collide. Completely

embroiled in this clash of circumstances, he details how “we sit in my office naked, buzzed on champagne, while she shows me pics from a Calvin Klein show, audition tapes a friend shot, a modelling portfolio, paparazzi photos of her at B-list events”.<sup>66</sup> The prevalence of visual media – most of it disposable – in an environment typically associated with writerly practice is disruptive, and is suggestive both of the mediated status of the kind of authorship in which Clay engages, and, to recall Davis, the omnipresence of Hollywood’s dystopic influence in a supposedly untainted writerly context.

This is most apparent some twenty pages later, when the notion of “pretending to work” is fully introduced, providing a highly effective realisation of Davis’s creative/destructive parallel, with Clay detailing how ‘in my office, sitting at my desk pretending to work on a script, I’m really watching Rain, who has just shown up, and she’s tan and pacing the floor, holding a glass of ice with some tequila in it, chatting casually about how crazy her mother is...’.<sup>67</sup> What must be noted here is that the office is no longer even figured as a space to work, but as a space in which to feign working. Moreover, it is colonised by elements evocative of the dystopic representations of an affectless LA which characterised *Less Than Zero*: tanned, beautiful youths, debauched conduct, and a lackadaisical attitude to very real problems. This suggests that any notions of uncorrupted authorship, such as the desire Clay expressed at the outset of the text to “become a writer”, are necessarily subjugated due to the peculiar psychogeographical context in which he is now mired. Office space and urban space have merged to create a psychogeographical environment in which authorial practice is no longer possible.

Initially, this would seem to bring the text full circle to address the criticism levelled at Clay as a character by early critics of Ellis: he has been, in *Less Than Zero* and *The Rules of Attraction*, “barely discernible as a character at all”.<sup>68</sup> Ellis’s late fiction is in places imbued with exactly the same kind of affectlessness as his early work supposedly was,

despite *Lunar Park* often being considered a “turning point” which marks “a new direction towards less ‘blankness’”,<sup>69</sup> although more psychogeographically nuanced, Clay is still “unsure about everything”.<sup>70</sup> That this apparently remains the case even in the context of the explicit practice of authorship foregrounded in Ellis’s fiction from *Lunar Park* onwards, would suggest that for all its concern with the process of writing and its space, Ellis’s fiction continues to tread superficial ground.

This, however, is not quite the case, and to explore fully the significations of problematic space for the authorial subject defined by Ellis, it is necessary to turn, again, to *Lunar Park*. In an early passage from that novel, during which “Bret” makes the journey from his house to the college at which he teaches, the issues of office space, and of de Certeauian walkers and voyeurs, are foregrounded. Also introduced is a further psychogeographical feature: that of place names and their role in territorial narrative mappings. In his wide-ranging study, *Everyday Life*, Michael Sheringham draws upon theories of the impact of street names on perception of and identification with urban space as popularised by Benjamin and de Certeau, amongst others.<sup>71</sup> Sheringham pays particular attention to the impact of place names on the experience of walking in the city as defined by de Certeau, stressing how he “makes a parallel between the act of walking, *vis-à-vis* the imposed order of the city, and the act of speech, *vis-à-vis* the linguistic system”.<sup>72</sup> It does not require too great a leap to extend this notion to the paralleling of movement through urban (or, in the case of the “Bret” of *Lunar Park*, suburban) space and the act of writing. De Certeau, in *The practice of everyday life*, relates the experience of a non-native of Paris walking through its streets, stressing how certain street names “articulate a sentence that his steps compose without knowing it”.<sup>73</sup> This observation almost perfectly anticipates Ellis’s conceptualisation of the negotiation of urban space as impacting upon writerly practice. See, for example, an account of one of “Bret’s” journeys around town:

My route to the college ran past numerous playgrounds and a baseball field, and on Main Street (where I stopped to buy a Starbucks latte) there were a variety of gourmet food stores ... a friendly pharmacist who filled my Klonopin and Xanax prescriptions, an understated cineplex and family-run hardware store....<sup>74</sup>

The use of various names here – particularly “Main Street” and “Starbucks” – create a generic semi-urban environment only problematised with the mention of “Klonopin and Xanax”. These call to mind the litany of brand names – and drugs – which populate much of Ellis’s fiction (and which recall again allegations of affectlessness),<sup>75</sup> and their somewhat incongruous appearance here implies that, as de Certeau and Bauman after him suggest, the postmodern “steps” “Bret” takes around town are composing a sentence without his knowing it. That the sentence strongly reflects the other texts from his canon suggests that despite the new streets he is forced to travel (and this suburban street is at a distinct remove from the urban landscapes his fiction typically negotiates),<sup>76</sup> an element of his authorial voice remains strongly detectable. Here, aspects of previous “affectless” narration converge with the real practice of *flânerie* to produce new authorial terrain, stressing how the negotiation of the geophysical present can be imbued with elements of an undesirable textual past while signifying the authorship of new sentences.

It is only fitting that this journey ends in an office. Approaching his supposed place of work, “Bret” notes that pinned to the door “was a note from a student I never heard of canceling an appointment I didn’t recall having made”.<sup>77</sup> This has a number of implications for “Bret’s” psychogeographical self-situating. Firstly, the official tone of the note stresses his responsible, East Coast authorial role, although this is tempered by the allusion to mistaken identity, a recurrent feature of *Lunar Park* and also Ellis’s earlier fiction. Further, the door signifies a threshold, physical and symbolic (and arguably Genettian), into the official space of writing, the final destination of the author-wanderer. That it is no more an effective site of authorship than any other of the novel’s problematic geographies says more

about the psychogeographical orientation of “Bret” than of its formal demarcation as a writerly space. As the peculiar postmodern *flânerie* of “Bret’s” trip to the office has shown, his narrative is frequently generated through the physical and psychogeographical negotiation of space, and not through confinement in a fixed, pseudo-creative setting. As such, the door represents a final signpost of sorts within the de Certeauian litany of spatial symbols which has preceded it, and yet the narrative it seems to anticipate, that of an author going to his desk to work, is disrupted when Ellis enters this office and “immediately” opens his laptop – not to engage in an act of authorship, but to begin inventing a dream to relate to the psychiatrist his wife insisted he visit.<sup>79</sup> To emphasise the lack of truly writerly practice conducted in the office, “Bret” later struggles to find a pen on his desk.<sup>80</sup> The progressive textual and physical steps “Bret” has taken during his journey to this point are here foregrounded as part of a particular narrative of psychogeographical fashioning: stranded within contested space, “Bret” is still an author who cannot quite situate himself within his own discourse; his discourse is constricted, rather, through his repeated attempts to situate himself. Behind the door of the office, as already discussed, even further psychogeographical de-situating occurs, and that this is signalled by an effective de Certeauian signpost highlights the link between the textual past and present and the space(s) in which they are represented and revisited for Ellis’s authorial subjects.

All this would point to a somewhat circumlocutory situation in which “Bret” of *Lunar Park*, like the Clays of *Less Than Zero* and *Imperial Bedrooms*, negotiates multiple psychogeographical terrains, finds his topographical present imbued with his textual past (and vice versa), and spells out various de Certeauian “sentences”, only to find that his ability to write himself into space remains, ultimately, elusive. This would seem to merely update – albeit by complication – the accusations of “blankness” levelled at his early prose, and to justify connotations of “incoherence” in his later work.<sup>81</sup> The technicalities of Ellis’s

fashionings of space – and particularly the kind of geographical-synaesthetic entanglements which Seargeant’s readings of tense and memory in *Lunar Park* anticipate – would belie a reading of this kind, however.

Rather than arguing, along the lines of Ellis revisionists who feel that it is the apparently superficial and self-defeating nature of his later writing which actually communicates its affect, that Ellis’s authorial de-territorialisation is in fact indicative of an ability to navigate his own canon with ease, unwittingly following de Certeauian signposts from his textual past and so deftly piecing together a trans-urban authorial subject, it might be better to take Ellis – or at least “Bret” – at his own word. At the very close of his narrative, that author defines himself as being “in the pages, between the covers, at the end of *Lunar Park*”.<sup>82</sup> It is always narrative space that Ellis negotiates, and his strange authorial psychogeography, with its meandering sentences and temporal shifts, ultimately fixes him and his authors in one place: their text itself. In this, Ellis’s psychogeography, for all its postmodern edge, leaves its protagonist in a very similar position to that of the Baudelairean *flâneur*: simply put, “everywhere at home” in his text. That this text is frequently orientated within a meta- and intertextual tissue of spaces experienced in the present and recalled from previous self-authored narratives, suggests that, for Ellis’s later, authorial protagonists, text and space, empty and affective, is productively interchangeable. The Clay of *Less Than Zero* struggled to situate both himself and his narrative, resulting in what Young identifies as “a vast absence” in his narration, with the invisible “ghosts” of his life on the East Coast transposed against his nebulous Western presence.<sup>83</sup> However, as we have seen, the space inhabited by his more mature, authorly self in *Imperial Bedrooms* is more clearly delineated and more meaningfully problematised, even if often destructively so. The resurgence of space remembered, for Clay and for the “Bret” of *Lunar Park*, consistently provides a means through which to negotiate an authorial position. By operating a relation of binary opposition

between past and present space; remembered and experienced space, after Seargeant; creative and nihilistic space, as Davis would have it; and lived and written space, following de Certeau, Ellis's later, authorial protagonists both dismiss and draw on the affectless spaces of their metatextual pasts, their psychogeographical positions strange precisely because of their compromised, compromising spatial and textual heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *Lunar Park* (London: Picador, 2005), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive account of the way in which this controversy unfolded, see Rosa A. Eberly's *Citizen Critics* (2000). Georgina Colby, re-siting Ellis's fiction as a critical force within its consumerist milieu, in fact identifies Eberly's account of *American Psycho*'s reception as emphasising the apparent perception, not just of Ellis's work as commodifying, but of the book itself as a commodity (11). This approach is particularly noteworthy, suggesting as it does that Ellis's work was perceived as being both literally and metaphorically affectless, and so setting an important precedent for the treatment of the written text in his later writing.

<sup>4</sup> For a particularly pertinent reading of *Lunar Park*'s relation to the critical contexts which preceded and followed it, in parallel with similarly contextualising readings of Ellis's other novels, see Sonia Baelo-Allué's *Bret Easton Ellis's controversial fiction* (2011).

<sup>5</sup> John W. Aldridge, *Talents and technicians: literary chic and the new assembly-line fiction* (New York: Scribner's, 1992), 134.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Young, "Children of the Revolution," in *Shopping In Space: essays on American "blank generation" fiction*, ed. Graham Caveney and Elizabeth Young (London and New York: Serpent's Tail, 1992), 20.

<sup>7</sup> In *Underwriting the contemporary*, one of two recent monographs on Ellis's work, for example, Colby orientates her reading of Ellis within a mutually constitutive political-literary sphere, suggesting that although his works do not resist their sublimation into the consumerist discourses with which they are associated, they are in fact "dangerous" precisely because of the "dialectical discourse between domination and liberation" of their protagonists that they enact (12-13). Colby's reading is typical of the more constructive approach evident in the readings initiated by a new wave of Ellis critics whose work attempts to recover Ellis from the previous critical heritage of affectlessness. The most notable examples of this trend are found in studies which situate Ellis against readings of his work as critically problematic. This approach was arguably initiated in 2006 with Alain-Philippe Durand and Naomi Mandel's collection *Novels of the contemporary extreme*, which features essays by Mandel and Nielsen on Ellis's mid-period fiction. Mandel's essay, notably, considers the dialectic between violence and its mode of presentation in *American Psycho*, and the themes and approaches Mandel introduces echoed in the essays on that novel in her recent collection of essays on Ellis (2010), suggesting the initiation of a new critical heritage. Another notable proponent of this critical method is Baelo-Allué, whose recent monograph both fully engages with earlier criticism of Ellis and undertakes to locate his work productively within its critical heritage.

<sup>8</sup> James Annesley, "Brand Ellis: Celebrity Authorship in Lunar Park," in *Bret Easton Ellis: American Psycho, Glamorama, Lunar Park*, ed. Naomi Mandel (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 157.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Henrik Skov Nielsen's "What's in a Name", which unpicks *Lunar Park*'s references to Hamlet to provide a thoroughgoing critique of the novel's technique of physical and ontological doubling.

<sup>10</sup> The most notable example of this phenomenon is evident in the characterisation of *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman, whose uneasiness as a resident of New York City prompts him to engage in numerous murderous deeds (metaphorical or otherwise) which both take place in a modified version of the cityscape (as indicated by the novel's opening, which details the appearance of some ominous graffiti "scrawled in blood red lettering" (3) on a previously blank wall) and which alter this space in and of themselves (this graffiti is echoed later in Bateman's homicidal actions when, after killing a girl, "I spend the afternoon smearing her meat all over the walls" (332)). Also notable in this regard is Victor Ward, whose inauguration into Ellis's textual universe in *The Rules of Attraction* (1987) figured him as maladjusted to the campus setting in which the novel takes place, given his previous status as an international jetsetter. This problematic relation to space anticipates Victor's subsequent appearance as the protagonist of *Glamorama* (1999), in which he is estranged from the urban environment he inhabits through his involvement with the glamorous New York City social scene – "everything

suddenly seems slightly exhausting, vaguely demanding”, he notes at one point (129) – which in the novel’s opening section results in his consistent identification by others as having been present at events he has no recollection of attending. Despite later clarification that this confusion might be due to Victor’s replacement by a double, it nevertheless serves to initiate an uneasy disjunction between identity and space, which only deepens following his passage to Europe in the novel’s subsequent sections. (For full discussion of Victor’s apparent “doubling” and the impact of this on novel’s conceptualisation of identity, see Henrik Skov Nielsen’s “Telling Doubles and Literal-Minded Reading in Bret Easton Ellis’s *Glamorama*” (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (London: Picador, 1986), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Clay is physically distinct from his peers in one notable regard, with his distinctly un-Californian pallor frequently drawing comment: “You look kind of pale, Clay. You should go to the beach or something” (9).

<sup>13</sup> Ellis, *Less Than Zero*, 35-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-6.

<sup>16</sup> Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud, “Cartographie du vide: les ‘non-lieux’ de l’espace américain dans *The Informers* de Bret Easton Ellis,” *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies* Vol. 19, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Young, “Vacant Possession”, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> For example, “Bret” is working on a novel entitled *Teenage Pussy*: “Knopf was going to call it a “pornographic thriller” in their catalogue”, he notes (69), once again satirically invoking the vociferous objections to the sexualised violence of *American Psycho* prior to its publication.

<sup>22</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” trans. Ken Knabb, in *Critical geographies: a collection of readings*, ed. Harald Bauder and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro (Kelowna, British Columbia: Praxis, 2008), 25. Merlin Coverley sees Debord’s definition as exemplary in explaining the concept of psychogeography, as “psychogeography is, as the name suggests, the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban space” (10).

<sup>24</sup> See Coverley 105-6 for an account of de Certeau’s thought in this area.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”, in *The painter of modern life, and other essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1995), 9.

<sup>26</sup> See Coverley (111, 114-18) for discussion of the particular psychogeographies foregrounded by these authors. Fittingly, Self’s *Walking to Hollywood*, in which he charts his (fictional) passage through the North American landscape, contains an account of a meeting with Ellis, or perhaps “Bret”. Self, or perhaps “Self”, remarks upon the author’s estrangement from his environment, noting that “I could understand why Bret didn’t want to sit next to anyone in LA ... his face bore an expression of frightening ennui” (236); he subsequently complements this “Bret” on the pseudoautobiographical playfulness of *Lunar Park*. The various metatextual implications arising from this passage are mind-bending, but most notably suggest a certain degree of proximity between the two spatially disrupted authorial avatars.

<sup>27</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” in *The flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge 1994), 155.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> For a pertinent recent study of *Lunar Park*’s gothic narrative, see Joanne Watkiss, “The horror of inheritance” (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Picador, 1991), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Seargeant, “Time, tense and perception in the narrative voice of Bret Easton Ellis’s *Lunar Park*,” in *Applied linguistics in action: a reader*, ed. Guy Cook and Sarah North (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 246-7, 249-50.

<sup>38</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 107.

<sup>39</sup> Seargeant, 248.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>41</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 279.

<sup>42</sup> Much later in the text, in reference to a time some years previously when he was still living a bachelor's lifestyle away from his family, Ellis remarks of Robby that the suburban house "used to be *his* house before I arrived" (173), a comment which would certainly emphasise this observation.

<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting here that, as "Bret's" room out West mutates into the kind of writerly space he established in the East, so does the suburban house he occupies in upstate New York, throughout *Lunar Park*, morph into an exact facsimile of his childhood home in LA, with a shag pile carpet sprouting in the lounge and paint peeling off its façade to reveal an undercoat that was never there, until, ultimately, "Bret" realises that "the house had felt so sharply familiar to me [because] I had lived in it before" (169). Interestingly, after his trip to LA and his realisation of the authorial self-impetus behind his narrative, "Bret" returns to the house in question to discover the house returned to its normal state, permitting him to cast aside his sense of regret and become "someone else" (285). Here, as with the bedroom/office in LA, the transformation of space has occasioned a psychogeographical shift in the perspective of the author inhabiting it, once again emphasising the impact of space on writerly perspective, and vice versa.

<sup>44</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ellis, *Less Than Zero*, 3, 194.

<sup>46</sup> Kimball, it should be stressed, does also appear as a character in the real-world, published version of *American Psycho*, and also in *Glamorama*; readers of *Lunar Park* aware of this fact will, then, be even more aware of the problematic intertextual web *Lunar Park* consistently weaves.

<sup>47</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 281.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent-Arnaud, "Cartographie du vide," 107.

<sup>49</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *Imperial Bedrooms* (London: Picador, 2010), 3.

<sup>50</sup> See particularly J. Robert Lennon's *London Review of Books* review "Via "Bret" via Bret", and Erica Wagner's review in *The New York Times*, which notes the novel's "neat, postmodern, self-referential beginning, with Clay ... observing himself being observed, an acknowledgement that his version of the story may only be one of many".

<sup>51</sup> Ellis, *Imperial Bedrooms*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Mike Davis, *City of quartz: excavating the future in Los Angeles* (London: Pimlico, 1998), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Note also, of course, the allusion to a cultural marketplace as defined by Bourdieu and Adorno and Horkheimer, of the kind which Ellis fictionalises in both *Lunar Park*, in which literary celebrity is foregrounded as frequently eclipsing the works by which it is preceded (9), and in *Imperial Bedrooms*, where Clay is involved in scripting a "complicated novel" optioned for filming (14).

<sup>55</sup> Davis, *City of Quartz*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> One of these novels, *The Listeners*, strongly recalls Ellis's *The Informers*, a film adaptation of which was released in 2008; once again, authorship functions within a highly metatextual context.

<sup>58</sup> Sonia Baelo-Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's controversial fiction: writing between high and low culture* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 192.

<sup>59</sup> Ellis, *Imperial Bedrooms*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> "Bret's" suburban home ultimately comes to completely resemble his childhood home, unequivocally locating the spatial past in the narrative present.

<sup>62</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988), 92.

<sup>63</sup> Clay actually observes that the view from the apartment is "impressive without becoming a study in isolation" (13), suggesting that the level of voyeuristic distance from the psychogeographical mêlée of the streets of LA is optimal.

<sup>64</sup> Ellis, *Imperial Bedrooms*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, 103.

<sup>66</sup> Ellis, *Imperial Bedrooms*, 55.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-9.

<sup>68</sup> Young, "Vacant Possession," 24.

<sup>69</sup> Baelo-Allué, *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction*, 175.

<sup>70</sup> Ellis, *Imperial Bedrooms*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting here that place names frequently carry a particular significance in *Lunar Park*. Several of them, such as "Elsinore Lane", on which "Bret" lives, and "Fortinbras Mall," which he frequents and which is the setting for several key events, clearly reference Hamlet, meaning that the reader, as well as "Bret," is engaged in following a series of de Certeauian signposts which both direct their reading in a pseudo-psychogeographical sense, and situate the novel within an extratextual framework which further complicates its

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discourse of authorship. For a full discussion of *Lunar Park*'s references to *Hamlet* and the way in which they doubly focalize the text, see Nielsen's "What's in a Name".

<sup>72</sup> Michael Sheringham, *Everyday life: theories and practices from Surrealism to the present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 379.

<sup>73</sup> De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 74.

<sup>75</sup> In a review of *Lunar Park* for the *New Statesman*, Rachel Aspden observes that "the lists of celebrities and designer labels have been largely replaced by cabinet upon cabinet full of 'meds' for adults, children and even the family dog" (54), suggesting that, to a certain degree at least, the psychogeographical shift occasioned by "Bret's" move to suburbia has not completely diminished his signature authorial style.

<sup>76</sup> One notable exception is the story "Sitting Still" which appears in *The Informers*. Chronicling a train journey out West to LA from East, it is characterised by subtle adjustments of perspective and style as befit the territory negotiated: as the train approaches LA, for example, the narrator reads *Vanity Fair* and takes "a Valium" (80). This would perfectly mirror de Certeau's notion of psychogeographical shifts of place as fashioning a particular narrative, and in this way it is fairly atypical of the usually disjunctive representations of spatial experience in Ellis's fiction; although, as Vincent-Arnaud notes, the dispelling of the previously nostalgic appreciation of American space the arrival into the city entails does complement Ellis's frequently bleak depictions of urbanism (113).

<sup>77</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 76.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 77.

<sup>81</sup> Lennon, "Via "Bret" via Bret", 7.

<sup>82</sup> Ellis, *Lunar Park*, 308.

<sup>83</sup> Young, "Vacant Possession," 28-9.

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