Consumerism and Cosmopolitanism in Bret Easton Ellis's *The Informers*

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Abstract: Rooted in the ancient philosophy of the Cynics and Stoics, cosmopolitanism is essentially an ethical notion, which insists on moral obligations and compassion towards others, regardless of racial, national, class, or other affiliations. However, in the late twentieth century, political and theoretical debates—generated by specific situations and issues—complicated the ethical notion of cosmopolitanism with more practical political and sociocultural connotations, melding it with globalisation, anticolonialism, and multiculturalism. Cosmopolitanism has also been associated with the global elite. The super-rich are the protagonists in Bret Easton Ellis's The Informers, *a collection of interrelated short stories, set in Los Angeles in the early 1980s. The sprawling, featureless city offers hollow enjoyment and the illusion of eternal youth through the consumption of commodities that include not only objects and entertainment but also human beings, who are commodified by means of their eagerness to experience more pleasure. Drawing on the ethical and the culturalist concept of cosmopolitanism and Baudrillard's theory of the consumer society and simulation, this paper argues that Ellis's privileged white Angelinos, immersed in a multicultural environment and global consumerism, are profoundly alienated not only from the racially other human beings they encounter, but also from family, friends, and even themselves. Their progressive debasement is caused by a way of life that is governed by consumerist values, such as the cult of the body, the adulation of youth, obsession with fame, and the commodification of people. Culturalist cosmopolitanism is shown to be an evolved version of consumerism, as it entails the consumption of the racial and sexual Other as a means of self-aggrandisement and the assertion of the cultural hegemony of white American masculinity. This paper concludes that culturalist cosmopolitanism as well as consumerism are fundamentally hostile to ethical cosmopolitanism.*

In today's globalised world, encountering different cultures has become a part of everyday life. Interest in, and open-mindedness towards, foreign cultures are widely promoted and posited as a means of resolving intercultural conflicts and furthering peaceful coexistence. Acceptance, tolerance, and respect for difference are increasingly subsumed under the notion of a cosmopolitan way of life, which involves crossing, and even abolishing, boundaries between self and other. However, as opposed to the ancient Greek world of the *polis*, the notion from which cosmopolitanism evolved, today's citizens live in a globalised capitalist–consumerist order, which encourages subjects to construct identities and achieve social positioning through consumption patterns. Therefore, the original philosophical notion of cosmopolitanism is significantly complicated by the transformation of societies into a worldwide system of production and consumption.

Moreover, in the wake of World War II, a new global political and economic order emerged under the hegemonic leadership of the United States. American hegemony is expressed not only through global organisations, supranational legislation, and multinational business corporations. It also means that today's globalised culture is largely the reflection of American norms, values, and tastes. The convergence of a cosmopolitan outlook on life, consumerist attitudes, and American cultural hegemony can be observed in the works of Bret Easton Ellis, one of the most highly acclaimed American writers in the 1980s and 1990s.

Bret Easton Ellis's fiction has been controversial, and its literary prestige has been fluctuating. The most contentious aspect of his writing is the depiction of morally outrageous actions that are not condemned by the first-person narrative voice (Baelo-Allué 33). Critics have attempted to interpret this authorial strategy by placing Ellis in various literary movements or styles, attaching labels to his writing (Baelo-Allué 22). Baelo-Allué summarises Ellis's critical reception history by introducing and elaborating on each label and determining the extent to which it fits Ellis's writings or has shaped his critical reception.

The first label attached to Ellis's fiction was the "brat pack" due to Ellis's close affiliation with young, affluent, overly hyped writers who achieved instant best-selling author status on publishing their first book. These writers lived celebrity lifestyles and were associated in the public imagination with Hollywood actors and the entertainment media, rather than the literary field. As a result of this label, Ellis's fiction has been seen as one that blurs the boundaries between high and popular culture (Baelo-Allué 23–26).

Secondly, Ellis's fiction has been deemed "postmodern," a term which can be interpreted in both a wider sense and a narrower one. Baelo-Allué explains that, as an umbrella term, it applies to all fiction written after World War II. In its narrower sense, it is applied to metafictional or experimental writing. In the latter sense, Ellis's fiction cannot be considered postmodern. Nevertheless, the notion of the postmodern has been evolving and has come to include a focus on the socioeconomic conditions of postmodernity. This view, developed by Fredric Jameson, is highly relevant in Ellis's work as it depicts "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Baelo-Allué 33). His conspicuously wealthy characters experience the "time-space compression" (Baelo-Allué 27–28) of late modernity, since they have instantaneous access to disposable consumer goods, quickly become tired of them, and search for new sensations. Eventually, this compulsive pursuit of novelty results in discovering extreme sources of sensation, such as drug consumption, transgressive and violent sexuality, even murder. According to critics that label Ellis as a postmodern writer, his exaggeration of consumer society's excesses results in a satire of our contemporary culture, in which only appearances and fragments are left for individuals from which to construct a personality (Baelo-Allué 27–29).

The third label that is commonly attached to Ellis's fiction is "minimalism," characterised by a flat style and a lack of formal experimentation. The narrators are non-committal, not omniscient, and are involved in ordinary situations. Whereas Ellis's writing displays the simplicity of minimalism, it deviates from it in terms of its upper-class characters, extraordinary situations, and catalogue-like descriptions (Baelo-Allué 29–31).

Due to these features, Ellis's fiction has been associated with the "downtown writing" label. Downtown writers aimed to subvert traditional social and artistic conventions and produced alternative art with limited dissemination. Ellis's *oeuvre* shares thematic concerns with downtown writing, as it represents transgressive behaviour, involving drugs, crime, sexual excess, obsession with consumption, fashion, and the entertainment industry, and the staging of inner-city life. In contrast, it apparently lacks the commitment of downtown writers who rebelled against socioeconomic and racial injustice (Baelo-Allué 31–33).

According to Baelo-Allué, the combination of certain features of postmodern, minimalist, and downtown writing can be summed up by a fifth label, that of "blank fiction." Blank fiction's subject matter is the urban life of the 1980s and 1990s, depicting its decadent consumerism, violent, criminal and sexual excesses, and abounding

in references to its consumer culture (33). Annesley sees blank fiction's preoccupation with consumerism as its primary characteristic. However, far from lacking any intellectual depth, this focus on the commodity enables blank fiction—including Ellis's novels—to give an insight into the functioning of our culture (7–10). Whereas some critics dismiss blank fiction as the amoral purveyor and promoter of late capitalistic commerce and consumerism, others—including Annesley—assert that an exaggerated emphasis on consumerism as a way of life offers a critique of contemporary cultural and social practices (Baelo-Allué 33–35). Annesley argues that the first-person narrators who fail to condemn the moral turpitude of this lifestyle speak from within this culture, in the language of consumerism (92–97), thus providing an implicit critique of consumer society's excesses, in which all aspects of life have been colonised by commodification (117–118). Baelo-Allué points out the significance of Ellis's representation of mass society as one consisting of atomised individuals who have only the most tenuous, utilitarian relationships with each other. As there is no community to provide them with values, they succumb to fake moralities offered by mass culture and consumption. Therefore, they cannot be expected to take a moral stance on the actions depicted; instead, it is precisely their inability to do so that constitutes the moral of Ellis's novels (Baelo-Allué 33–35).

As this reception history makes clear, Ellis's fiction has been interpreted in the context of various literary styles and movements as well as the sociocultural conditions of postmodernity and consumerism. However, little critical attention has been directed to the affluent white characters' attitudes to racial otherness and cultural differences. Ellis's novels have not been examined in the context of cosmopolitanism either.

Drawing on the concept of cosmopolitanism as well as Baudrillard's theories of consumer society and simulation, this paper argues that it is a banal form of culturalist cosmopolitanism and a savagely competitive consumerism that are staged in Bret Easton Ellis's *The Informers*. The characters are privileged white upper-class professionals, artists, and youth, who are immersed in the multicultural environment and consumerist lifestyle of Los Angeles in the 1980s. Although exposed to the racial other, such as the Japanese, Latinos, and Blacks, these Angelinos engage only in culturalist cosmopolitanism with a view to enhancing their lifestyle and social status. Excessive consumption of mass media products and drugs as well as promiscuous and reckless behaviour lead to a progressive alienation from other human beings and themselves. While the racial other is ruthlessly "cannibalised,"

no meaningful companionship is formed with the same. The members of the elite remain locked in competitive, exploitative, or abusive relationships. The characters' rapacious consumerism and superficial cosmopolitanism precipitate the commodification of human beings and values, resulting in the debasement of the humanity of others as well as their own. It is not only the cosmopolitanism of the characters that is shallow and lacking ethical foundations, but their entire way of life is devoid of normative values or concerns. The dearth of ethical values in Ellis's fictional world is closely tied to the ethos of the consumerist society.

The Relationship between Cosmopolitanism, Globalisation, and Consumerism

The concept of cosmopolitanism originates in the ancient philosophy of the Cynics. The "*kosmopolitēs* (citizen of the cosmos) recognises his potential kinship with others and he has therefore a certain obligation to help them" (Moles 119). This kinship is based on the reason—intellect or judgment—that each human being possesses. This reason overrides the importance of other sociocultural markers such as race, sex, or social class. Diogenes, the most distinguished Cynic philosopher, coined the term *kosmopolitēs,* and the notion was later developed and explained by the Stoics (Moles 116–119).

The modern construction of cosmopolitanism first emerged in Kant's 1795 essay, "Perpetual Peace" (Papastephanou 1). Kant takes the contractual political philosophy of Hobbes and Locke as a starting point for his argument. In the same way in which individual people renounce absolute freedom to gain protection from the state, individual states will also eventually give up their absolute sovereignty so that they can avoid violent conflicts that occur in a political system where countries act independently and focus solely on their own interests (Chauvier 46). As a result of this mutually beneficial cooperation, their interests gradually coalesce, building solidarity between formerly indifferent or even hostile political entities: "the peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in *one* part of the world is felt *everywhere*" (Kant 107–108).

However, by the 2000s, cosmopolitical thinking has bifurcated into two partially overlapping, partially opposing directions. Homi Bhabha labels these two cosmopolitical forms of thought as global cosmopolitanism and vernacular

cosmopolitanism. Global cosmopolitanism is characterised by imagining the world as "a concentric world of national societies" (xiv) in which the ideal of progress legitimates neoliberalism in the political, and unimpeded competition in the economic sphere. Technological advances enable communication on a global scale, resulting in a "multicultural multinationalism" (xiv), which promotes diversity on condition that migrants bring profitable skills with them, contributing to economic growth. In contrast, refugees and impoverished, unskilled migrants are ignored and excluded. This leads to "unequal and uneven development" (xiv), and eventually, to "a dual economy" (xvi), which is a consequence of a "predatory" (xv) cosmopolitanism.

As opposed to global cosmopolitanism, vernacular cosmopolitanism places emphasis on the point of view of minorities (Bhabha xvi). Based on ethics, the vernacular movement critiques the hypocrisy and intolerance of global cosmopolitanism (xiii). Vernacular cosmopolitans lead "a hybrid form of life," defined by a movement "in-between cultural traditions," and refuse to be tied to "any single culture" (xiii). They claim their "right to difference in equality" and aim to redefine the political, legal, and social criteria of citizenship in a bid to achieve "symbolic citizenship." To do so, Bhabha contends, the "nation-centred view of citizenship" (xvii), according to which identities are constructed along the lines of origins or prior belonging, must be eliminated. Instead of the "quasi-colonial" ideology of global cosmopolitanism, premised on invidious dichotomies of local–global, centre–periphery, citizen–stranger, vernacular cosmopolitanism focuses on minorities as the true global citizens (xxi), who should gain acknowledgement by establishing and strengthening global minoritarian alliances (xxii).

A similar distinction between two approaches to cosmopolitanism, based on ethical values, is made by Papastephanou. The first is the Kantian, legal–moral philosophy that construes cosmopolitanism as a normative ideal. This conception of cosmopolitanism is oriented towards an imagined community and its relational possibilities. Therefore, it insists on responsibility towards the other. In contrast, the culturalist construction regards cosmopolitanism as an empirical phenomenon, whose avatars are members of a global elite, for example, the managerial class, scholars, and travellers. This approach has a primarily individualistic outlook and is mostly focused on the Western subject and its cultural enrichment (2–3). A very similar conception of this meaning of the term is conveyed by the phrase aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which denotes the consumption, production, and dissemination of cultural content worldwide by individuals (Octobre 276). Octobre calls this

the most banal form of cosmopolitanism as it requires little investment of resources and is widely used by subjects to build an identity (276). Papastephanou rejects the culturalist, elitist, and universalist conception, and defines cosmopolitanism, in accordance with Kantian legacy, as an "ethico-political ideal" (2).

Even when restricted to its ethico-political sense, cosmopolitanism remains a complex interdisciplinary notion, which encompasses "ontological, ... legal, historical, ecological, aesthetic, economic, emotional and cognitive aspects" (Papastephanou 4) and, therefore, clearly transcends the culturalist construction. This complex ethical cosmopolitanism also exceeds mere temporary charity towards the refugee or migrant: it involves responsibility towards those who do not only visit but stay permanently as well as to those who "remain rooted" and do not visit our country. In brief, this ethically demanding cosmopolitanism, which is "an ideal and a virtue to be explored as a possibility," commits individuals to "a responsible, lawful, loving and thoughtful treatment of the whole *cosmos*" (4).

However, there is a crucial notion related to cosmopolitanism that cannot be ignored, irrespective of what construction of cosmopolitanism is applied, and that is globalisation. Cicchelli and Mesure present three intersections between globalisation and cosmopolitanism. The first overlap consists in cosmopolitanism's capacity to examine "the non-economic dimension of globalisation" (7). This refers to an attentiveness to globalisation's impact on individuals' experience and identities as well as its effect on culture, social norms, and institutions. The second link consists in a newly emerging world order, as American hegemony is being replaced by a multipolar global political system with emerging new powers, such as China and India. In the process, "new vulnerabilities, inequalities, imbalances, *and* opportunities" (8–9) are being created. The third meeting point is constituted by the relative weakening of nation states confronting the forces of globalisation, such as transnational capitalism, the global economy, supranational organisations, and military alliances. In this changing and increasingly interdependent environment, states are both hindered and assisted by supranational forms of political control. These aspire to global governance, while nation states try to navigate the intractable processes of globalisation (9). The nation state is increasingly unable to retain absolute sovereignty and deliver goods to its citizens, because "[t]he spatial scope of the problems and the spatial scope of governments do not match" (Agnew 313). The discrepancy between globalisation and cosmopolitanism is summarised by Cicchelli and Mesure as follows: "Contrary to the dreams of the eulogists of a unified world,

the anonymous forces of globalisation are at the roots of the unfulfilled promise of the advent of cosmopolitanism" (11). In other words, globalisation is not necessarily conducive to cosmopolitanism, mainly because it lacks ethical values.

This marked contrast between an ethical and a practical worldview was also formulated by Ferdinand Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887). As Inglis explains, Tönnies invented the dichotomy of *Gemeinschaft*, that is, community or "affectively based groups," as opposed to *Gesellschaft*, which stands for society or "rationally calculating, selfish individuals" (57). According to Tönnies, *Gesellfschaft*, characterised by *Kürwille* or rational will, gradually replaced *Gemeinschaft*, driven by *Wesenwille* or natural will. Whereas *Wesenwille* assesses the inherent value of a particular action, *Kürwille* considers its practicality. Therefore, *Kürwille* stands for rational and "individualistic calculation" (Inglis 58). Tönnies associates the emergence of this opportunistic way of thinking with merchants and argues that it spread among diverse populations due to the mobility and rootlessness of the merchant class. Unencumbered by ties to nation, community, or family, the merchant is quintessentially cosmopolitan (Inglis 59).

For Tönnies, the merchant is self-seeking, mobile, and adaptable:

> He is without a home, a traveller, a connoisseur of foreign customs and arts without love or piety for those of any one country, a linguist speaking several languages, flippant and double-tongued, adroit, adaptable, and one who always keeps his eye on the end or purpose he plans to attain. He moves about quickly and smoothly, changes his character and intellectual attitude (beliefs or opinions) as if they were fashions of dress, one to be worn here, another there. (Tönnies 168)

The merchant consumes foreign culture, such as food, music, and various forms of recreation, with a view to applying this cultural knowledge to his own individualistic purposes. Tönnies's merchant prefigures neoliberalism's neocitizen, whose relationship "to the structure of governance in which she participates is expressly and openly opportunistic" (Cherniavsky 75). Both the neocitizen and the merchant seek to utilise the competencies and affordances provided by a state or a culture, with which they do not profess any affective identification.

This mercantile attitude has much in common with culturalist or aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which involves the consumption of exotic cultural content

as a means of enriching one's lifestyle and shape one's identity. Although the merchant's aim in appropriating cultural content is mainly financial, while the aesthetic cosmopolitan's goal is existential or sociopsychological—to satisfy a desire to belong—both avail themselves of alien cultures with a view to individualistic and egocentric purposes.

The predatory attitude of the neocitizen is in close rapport with global cosmopolitanism. Raschke argues that global cosmopolitanism is fundamentally corporatist, and the "global citizen" has evolved from Whyte's "organisation man" of the 1950s. The global citizen, under the thin veneer of humanitarian altruism, makes substantial profits from promoting transnational corporate interests (92). Essentially, the neocitizen is a global citizen since they both function according to the morally hollow logic of neoliberalism.

Moreover, the most banal form of cosmopolitanism intersects with consumerism, since it mainly consists of the consumption of foreign products. In addition, both aesthetic cosmopolitanism and consumerism involve the negotiation of individual identity (Paterson 6). Another common feature of consumerism and aesthetic cosmopolitanism is that both are driven by irrational needs, wants, and desires in contrast to the calculating and rational *Kürwille* of the merchant. Paterson emphatically rejects the notion of the rational consumer. Instead, he stresses "elements of the sensory consciousness and the nonconscious states" as well as "the temporary satisfaction of a desire or felt need" (3). Finally, consumerism is not incompatible with a concern for the wider world, as it may involve ethical and environmental considerations (7).

However, there is also a significant difference between aesthetic cosmopolitanism and the consumer as constructed by critics of capitalism, such as Marx, Weber, Adorno, and Marcuse (Paterson 7). The minimal requirement for even a banal cosmopolitanism is an openness to other cultures and ways of life, and, more importantly, to human beings who are significantly different from the self (Cicchelli and Mesure 4). In contrast, the consumer, confusing their biological needs with artificially generated desires and ignoring relational responsibilities, grows "alienated, unreflexive, inward-looking, and routinised" (Paterson 6). Marxist thinkers emphasise the alienation and self-centredness of the consumerist attitude, in stark contrast with cosmopolitan openness and curiosity towards others.

Consumer society is defined by Paul Elkins as "one in which the possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social

status, and national success" (qtd. in Goodwin 2). Jerome Segal's definition adds that "an individual's self-respect and social esteem are strongly tied to his level of consumption relative to others in the society" (qtd. in Goodwin 2). It is worth highlighting that social status and social esteem depend, according to both these definitions, on one's level of consumption. The implication is that a consumer society is a competitive one in which individuals strive to surpass each other in terms of expenditure on, and use of, goods and services. Whereas consumerism entails competitiveness, ethical cosmopolitanism is based on the presumed equality of individuals, regardless of external variables such as income or consumption level. Therefore, a consumer society is inhospitable to ethical cosmopolitanism; however, it is compatible with a culturalist or aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

Consumerism in *The Informers*

The Informers, a collection of interrelated short stories, presents characters that seem interchangeable due to their disordered, pleasure-seeking lifestyle and their overlapping relationship network. Each story is told by a first-person narrator who is either named rather late in the narrative or remains nameless throughout, further enhancing the anonymous quality of the characters. As several narrators refer to characters who also narrate a story, many characters are presented from different viewpoints. This narrative strategy distances the reader from these characters since any emotional identification with a particular first-person narrator is seriously undermined by subsequent and often contradictory viewpoints.

Another factor that contributes to a sense of emotional distance is the characters' uncertainty and indifference about each other's background or everyday life that falls outside the scope of their relationship. For example, the narrator of "Another Gray Area" states that "Christie is my girlfriend, a model who I think is from England" (Ellis 153), whereas the fictional author of "Letters from L. A." avers that Christie is "half German" (Ellis 145). However, the main reason why emotional identification with any of the characters is difficult is that they have no meaningful relationships with each other: "My relationships here with people aren't tense or trying because no one requires a whole lot of serious emotional investment at all. They're very safe ... I feel kind of anxious and depressed because of them sometimes" (Ellis 140). The dearth of affective ties generates a deep-seated anxiety, which, nevertheless,

is effectively suppressed by an atmosphere of eternal holidaymaking and a ready supply of easy gratifications.

The urban dweller has a calculating and matter-of-fact attitude to everyday life and human relationships according to Georg Simmel. This affectless temperament is generated by the money economy that pervades urban life. As a result, "in the treatment of persons ... a formal justice is often combined with an unrelenting hardness" (104). Another peculiarity of the inhabitants of the metropolis is that they fail to distinguish between objects since every one of them can be equated with a certain sum of money. Therefore, the exchange value of objects replaces the object themselves: "To the extent that money ... can become the common denominator of all values, it becomes the frightful leveller—it hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair" (106). By implication, human beings also become indistinguishable items, which are drained of colour and uniqueness by the levelling and quantifying power of money. The uniform featurelessness of most of the characters in *The Informers* is caused by the levelling influence of the money economy.

The most conspicuous link that connects Ellis's urban dwellers is their consumerist lifestyle, which has four salient features: the cult of the body; an obsession with youth; aspirations to, or fascination by, celebrity; and the commodification of self and others through sexual relations. All these aspects involve consumption of material and cultural goods as well as commodified human beings.

Firstly, the cult of the body reflects the materialist and consumerist worldview of these wealthy inhabitants of Los Angeles. For Baudrillard, the body is the finest consumer item. As all consumer items, it is invested with symbolic value that enables it to become a marker of identity. Thus, the body is not only reified—turned into an object—but also exalted. In a materialist society, the uppermost level of existence, formerly occupied by spirituality, is now filled by the body as the tangible essence of the human being. The ethical notions of sin and guilt are also transposed onto the body, which is now seen liable to punish the guilty individual (*The Consumer Society* 129–131).

In the world of *The Informers*, bodily degradation is the one unforgivable sin, for which there is no excuse. The appearance of the female protagonist of "On the Beach," in the last stages of an unspecified terminal illness, is described and referred to with critical undertones, emphasising her "sinful" deviation from the well-cared-for, healthy body:

> She stopped shaving her legs because she doesn't have the strength ... [She used to be] [t]all ... and blond ... and her body was supple, carefully muscled, aerobicised, and now she basically looks like shit. ...
>
> "She's looking pretty shitty, dude."
>
> "But she's dying," I said, understanding where he was coming from.
>
> "Yeah, but she still looks pretty shitty." (Ellis 214)

Illness that ravages the body is regarded as the result of irresponsibility or the slothful omission of the individual's duty of care towards their body. To some extent, the condition of the body indicates the individual's degree of adaptation to society: the more it approaches the ideal, the more adaptable, and therefore successful, the individual is (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* 131). The body, as the finest consumer item, is cherished and cared for to render it "a smoother, more perfect, more functional object for the outside world" (131). Thus, especially the female body, is reified and commodified in the name of self-care.

The female first-person narrator of "Letters from L. A." documents her gradual transformation from pale, artsy sophomore into party-going beach blonde: "I go to aerobics class with Christie in the morning and I've also been going to the beach a lot, working on my tan" (Ellis 145–146). The narrator's progressive integration into LA society is marked by outward signs of group affiliation, such as skin or hair colour, body shape, and muscle tone. The body is treated as a "colonised virgin 'territory,'" which one can exploit for manifestations of health and beauty. Therefore, it also performs the function of an investment which will yield returns in terms of social status and esteem. This process "represents a more profoundly alienated labour than the exploitation of the body as labour power" (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* 131–132).

Closely related to the cult of the body is the imperative of slimness. In "The Up Escalator," there are references to anorexia among wealthy girls, which indicates that the drive to do violence to the body is the most characteristically expressed by excessive dieting among young women: "Faith begins to talk about how her daughter's therapy is progressing. Sheila is an anorexic. My daughter has met Sheila and may also be an anorexic" (Ellis 23). In contrast, obese and unkempt characters elicit revulsion, which is as much moral as it is physical. There is an interchangeability of internal and external ugliness, demonstrated by the overweight and scruffy-looking character, Peter, in "The Fifth Wheel." His repulsive

appearance is portentous: "he's fat, three hundred, four hundred pounds, and his hair is long and blond and greasy and he's wearing a green T-shirt, sauce all over his face, marks all up and down his arms, and I get pissed" (Ellis 197). Somewhat later, Peter abducts and sexually abuses a little boy then incites the first-person narrator to murder the child, thus fulfilling the foreboding felt at the sight of his unattractive body. While consumerist society apparently promotes a positive relationship to the body in the name of physical indulgence and pleasure, it also enforces "repressive solicitude" towards the body. Consumerism exhibits a primeval aggression against the body since the obsession with slenderness is a form of violence, in which "the body is literally *sacrificed*" (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* 142–143).

The second main feature of the characters' mindset is their fascination with youth. A youthful appearance is sustained well beyond young adulthood by dietary supplements, exercise, and tanning. For example, the grandfather of the young female protagonist of "Letters from L. A." "looked so tan and healthy it was positively eerie" (Ellis 131). The importance of the latter is that a naturally suntanned body is associated with playing outdoors or enjoying oneself on the beach—activities linked with the carefree youth. Therefore, having a tan is also thought to indicate contentment with one's life: "'But you don't look too good,' Cheryl says. 'I mean, you're tan but you don't look happy'" (Ellis 78).

Nevertheless, the cult of youth entails not only the care of the body, but also an imaginative identification with a youthful and, therefore, immature perspective. The middle-aged characters' emotional immaturity is the most clearly seen in their failure at parenting. The unnamed housewife is unable to love or take care of her children. Her distant and indifferent parenting is largely due to her lack of compassion and self-absorption, which are qualities often found in children and adolescents. Another example of a failed parent is Les Price, who is unable to let his son win any game, whether it be cards, tennis, backgammon, or, crucially, seducing women. Les vaguely hopes to improve his relationship with his son during their short Hawaiian holiday. There are traces of genuine affection towards his son; however, these flickering sparks of emotion cannot contend with the chilly atmosphere of competitiveness and a ruthless will to power, which characterise the corporate culture in which he lives. Emotions are fundamentally alien to the cult of business success embraced by executives like Les: "after the anger brushes past, I'm left with a feeling of caring that seems strangely, hopelessly artificial" (Ellis 45). Competitiveness, although a key trait of manliness, is also a distinctive quality of children, especially when

playing games. When Tim is finally aroused from his lethargy by an encounter with an attractive girl, Les is "almost happy for him" (Ellis 59). However, he cannot conquer his habit of one-upmanship, and he sets out to captivate the girl by means of his wealth, worldliness, and cunning. Les's narcissistic self-aggrandisement prevents him from forming meaningful intimate relationships even when there is a genuine desire to be loved.

The third major aspect of these Angelinos' lifestyle is their aspiration to fame. This is closely linked to consumerism since consumption patterns are structured by individuals' desire to belong in a social group: "Commodities are purchased and used as markers of social position by consumers who are defining their relative position in regard to other consumers" (Paterson 39). The most apparent indicator of the characters' ambition to live a celebrity lifestyle is the solicitude with which they tan, exercise, and strengthen their body. Their virtually uniform appearance—tan, blond, slim, muscular—imitates the physique of actors, singers, and models, images of whom they consume daily. Watching MTV or Hollywood films and browsing the men's fashion magazine, *GQ*, are activities mentioned in nearly each story.

Both lower- and upper-class youth avidly consume popular cultural products, such as songs, music videos, magazines, and action-packed or romantic films as a form of entertainment. However, entertainment is more than a passive consumption of signs: it is a form of social activity, during which social norms of behaviour and appearance are transmitted and value systems are formed. "Entertainments," declares Brennan, "are more than outlets for enjoyment but places where social relations are reproduced" (72). To a certain extent, mass culture establishes democracy in the consumer society, as the same cultural products are consumed regardless of social position, thereby providing some common ground.

Whereas the consumption of mass media entertainment has a levelling influence, social class determines access to places. Working-class characters, small-time criminals, or impoverished drug addicts, especially women, are generally represented spending time indoors, while the elite is often seen driving around or moving between various entertainment venues, such as bars, restaurants, shopping malls, or travelling to far-flung tourist destinations. Lejeune et al. stress the intimate connection between cosmopolitanism and consumption, which manifests itself in differential access to public spaces: "consuming global goods or frequenting generic places mean greater cosmopolitan feelings or a greater willingness to engage with

diversity and the other" (9). As opposed to exploited migrants and the local poor, "highly mobile elites ... benefit from unlimited access to places" (9).

Most characters belong in the upper echelons of society and work in privileged occupational categories in the entertainment industry, news media, and fashion; however, they are also prone to be degraded by the meretricious nature of mass culture. Anne, an aspiring writer in "Letters from L. A.," gradually surrenders her relatively respectable intellectual values to the demands of commercial viability. Anne's metamorphosis into a tan, blond socialite, who eventually turns out "commercial" film scripts, follows a predictable pattern, staging the process by which artistic aspirations are throttled by the pressure to conform. Randy, a financially successful filmmaker, is also a failed writer who allowed his artistic sensibilities to be debased by commercial interests. Selling out his talents, however, has taken a toll on Randy, who "feels hollow and lost" (Ellis 143) and eventually commits suicide—or, possibly, falls victim to mysterious vampires stalking the Los Angeles area. He is physically torn apart as a metaphor for his unresolvable inner conflict.

Another pitfall of celebrity life is that it is often acquired at the cost of other people's professional and personal tragedies. This is exemplified by Bryan Metro, the protagonist of "Discovering Japan." Bryan capitalised on the songwriting talent of the members of his former band and even exploited the suicide of one of them, by having a heart-wrenching film made about the band. Having betrayed his former band members, he immerses himself in celebrity lifestyle with a voracious appetite for drugs, sex, and violence. The lack of all social and moral restraint brutalises him, while he is also tortured by the awareness that his own music is inferior to the productions of the band members he abandoned to their fate. The road to celebrity is paved with human sacrifice, as the aspirational individual exploits and preys on others. Another example is Ann, who inherits Randy's house and Ferrari after his unnatural demise. The most outrageous instance of human sacrifice in the volume is the kidnapping and murder of a child, orchestrated by Peter, a fan of Bryan Metro.

The fourth feature of consumerism in *The Informers* is the commodification of people, which manifests itself in transactional sexual relationships. Transactional or "economically motivated sexual relationships" are defined as "sexual relations for money, not for survival, but for material resources and leisure items" (Wilson and Flicker 98). The unnamed housewife narrator of "The Up Escalator" is involved in a sexual relationship with a young man who is the same age as her son and who receives

expensive gifts and cash disguised as loans in return for sexual favours. Dazed by tranquillisers, bored and fatigued, she spends her days lounging by the swimming pool, driving about, or having cocktails with girlfriends. She is immersed in an erotic daydream by the pool while watching the young pool boy, whose "muscles ... ripple gently beneath smooth clean brown skin" (Ellis 22). Her sensual reverie is abruptly terminated by the young man's announcement: "You have two dead rats in your drain" (Ellis 22). The rats in the swimming pool, which return in her nightmares, become symbolic of the moral sordidness of her consumerist and parasitic way of life. Sexual emancipation, for her, means the objectification of young men's bodies. However, she herself is commodified as an indolent and useless trophy wife to a successful film producer.

The paltriness of sexual liberation is shown most clearly when the sexually liberated woman confronts problems in an area other than sexuality. Freedom, in Levinas's philosophy, is indissociable from responsibility. To the extent that the subject is free, he or she must take responsibility for others: "Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness. The order of responsibility ... is also the order where freedom is ineluctably evoked" (Levinas 200). Therefore, a greater degree of real freedom is concomitant with increased compassion towards the other. However, much like her refusal to deal with the problem of rats in her pool, her inability to listen to her mother's complaints of her progressing terminal disease demonstrates that sexual freedom does not make the housewife a more compassionate and responsible adult. Since it is inoperative on the level of inevitable human realities, such as pain, loneliness, disease, decay, and mortality, the liberation of the female body increases neither women's agency nor their acknowledgment as responsible actors. In effect, the ideology of women's sexual freedom is ancillary to the ethos of consumerism since the former encourages women to regard men as interchangeable sexualised bodies or tools of gratification, in other words, as commodities. Baudrillard argues that sexual liberation, seemingly a radical change, ultimately re-establishes the constraints on women's agency in the public sphere and "stand[s] in the way of real economic and social responsibility" (*The Consumer Society* 137).

In brief, the characters' consumerist lifestyle is characterised by the commodification of self and others. Their consumption patterns are shaped by four ideological features: a reverence of the body, the adulation of youth, the obsession with celebrity, and transactional relationships. The eventual outcome of this

ethos is not a sophisticated culture of hedonism—quite the opposite. The characters are increasingly desensitised by their transgressive sensual experiences, and their perception is dimmed by the quantifying and levelling perspective induced by the money economy. They develop a blasé attitude, like Georg Simmel's urbanite, who deems all objects essentially identical because they are all purchasable (106). This emotional withdrawal from the surroundings also affects interpersonal relationships with the result that both self and others are seen as strangers. This alienation has been associated with not only the metropolitan but also the cosmopolitan subject (Johansen 86).

Cosmopolitanism in *The Informers*

Ethical cosmopolitanism implies the existence of a common essential feature in all human beings, an ineffable quality that elicits the compassion of the moral cosmopolitan. By the same token, the culturalist version of cosmopolitanism implies the existence of a "unitary" or "single" global culture. This global culture is engendered by American hegemony: "globalisation could once (and especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the attacks of September 11, 2001) be considered the synonym of American hegemony" (Cicchelli and Mesure 8). Hegemony necessarily has a cultural–ideological aspect since it "relies less on coercion than on ideological consensus or compliance" (Ramel 373). The Americanisation of the world is inextricably linked to both culturalist cosmopolitanism and consumerism, since both ideologies offer artificial and illusory identities, which can be accessed and consumed through material and cultural products.

Subjects' identity construction is based on simulated images that circulate in a globalised consumer culture. According to Baudrillard, simulation is the quintessence of American culture, and thus, of an Americanised world as well. Disneyland is the prime example of simulation. Its attraction consists in its ability to condense American culture. However, its real significance is that it represents an attempt to conceal the lack of a profound reality in American culture: "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it ... belong to the ... order of simulation" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 12).

Los Angeles, the setting of *The Informers*, bears a particularly close resemblance to Disneyland due to its profusion of similar entertainment venues. Headquarters

to the American film industry, this city is "an immense scenario and a perpetual pan shot" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 13). Significantly, Los Angeles also recycles and circulates childish dreams and phantasms, which inform the highly unnatural and mediated lifestyles of Californians. Having lost touch with the real, the physical, and the social, they reinvent "penury, asceticism, vanished savage naturalness: natural food, health food, yoga" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 13).

Some critics see *The Informers* as a literary response to social and urban problems. For Colby, the characters of *The Informers* are alienated from social space and from their own subjectivity. This melancholic estrangement is caused by the covert but "systemic violence of neoliberalism" (25). The increasingly privatised, corporatist economy, the trauma of the Vietnam war, and the failure to integrate minorities and redress socioeconomic inequalities spawned widespread resentment in 1970s urban America (Colby 28). In Colby's reading, Ellis's early fiction, including *The Informers*, gives voice to a social malaise, manifested in alienation and melancholia (29). The characters seem completely disconnected from reality, and this detached and mediated way of life is symbolised by the image of the glass pane. Les Price touching the glass of his office window while looking down at his son, who is queuing in front of a cinema, and Bryan Metro placing his fingertips on the small windowpane of the airplane, trying to discern the island of Japan, are both images that convey the characters' momentary realisation of their encaged, cordoned-off existence.

Both Les and Bryan, protagonists of "In the Islands" and "Discovering Japan," respectively, are emphatically severed from the cultures they are supposed to be discovering. The titles are in ironic contrast with the protagonists' isolation from life in these foreign lands, especially the latter title, since Bryan merely spends time in Japan without discovering any of it. They reside in international hotel chains such as the Hilton, visit coffee shops, bars, stadiums, or beaches crowded with tourists, all of which are venues associated with a standardised, global tourist industry and culturalist cosmopolitanism, detached from, and unaffected by, local particularities. Their privileged seclusion from the native culture generates a sense of imprisonment into an elitist and American way of life. Their privileges exempt them from common difficulties, but these same privileges also incarcerate them and make them unable to disengage themselves from patterns of manipulative or abusive behaviour towards others. Clearly, a cosmopolitan mobility and ease of crossing borders is not necessarily concomitant with an interest in, or respect for, other cultures.

A sense of suppressed guilt manifests itself in their self-destructive behaviour. While Les merely intoxicates himself with alcohol, Bryan is an inveterate heroin addict. When he severely (although accidentally) injures himself, he acts as if the injured body part did not belong to him:

> for a long time I'm staring at my palm, at a thin rivulet of blood racing down my wrist. ... I pull [the glass] out and the hole in my hand looks soft and safe and I take the jagged stained piece of glass ... and seal the wound by placing it back into it where it looks complete, but the glass falls out and streaming blood covers the guitar I'm beginning to strum ... . (Ellis 108)

Detachment from one's own body is intertwined with detachment from, and the lack of compassion towards, other people. Györke and Bülgözdi highlight the importance of affect (or the lack thereof) as a factor shaping subjects' relations to places: "sensations such as belonging or alienation ... mark the impact of the environment on the individual." Moreover, emotions are important mediators of social relations rather than being merely self-indulgent solipsistic sentiments (6). This construction of affect as fundamentally social is highly relevant to *The Informers*, in which the characters prove unable to establish meaningful relationships due to their emotionally deadened self and affectless attitude.

In "Discovering Japan," the elite male protagonist's encounter with the Other is staged as a dream. While actual interactions with young Japanese women are merely glossed over, the dream is vividly described. It conveys the privileged male's isolated and superior position: "I'm sitting in the restaurant on top of the hotel near a wall of windows and staring out over the blanket of neon lights that pass for a city" (Ellis 106). The words "wall," "blanket," and "pass for" refer to his incarceration within the order of simulation. In the dream, the Japanese girl—the Other, both in terms of race and gender—is both sexualised and threatening: "I'm drinking a Kamikaze and sitting across from me is the young Oriental girl from *Hustler* but her smooth brown face is covered with geisha makeup and the tight, fluorescent-pink dress and the expression creasing her flat, soft features and the gaze in the blank dark eyes are predatory, making me uneasy" (Ellis 106). As Baudrillard explains, exploited categories, such as women and racial others, are always, at the same time, threatening; this is why they are regarded as sexual objects (*The Consumer*

Society 137). While the "flat" features and the "blank" eyes convey the inscrutability of the foreign other, the "predatory" facial expression induces a fear which cannot be neutralised—as it might be in conscious waking life—by the sexual definition imposed on the girl through the "geisha makeup and the tight, fluorescent-pink dress." As the city below is emitting signs of an escalating panic then bursts into flame, the geisha girl is mumbling an inaudible word to the narrator, whose mounting terror is in sharp contrast with her serenity. Finally, a huge monster blasts through the window, grabs Bryan and lifts him towards its mouth. It is only when being seized by the monster that Bryan can distinguish the word muttered by the woman: "Godzilla ... Godzilla, you idiot ... I said Godzilla" (Ellis 107).

There is a twofold representation of the racial Other in this nightmare: the sexualised Other and the monstrous Other. While the former is inscrutable and vaguely threatening, the latter embodies the horrifying, vengeful ire and hatred of the oppressed: "the claw is ... pulsing with anger and covered with a slime that drenches the suit I'm wearing" (Ellis 107). The slime symbolises the privileged white male's visceral repulsion when encountering unmediated Otherness, whereas the motif of being devoured by the Other indicates a fundamental lack of confidence in American—or Western—cultural values. Overall, this nightmare stages the impossibility of communication taking place between the One and the—female and racial—Other as well as the profound terror of the One disguised as mastery and contempt.

The basic dualism of the One as opposed to the Other is, according to Haraway, a fundamental principle in Western culture. This fundamental dichotomy is supported by more specific dualisms that "have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self" (Haraway 59). While the One is complete and superior, the Other is multiple, indeterminate, and emphatically inferior: "The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other ... To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial" (Haraway 59–60). Bryan's nightmare is a striking dramatisation of Haraway's "dialectic of apocalypse with the other" with its image of a burning, frantic city. It also represents the Other as multiple: both seductive

geisha and slimy Godzilla. More importantly, the dream stages the illusory quality of the One's power and superiority over the Other.

In waking life, Japanese women, both sexual and racial Others, are humiliated, degraded, and even dehumanised by English and American visitors. Sexuality as well as the language barrier are used against them as a means of domination when the lead singer of an English band plays a cruel joke on the young Japanese hostesses: "'You a good fuck, bitch?' he asks, a sincere expression on his face, nodding. The girl looks at the expression, takes in the nod, the smile, and she smiles back a worried, innocent smile and nods and everyone laughs" (Ellis 127). Similarly, the American film producer, in the company of drugged Japanese idols, maliciously remarks: "Don't trust these fucking Japs ... I hope [the recent earthquake] got some of them" (Ellis 111). This remark as well as Bryan's dream of a blazing city may be allusions to the American nuclear bombing of Japan to win World War II. However, the most cruel and dehumanising incident in the story is Bryan's treatment of the two young prostitutes he slept with. He orders them to be removed from his room then listens to their screaming as the security guards maltreat and violate them. Waiting for the henchmen, he inadvertently locks eyes with the Japanese boy. Bryan, who had whipped this boy the night before, taunts him: "You feel sorry for yourself?" (Ellis 106). This question is the only utterance Bryan addresses to a Japanese person in the story, and it encapsulates the privileged Anglo-Saxon characters' attitude to the Japanese: a mixture of fear and contempt.

The American characters also encounter the racial other in Los Angeles, which has a sizeable Latino population. Cheryl, desperately in love with a fickle young playboy, receives a message. Her windshield wipers are broken off and a note attached says: "Mi hermana." Another character to whom a similar message is communicated is Graham. He sees a young Latino woman, apparently intoxicated by drugs, cross the road. She is almost hit by a large car, the driver of which swears at her: "'Watch out, you dumb spic' and the girl, not shaken at all, walks calmly to the other side of the street" (Ellis 170). As Graham is staring at her, she spots him and approaches him purposefully then whispers the phrase, "Mi hermano," three times, addressing the words directly to him. The mysterious encounter with the Latino woman is shown to have some significance: Graham is "transfixed" in anticipation and the girl feels her message is "urgent." In contrast with the customarily and uniformly blasé attitude of the characters, the white male protagonist is intrigued enough

to think that the girl "looks worth following" (Ellis 171). Moreover, he is curious about the meaning of her words: "What did she say?" (Ellis 171).

However, his girlfriend's answer jolts him out of this momentary exaltation of mind: "Me hermano? I think it's a kind of chicken enchilada with a lot of salsa," Christie says. "Maybe it's a taco, who knows?" (Ellis 171). Christie's interpretation of the phrase reflects a culturalist attitude to cosmopolitanism. She associates the words with the typical consumer goods linked with Mexican culture: fast food. Both Christie's consumerist gloss and Graham's incomprehension of a simple phrase in Spanish are indicative of a profound indifference towards the culture of Latinos. The wealthy Angelinos' lack of interest in other ways of life is in stark contrast with the minimum requirement of cosmopolitanism, which is "openness to others" (Schmoll 257). In addition, Graham's failure to comprehend the phrase spoken by a Latino woman is reminiscent of Bryan's nightmare in which he could not distinguish the word mumbled by the geisha girl. In both cases, communication between the One and the Other proves impossible.

The phrase "my brother" uttered three times and the small gold cross the Latina is wearing suggest that the message is one of Christian love for a fellow human being. However, the Latina is intoxicated with drugs and Graham is a drug dealer. Therefore, the imagined kinship between whites and Latinos is based not on Christian love but rather on their mutual involvement in a pleasure-seeking economy of addiction and escapism.

Graham also encounters the racial Other when he observes a young Black boy being pursued by supermarket security guards. In a similar fashion to his reaction to the Latina, Graham shows interest in what the boy carried off, then dropped in the street. It is a packet of filet mignon, an expensive cut of beef. The packet is dripping blood, soiling Graham's costly white shirt, which is an image of defilement. The stolen meat oozing blood is symbolic of predatory impulses and reappears in the subsequent story, "The Secrets of Summer," in a more pronounced manner.

"The Secrets of Summer" offers a solution to the mystery of a series of gruesome murders alluded to throughout the stories. The murdered young men, who were drained of their blood and mutilated, were the victims of Dirk, a vampire. While Dirk targets young men, Jamie, another vampire, feasts on the blood of teenage girls. Alternatively, he consumes large quantities of raw filet mignon, which refers to the previous story. In this case, the imagined fraternity between Black youth and privileged white males is founded on a predatory way of life. In a world where wealth,

good looks, and celebrity status are the utmost values, underprivileged categories such as Black youth aspire to become men like Bryan Metro or Jamie. These ruthless male characters are presented as role models, since they seem to have unlimited power to exploit others. Vampirism, a form of parasitism, is a metaphor for exploitative behaviour, glamourised as "the cool life" (Ellis 193). In retrospect, the pilfered packet of bleeding meat becomes symbolic of the aspiration of subjected categories to prey on others. Whereas the Black boy fails to carry off his loot and is presumably punished for his transgression, privileged white males, such as Bryan and Jamie, keep destroying other people and enjoy complete impunity. In addition to consuming blood, Dirk and Jamie have cannibalistic tendencies, indicated by piles of human bones, severed body parts, and their craving for human flesh. The cannibal, according to Paterson, "represents ... the endless appetites of consumer society" (3).

The vampire, an emblematic figure of capitalist and consumerist parasitism, also embodies Western cultural dichotomies. As a monster with a liminal body that transgresses boundaries between male/female and human/animal (Hurley 190), it can serve as an interrogation of social values. However, Jamie's character, with its emphatic heterosexuality—in contrast with the bisexuality of most other male characters—his well-appointed, designer coffin, and an appetite that can be sated with beef—a quintessentially American choice of meat—seems a rather effete and simplistic version of the vampire. Instead of uniting opposites, Jamie appears to assert the cultural superiority of the privileged white male. This is demonstrated by his predilection for watching the effect of his facial transformation on his helpless victims: "she looks up into eyes that cloud over completely, black and bottomless, and she reaches up, weeping with disbelief, and touches my face and I smile" (Ellis 191). The young women's function is to mirror and nourish the self of the One, providing it with a sense of omnipotence.

Conclusion

In *The Informers*, consumerism complements culturalist cosmopolitanism. Both aim at enhancing social status and contribute to practices of cannibalistic parasitism on subjected categories, such as women and people of colour. Both are ideologies that incite appetites for self-aggrandisement and the exertion of power over others. Culturalist cosmopolitanism is shown to promote the exploitation of the sexual and racial Other. Even in its mildest form, culturalist cosmopolitanism fails to engender

genuine interest in other cultures and ways of life. Indeed, it promotes the transformation of other cultures into consumer items.

In effect, culturalist cosmopolitanism is an offshoot of consumerism and represents its evolution into more complex forms of exploitation. Consumer society exalts the body—including its health, fitness, slimness, and beauty—as the finest consumer item and thereby promotes its exploitation as a source of social status. Culturalist attitudes take the instrumentality of the body one step further and regard the body of the Other as capital that can be appropriated and used for the social exaltation of the One. Underprivileged demographics such as the youth, women, and ethnic minorities, function as a mirror and nourishment to the self. They are regarded as consumer items and are—sometimes literally, as in "The Secrets of Summer"—consumed for rejuvenation and social power.

Even as the One exploits the Other, the latter sometimes offers itself up as resource and sacrificial victim. Prime examples of this self-immolating behaviour can be found in the characters of stoned groupie girls, prostitutes, party girls, and young bisexual men. People are debased into bestial predators and prey, according to the logic of consumer capitalism. The predatory and parasitic economic system of consumer capitalism spills into subjects' private lives and interpersonal relationships, turning sexuality into a form of cannibalistic consumption.

There are only a few instances of the emergence of ethical cosmopolitanism in *The Informers*. Examples include Cheryl, who experiences genuine love for another person, which is not reciprocated, and Graham, who manifests signs of earnest interest in the way of life of oppressed categories, such as Latinas and Black youth. Nevertheless, their tentative awakening either veers off into psychological breakdown, as is the case of Cheryl, or a relapse into their customary indifference, which happens to Graham.

All in all, the ethos of consumerism and its more sinister outgrowth, culturalist or global cosmopolitanism, preclude the emergence of ethical cosmopolitanism in the sense of acknowledging the humanity of the Other, regardless of social status or cultural differences. Interest in other cultures is almost non-existent in *The Informers*, while the consumption of signs of otherness, with a view to strengthening the cultural and social superiority of privileged categories, is rampant. Both consumerism and culturalist cosmopolitanism are hostile to ethical values since they promote the reduction of objects and human beings to their exchange value. This, in turn, deprives subjects of uniqueness. Consequently, the interpersonal relations of global

cosmopolitans are devoid of emotions, without which no genuine compassion for the other and, thus, no ethical cosmopolitanism can exist.

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