

This, Christoph said in an oddly solemn tone, this was Elvis Costello, and his music I had to know, otherwise it wouldn't work out with me and my life. „My Aim Is True“ was the CD's title, Christoph had given it to me as a gift, and on the cover I could see Elvis Costello standing in this very toed-in pose that Christoph had been imitating before. I took, as people tend to do when receiving a CD as a gift, a mindless look at the backside, read the small-printed year of production: 1977. That sounded old, and the guy wore glasses – but the record came from Christoph and hence I liked it instantly. As an associated reading he gave me „Less Than Zero“ by Bret Easton Ellis, named after a song on the Costello record. I opened it on the first page, you receive a book, flip it open on some random page, a gesture of politeness, but then I really READ the first words – and now I got it over with politeness. I sat down and didn't stop reading, and then I experienced what you might know from comic books when someone pokes his fingers in a power socket. „People don't like to merge on freeways in Los Angeles“, that's how „Less Than Zero“ started, and for me that's when my present started. In reading, in thinking – and in my life. Now I had tuned in.

At the bookstore I successively bought a literary canon Arne had selected for me: Bernhard, Handke, Roth, Hemingway. And I finally read „American Psycho“, whose passages on pop music I debated intensively with Arne; of course we saw through this not very complicated effect – the cold blooded slaughterer listens to extremely cheasy pop music – but we still asked ourselves whether Ellis himself actually listened or had ever listened to Genesis or Huey Lewis & The News or whether this had all been contrived and constructed. We didn't know what we would have liked better.

In the staircase of the publisher's mansion black and white portraits of all Kiepenheuer & Witsch writers, many of whom my heroes, Bukowski, Wallraff, Salinger, Ellis, Hornby, Welsh. I wanted to be on this wall, too.

At the Frankfurt book fair I met – we had the same publisher – my hero Bret Easton Ellis and had him sign my paperback copy of „Less Than Zero“, in the back of the book the countless pin codes of all debit and credit cards I had ever owned, which was always easy to remember: What's the account balance and how do I get to my money? Consult Ellis.

What was again my credit card's pin code for CASH WITHDRAWALS? Consult Ellis. I pick up my torn „Less Than Zero“ copy that has always been accompanying me on my travels and by now contains so many pin codes and TANs that I've lost track of. The book's first sentence, however, still works, even 30 years after publication, it immediately draws one in: „People don't like to merge on freeways in Los Angeles“.

The paperback copy displays interesting biting marks, apparently I must frequently have put it into my mouth during the course of the last 20 years, when desperate for my pin codes I couldn't use my hands or whatever the reason was. Inside a dedication and signature:

*For Benjamin
Best wishes
from Bret Easton Ellis,
Frankfurt 10/99
PS: Where is Walter?*

And I have to think of how back then, 16 years ago, at some book fair night at the hotel „Frankfurter Hof“ Ellis and I had equipped a guy called Walter with a lot of cash in order for him to score us some cocaine. It took him long, of course, too long, and thus the sentence of the night frequently thrown at me by Ellis above the heads of all these book fair people who industry-engulfed hurried to get drunk, was: „Where is Walter?“ It was the battlecry of this night, even long ago after this Walter had returned. „Where is Walter“ were the winged words that took us to fly out in the night, down to the hotel's basement bathrooms and from there out through the night into some other basements, it was all right as long as we were going down because we were able to fly

were going down because we were able to fly.

And now, 16 years later, I'm relieved when Bret Easton Ellis seems to recognize me and thus his first connotation and questions was: Where is Walter?

The great first sentence from „Lunar Park“ takes hold: „You do an awfully good impression of yourself.“ Ellis himself still does look like Ellis – which means completely different from what anyone would imagine from reading his novels. Softer, finer, also more couldn't-care-less-ish.

I get into the car with Ellis and his boyfriend Todd. Ellis, in an ironic sugar daddy attitude, keeps calling Todd „the 26-year old“, even though Todd may rather be 30 by now, in his slightly off Twitter miniatures Ellis introduced Todd as a literary character and as such Todd is not bound to the gregorian calendar.

As a welcome, Todd hands me a paper card with a download code for his new song, which he said was called „Hotel“ and was essentially about the Chateau Marmont. It was going to be, so much he could say, one of the big hits of 2015, I was going to see, this song was here to stay.

Well, I'm going to listen to it, thanks.

Why not now, Todd asks and puts his phone to my ear, Soundcloud, it works anytime and everywhere nowadays, but we still can't hear anything, Todd receives no signal as we have just driven into the Soho House parking garage.

Todd insists on sitting on one of the couches, he was so stoned, he said. And in a way everything's like in a novel of early Ellis. The late Ellis, however, doesn't want to sit on a couch. So we settle on a regular table, Todd orders a huge cup of ice cream, he really seems to be pretty stoned.

Ellis orders swiftly two Martini Bombay, he's a functioning alcoholic, he says, fair enough. I ask him if he wanted to join me for a cigarette on the terrace but he says he never smokes in public, only behind his desk. Everybody chooses his own toxin, says Ellis, he keeps it with the alcohol. I ask him, if he had tried this hallucinogenic vomiting-drug Ayahuasca that everyone seems to be so fond of. Ellis stares dispassionately, says in the tone of senate committee hearing he was NOT INTERESTED. He was done with drugs. Todd kept smoking pot, pharmaceutical weed on prescription, but that would be about it, except only for the alcohol.

The conversation keeps slowing down, it is getting a bit dull. He's currently reading Knausgaard, Ellis says, he was addicted to Knausgaard's daily routine experienced in narrative time, nothing ever happens and that's exactly why it's so fascinating. Descending down the stairs and then finding no milk in the fridge alone takes two pages, Ellis thought this was great.

When the conversation touches on the Chateau Marmont I can finally contribute something. Ellis, too, had once stayed there for a couple of weeks and we agree that one has to save on details in order to keep feeling good about the whole thing: Have them empty the mini bar, go to the supermarket instead.

Todd's phone, unlike his continuously stoned owner, is receiving a signal again, so he plays his song „Hotel“ for me, which may or may not be the song of the year. From his phone speaker I hear Todd sing:

The minibar is empty from last night

And I don't even care about the price

Well, but Bret does, I say, Bret, too, buys his drinks at the supermarket. With a sarcasm that seemed practiced, supporting Bret's sugar daddy irony, Todd says: He lets me do what I want, I let him do what he wants – and he gives me money.

He certainly does not pay ten dollars for a chocolate bar, Ellis says.

„Trader Joe's“, huh?, I ask and Ellis confirms, exactly, diagonally across the Chateau Marmont, at Trader's Joe, a kind of organically decorated discounter belonging to the ALDi group, Ellis bought his drinks for the thirst at night in the hotel room when he was staying at the Chateau Marmont, also chocolate, nuts whatever you needed. And that's what I do, too.

I think of Carol from Hamburg, twenty years ago, who impressed me as a record industry intern at my exciting first business-trip-hotel-stay when he told me that he took nuts from the mini bar whenever he felt like it not giving shit how much they were. But Ellis and I know better.

Still, doesn't work as a dinner topic longer than three minutes. What now? No, please don't

– but indeed, the doom subject of the present as such: television shows. Interesting after all, when Ellis recounts that his dealer – well, that is his former dealer, by now it's been four years that he'd last seen him as he's no longer doing drugs, anyway – that his former dealer is now the producer of a TV show that I hadn't heard of. Still, fantastic story. Bret also comes up with a good theory about the final season of „Mad Men“ that had just aired: The show was really about Sally, the daughter – we are all Sally, by means of her we were confronted with our own childhood. The finale of „Mad Men“ Ellis thought was „disappointing in an interesting way“, brilliant in conception but not in execution. I nod and don't understand a single word; I think Ellis just wants to show off a little bit and come across as profound in the script writer business because the novel, well, the novel had died as a concept, instead television shows were the new novel and so on.

Knowing it would be a mistake but unable to come up with something else I ask Ellis about his new novel. Hadn't he planned to write a novel that started with a car accident on Santa Monica Boulevard? Ellis wipes off the topic by signaling the waiter, this questions demands another drink. Drink is coming. Ellis says he had tried but then quit, he didn't FEEL it enough. That, of course, is an unexpected criterion for a book by Bret Easton Ellis: „to feel“. This had never been a problem for an Ellis book, on the contrary, wasn't this always the idea of his entire work, „to not feel“? But saying this I probably confuse my idea of him with the real person sitting in front of me for whom fan expectations are not a stimulant but only pressure and pain.

The next drink arrives, Ellis bangs it down in one slug, liquor as bar spacer, his voice now sounds more businesslike. Instead of waiting for a new book one should rather listen to his PODCAST. That's what preoccupies him, he talks to great people there, Kanye West for example, Marilyn Manson, Quentin Tarantino and others. I ask him if it's true that Marilyn Manson once had lived above „Monaco Liquor“ on Santa Monica Boulevard when he was broke, just one intersection ahead of the one where the novel was supposed to start with that car accident. Yes, Ellis had heard that, too. All right, maybe that was again one intersection too close to the novel subject that makes Ellis noticeably uncomfortable, so I direct our conversation back into reliable terrain, back to „Mad Men“. Since I have no theory on my own I repeat what Arne wrote me about the finale: At the hippie camp Don Draper searches for peace inside – but inside, as we know, there's nothing.

Even this sentence got strangely caught in the air now. And then I realize that this, too, could be an uncomfortable notion for Ellis as this is exactly the main allegation that's always been made against him and his literary characters. It really is difficult to talk to people who refer everything to themselves because it's just their job. Says the man, who always refers everything to himself.

Todd wakes up now, he explains to me a new form of magic thinking that he had discovered for himself. The technique is called „to visualize“. You had to imagine something you are afraid of – and then by using positive thinking you could influence the outcome.

Right, Ellis says slightly scoffingly, let's just take the musical of „American Psycho“ that would premier on Broadway soon. He was pretty sure it was going to be pretty terrible, he had seen a trailer, an absolute nightmare.

Wrong, Todd screams, that's wrong thinking, that's what to visualize means, you have to imagine how it's going to be great – and then it actually will be great. C'mon, Bret, visualize it!

Okay, Bret says. I'm sure it's going to be fantastic.

That's it, says Todd.

If he, I ask Bret, will be watching the musical (a musical! „American Psycho“ as a musical! Can it get any sicker?), now that he has VISUALIZED its success?

Ellis calls for the check and says: No way. Down in the garage we wait at the valet desk, it's pretty busy, arrivals, departures, nightly chatter, random encounters, L.A. excitement. Ellis is sitting on a bench and shooting video with his phone. He's using an app called „Periscope“ that enables you to video-broadcast in real time. People all over the world can watch and comment on what he's filming, also give directing advice and thus influence the events.

Ellis is smiling coolly, saying nothing, filming – and I can't explain what happens to me sometimes but I've always tried to counter the narrative concept of obscuring, vanishing

and becoming invisible (of which Ellis is the ever ruling king and which he is just now demonstrating on a new level of escalation) with radical uncovering (and be it sometimes of myself; it's pretty obvious which of the concepts is less annoying), and sometimes I lose it then, which is what happens now: I stand directly in front of his camera and take off my shirt just for the sake of something to happen, even if it's only for Ellis to be happy. But there's nothing happening in his face, he keeps staring unmoved, distantly smiling towards the phone display. What he's doing with this insane app that's Knausgaard to go. Already in the moment of the event it's broadcasted and irretrievably over, nothing to be recorded or conserved. Here – and gone. The narrator smiles and vanishes. We will probably wait quite some time for a new novel from Ellis.

A couple of nights later at Todd's and Bret's place. Todd had invited to a „concert for friends“, he'll be singing some of his songs. Ellis' apartment is in one of the few residential high rises in Beverly Hills, he'd bought a model apartment and hadn't bothered to replace the MODEL FURNITURE from the open house period, your interiors probably can't get any more anonymous. Yes, Ellis definitely is the king of cool. He himself opens the door, there's noise coming from some of Todd's friends in the kitchen, and Ellis apparently has already said good bye to this evening, it's only his shell that I meet at the door step now, he's looking right through me. It's not only that he doesn't seem to recognize me, it seems as if he had completely ruled out the possibility of recognition in general, his eyes seem kind of switched to neutral and what is he doing now, that's crazy, he reaches out with his hand and says: „Hi, I'm Bret.“ That's priceless, he SEEMS to be standing there but: Ellis has left the building.

In one corner of the model living room Todd has arranged a keyboard, there's food in aluminum boxes from Chipotle on a table, Todd's friends seem to be hungry. And Ellis? Is walking around in between them, wiping stuff up here and there, pouring fresh drinks, it's a masterful out of body performance, wherever the real Ellis may be at this moment.

Right before the show is about to start, Ellis has disappeared, he had announced his departure earlier, saying it would be „emotionally too challenging“ for him. Ok, fair enough. I'm sitting on the model couch and just when I'm asking myself where Ellis went and how much longer Todd will be singing, my Periscope app starts flashing with a message: „Bret Ellis is now live on Periscope.“ From where is Ellis who had just been here a minute before filming? I open the app and see on my phone display exactly what I see here in the room. What? Ellis is broadcasting Todd's show live on Periscope but he's not here. The narrator not only disappears – and that's an even more radical variation of the „Knausgaard to go“ method from the Soho house garage – the narrator doesn't even exist anymore, the machines have taken over. But isn't the whole idea of Periscope eye witness? Ellis himself, though, Ellis IN ITSELF, is nowhere to be seen. How is he doing this? Is this now the allegory of the cave?

In the slightly time shifting broadcast from a person called „Bret Ellis“ the concert from the model living room is much more bearable, everything is moving so nice and fast, the present is flying by, and in an instant already gone. Much more pleasant actually than to really sit here. I think of this frequent dream I have about a mute button for the real world. Or a fast-forward button.

I step out on the balcony. Good views of the city, it's the hero's view, from here he saw the car accident at this intersection to the east in the first chapter of Ellis' scrapped new novel. Is the silence of Bret Easton Ellis overrated? By me, as a fans, always and with pleasure. Who does an awfully good impression of whom now? I have a knot in my brain: If Ellis is live broadcasting supposedly self witnessed events without even being there and if I'm on the balcony where the protagonist was standing in the novel that doesn't even exist and if Knausgaard went shopping for milk over the course of 600 book pages – what the hell would all of this mean then?

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One of the photographs in the exhibition shows a billboard that advertises an album by Elvis Costello. „This Year's Model“, this iconic album cover, Costello behind an old-world camera and the billboard is mounted on one of the Sunset high rises, a lady crosses the

street wearing bell bottoms, which is a good hint at time the picture was taken: late 70s. As usual when I'm confronted with Costello I have to think of Bret Easton Ellis, take a photo of the image and i-message this picture of the picture to Ellis. While it sometimes takes him several days to respond, this time his reply comes promptly, it says „I love this pic“, but at this point I'm already in negotiations with the museum administration. It was, of course, clear to me that Ellis loved this picture, after all he had named two of his novels after Costello songs, „Less Than Zero“ and „Imperial Bedrooms“, and because I love his books so much and he, like many geniuses, sometimes conveys the impression as if he doesn't really know how much he means to some people and how much he had given to them, I follow my impetus to get him a gift, an inappropriately expensive gift, just for the heck of it: this Costello picture.

I text Ellis that I just got this photo for him, he replies using one of these standard exaggeration adjectives that are so common here: „awesome“.

When the painter Richard Philips was here a couple of weeks ago, all he actually talked about was the Gucci billboard, from his room, too, he had a good view of it, he praised it as the ultimate painting and considered depicting it.

Like Bret Easton Ellis, Philips had made a film here in Los Angeles, where else?, with Lindsay Lohan and he said this time he couldn't meet her, after a COLLABORATION with Lindsay Lohan one needs a break from her, she was, after all, very intense. Ellis had made a similar statement, she had disappeared in Todd's and his bedroom when Todd had gone completely paranoid because it took her so long, he thought she was sniffing through their stuff, maybe stealing Bret's Xanax, but she probably just wanted to blow some coke, no big deal. Of course, not. Lovely, it always pleases you if all these ideas you get from reading the tabloid bullshit actually seem to be accurate. If the word is not: privately completely different. This pseudo analysis is always a disappointment.

And Ellis, the great angst monger among contemporary American novelists, trusts the anxiolytic drug Xanax because all the anxieties that his work describes but also fuels, this discomfort, these cracks in the beauty, all this is after all no „Thriller“ video clip masquerade but real. Ellis stares at his surroundings and the present, at „our times“, with this cool glance only because that's exactly how the surroundings, the present and so on looks at him. His text brutality is response, self defense and clarification.

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If your own hero is turning against you – is this the end? Not at all, on the contrary, says Bret Easton Ellis who experienced something similar with Elvis Costello, one of his big heroes who publicly made fun of him, when Ellis was still pretty young, 25 – and at least I was 29 already when the thing with Schmidt happened, so c'mon.

Ten years after I had watched Harald Schmidt through a haze of drugs laughing about me on national television, I'm sitting with Ellis and Todd in the patio restaurant of the Chateau Marmont. In my polytheistic ranking of my personal gods Ellis holds an at least as important position as Schmidt, so I'm doing everything to not blow it with him, too. I have brought him a present, that's a good basis to start.

I know it sounds like one of those stoner conspiracy theories but let me try to explain: Long ago, my hero who would later mock me, Harald Schmidt, read from „American Psycho“ on stage of the Burgtheater in Vienna, the place of his greatest childhood dreams, and reading from this novel held some lessons in numbness even for him, the leading German master of chill. Later Schmidt mentioned in an interview that this experience meant as much to him as his presence in the delivery room at the birth of any of his children. In the same interview, I deliberately looked it up again, Schmidt spoke about how as a 15-year old he had been to London's Piccadilly Circus for the first time and had seen this gigantic billboard for a Clint Eastwood movie and how at this moment he had planned that some day his name would be up there and while it didn't turn out to be London, his plan had worked out in a way. And now I have brought for Ellis, wrapped up in cardboard leaning against a neighboring table: bought at the exhibition „Billboards of the Sunset Strip“ the 70s photo of a Sunset Boulevard high rise with a billboard on its roof advertising the Costello album „This Year's Model“ that at that time had just been released. Framed, numbered and signed by the photographer. And Elvis Costello, Ellis' hero, as the latter

now tells me, has made fun of him, Ellis, and this in public. A couple of years after the publication of „Less Than Zero“, Ellis had coincidentally spotted Costello at a bar in Beverly Hills and a friend had told him, you have to go meet him. And he, Ellis, had refused at first, too shy to face his hero but his pretty drunk friend kept insisting and finally had dragged Costello over to their table, Costello had been very polite but he, Ellis, very embarrassed, had not really been able to say a word. Well, as it turns out, a couple of months later Ellis read a Costello interview in Rolling Stone magazine and Costello was asked what he thought of Ellis. Costello then told the story from the bar in Beverly Hills – and he did so by pretty hilariously imitating the tone of Ellis' debut novel: „I walked into a bar, Bret was standing there. He looked disinterested. I took some more cocaine. He didn't look any better. I had another vodka. The vodka didn't make me feel any happier, so I switched on MTV“ and so on.

And this, Ellis now says, had indeed been a special moment for him, he remembered it very precisely: You're in your mid 20s, and your hero made publicly fun of you. You cringed, you felt embarrassed – but then you do gain something from it. Really? How? Yeah, Ellis says, that's when you start growing up, an experience like this expedites the in any case unavoidable process of becoming mature. And if you can't deal with it, grow a dick and extremely big balls, that's all it takes. Mentors, well, at some point you have to get over them anyway. The same thing kept happening to him just the other way around – him offending people for whom he was a hero, well, that just happens. Bret gives an impersonation of a whiny person, rubs his eyes and wails: Uhhh, you tweeted my book was shit but you've always been such an idol for me, uhuh! Yes, this happens. His advice would be: Man up, stop whining, get over it, grow some balls.

I tell him the story about Harald Schmidt, „the German David Letterman, you know“, and that I thought it was somewhat mature of myself that after a short period of rage I was able to admire Harald Schmidt again. So I hope, I say to Ellis, you still love Costello's records despite of what happened? Oh sure, Ellis says.

When, if not now, so I'm fumbling the Costello picture out of the cardboard and the title of the there upon advertised album couldn't even be more appropriate: „This Year's Model“.

Ellis is delighted, he would put it on the wall in his office, he says, puts it back into the cardboard and we talk about Costello; a fan talk after we had finally concluded the Hollywood support group subject „My hero publicly offended me -- how to live on?“.

We go through the albums separately, Ellis knows them all. Even „All This Useless Beauty“ and this one almost no-one knows. While often times with Ellis one cannot be so sure if he's slightly lying, for obfuscation reasons or just for the sake of it, it's now clear that he's telling the truth: He really loves Costello. On what occasions he listened to Costello, I ask him. For example, when he's working out, Ellis says, when he's having „personal training“. That's, of course, a great image, a funny notion, no matter if it's true or not. Bret Easton Ellis, whose body tells a different story than frequent personal training, lying on a bench surrounded by the most beautiful and toned people, the physically perfect and mentally dysfunctional characters of his novels, and he's listening to: „All This Useless Beauty“. This is an absolute Ellis moment.

„Less Than Zero“, the novel from a writer who reached perfection so early, came out in 1985. He already brought the life achievement thing home thirty years ago – with his first novel: frequently copied, never equalled, not even by himself, of course. We can certainly keep hoping and waiting that he, again, will write a book that is „as good as“ or „equals“ his sparkling early work. But he doesn't owe it to us, we must never forget. Ellis has given us so much and that's enough, everything else would be a bonus.

I go have a cigarette and draw up an interim balance: a nice evening, actually. Ellis really seemed to be delighted about the picture and Todd, unlike at our previous meeting at Soho House, wasn't stoned but awake and funny, it went quite well.

When I come back to the table I tell them that back there behind the curtain that separates the smoking room I recently met Courtney Love and that someone had paid back another 10.000 of her original 75.000 Dollar debt she had had at the Chateau, so that she's now left with a debt of only 45.000, she's making clear progress there, and that today's Courtney Love looks so strange compared to these 20 year old private video images shown in the Cobain documentary. Ellis says in a casualness that you just get to see in Hollywood, whether it's the cliché or, where ever that may be, the „real place“, Courtney Love's plastic surgeon seems to be doing a good job.

We tell a little bit more about the Cobain documentary. Ellis says, Cobain was an

we talk a little bit more about the Cobain documentary, Ellis says, Cobain was so handsome, especially towards the end when he wasn't well at all, at the Unplugged show and after the Rohypnol overdose in Rome: What a handsome man, more beautiful than James Dean! I agree but at the same time I'm surprised that Ellis seems to be quite well informed about Nirvana – as in the 90s they surely must have been pop cultural antipodes: Ellis, the cocaine prep boy and prince of artificialness – and Cobain, the heroin rocker and Jesus of authenticity. But when Ellis now starts to talk about Cobain rather amused then moved, he reassuringly comes close again to the idea you have about him, he's now impersonating a whiny Cobain just as he impersonated a whiny Ellis-fan before, it's his prime role, he's good at imitating whiny people: Argh, help, everybody loves me, oh my god, success is so terrible, poor me, so much money and so much love, why does nobody help me?

It was yet complete bullshit, „crushed by success“, what a joke. Of all poses the authenticity pose was the worst, there's no such thing in art as authenticity. And Cobain obviously has already had enormous problems before his success, those problems have killed him, not his success. Ellis laughs, but not mockingly at all, not scornfully, he just thinks, it's funny. And maybe this is his blind spot, too, early worldwide fame followed by the big question: What now? I'm sure he knows this. But this is no therapy session, we're just eating some pretty poor Chateau food and are talking about this and that, you don't want to get too profound or too encroaching.

Actually I wanted Ellis to join me for the „Entourage“ movie but he refused, he couldn't watch something like this, the trailer had already been so terrible, this is just really old stuff, so 2004, all this douchebag pool party posing may have been bearable for a short period in 2004, when the TV show the movie is based on started, but now, eleven years later, just hideous and despicable, no way he was going to watch this movie.

In our text message exchange, in which I tried to convince him to come and see the movie with me, Ellis quite unexpectedly wrote he had just tried to google me, he had put in the words „crazy german writer Benjamin“ but nothing came up. He should add the words „kokain“ or „Anke“, my two most successful novels, then he would find me.

But now he had found me anyway. Ellis, Todd and crazy german writer Benjamin are sitting in the Chateau's patio restaurant.

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Unlike Ellis, Todd tends to the supernatural, his current favorite subjects are „channeling“, in which he would act as a medium for any given dead, and a wish fulfilling method that he calls „EFT“, Emotional Freedom Technique. Ellis shakes his head, lifts his hands, he's out but lets Todd do his thing. Bret didn't believe in it but if I didn't want to try it, it really worked, Todd says. What was currently my biggest sorrow? And Todd looks at me in such a cute and childish way that I decide to tell the truth, even if I feel embarrassed in front of Ellis – in front of him of all people, who had reached artistic perfection so early – to start talking about some ridiculous „working on my novel“ problems, which instantly evokes this amateurish tristesse, like all these wanna-be writers and project dudes with their open script programs in all these organic coffee places. If you had the opportunity to talk to a nobel laureate in medicine, you obviously wouldn't ask him to remove a splinter of wood from your index finger. Although – anyway, I thus tell the truth: I'm afraid that I will fail with this book.

All right, Todd says, he wants me to repeat word after word and, as shown by him, to knock on my head with my fingers, skull base, temples, neck, chin, then further down to the breast, I knock and repeat his words, advice book bestseller stuff, that I could achieve everything I really wanted, that I nevertheless still had to accept me if it didn't work out with the book and that then I still would be worth to be loved since I was unique and every day a gift and so on.

I have to concentrate in order to repeat Todd's murmured liturgy, to keep up with his finger ballet and at the same time to not start laughing about these absurdities and Bret's accompanying grimaces of disinterest.

Finally we're done and Todd says, I would see, now it will sure work out with the book, now I would be freed from my anxieties. Well, then. Bret, in the meantime, has ordered a glass of red wine, Martini doesn't seem to no longer do the job.

And on it goes with our esoteric adventure, right now I can't think of any other subject, it's just a bit boring so I ask Todd what the „channeling“ is about. Very easy, I should name just any dead person whom I wanted to get in touch with, this dead person would then talk

just any dead person whom I wanted to get in touch with, this dead person would then talk to me through him, Todd. He closes his eyes, reached out hands, palms facing the sky, it's pretty funny to be honest but o.k.: one dead person, any dead person. I look at Ellis and it's him who is unexpectedly asking how Kurt Cobain is doing nowadays. Todd starts flexing all his facial muscles as if he had to think very hard now but he will have it soon. Kurt, Ellis asks, please tell me, are you still sad that so many people love your songs? Todd is shaking his hands, Kurt's answer seems to go right into him now and he speaks: I'm doing fine, I'm happy. It wasn't the success, it was...

Todd flatters his eyes open, the line to Cobain seems disconnected, what a pity, it was just getting interesting. But amazing, this channeling, it really does work.

When thereupon we struggle a bit to come up with a new subject, Bret returns to that drugged out night at the Frankfurt Bookfair. He was noticing this the second night now – didn't I really no longer drink any alcohol? But back in the days I did, didn't I? At that bookfair night it did get pretty wild, didn't it? What year was that again? 1999, I say. Oh, „Glamorama“, he says, that was the title of the book he had just published back then. Oh my god, he had been in such a terrible shape during that time, really sad. So now, nothing at all for me? I tell him the short version, no alcohol anymore in order to not fall back into this I-no-longer-care state of mind which for me inevitably leads to cocaine and into absolute doom.

We talk about how dreadful it becomes to use drugs once you have left the amateur state; how dreadful it actually always is as soon as the eagerly anticipated substance enters your system; the actual high, the one that's great, happens before, it's the anticipation between drug ordering and intake, when you know it's about to start, the dealer calls one more time, says in five minutes at the door or so, these five minutes, they are what it's all about. From there on it's all downhill and the only thing that still matters is: more. And it won't be getting any better. Yeah, sad. But also fun, sure. It's actually nice to discuss this with someone who knows about it and has left it behind, too – but at the same time doesn't demonize it, ridiculously converted, but knows about the benefits and drawbacks and is capable of describing them. For instance, this painful moment the next day when you can tell just by looking at the internet browser cache how exactly it started to go downhill, how first dementia and finally sex drive broke its ground, when the IQ halves itself hourly and the chronology of the search words make for an absolute bleak poem. At the end, the googling feels as if you sped along nightly Sunset doing 150 mph and the gleaming key stimulus words become indistinct to one single cry for help that says: more!

And because we are – instead of taking drugs together as we used to – talking about it and why we are no longer doing it we are nothing else than a support group and thus are allowed to make fun about them. Talking about life with a bunch of passive aggressive losers, no, thanks, Bret says, it had made him so aggressive, all this whining, I caught a hepatitis, they turned off the electricity in my apartment, I crashed on my sister's couch and then I have to drink booze again or smoke some crack and blow my mother's retirement funds but now I'm here, guys – applause. The applause is the worst of all. It's great that you're here. Great you have been sober for ten hours now. Kind of awkward, though, you killed your room mate but now you're here. No, Ellis says, that didn't work for him, these loser stories all the time, it dragged him down.

It's just a short brainwave, one that's not harmless but I let it in, anyway: How nice would it actually be, how legendary in a way, to take some drugs with Bret Easton Ellis, one of the godfathers of drug literature, here at the no less legendary Chateau Marmont? Where in every room every plain surface give the impression: On this exact piece of furniture people have chopped up and sucked in cocaine worth the GDP of Japan in the past decades.

And what a sad rollator aura do we have talking about the old days instead of setting the present on fire, back then, remember? The bunker of the past. Terrible.

We are moving to my room, Todd needs some pain killers and I try to convince him to shoot the video for his „Hotel“ song at night at the Chateau pool and Ellis still has to sign a book, a copy of „Less Than Zero“ for Arne who, along with Christoph, years ago taught me everything, reading, writing, Costello, Ellis. Arne had just written me wistfully a couple of days ago after I had told him excitedly about the upcoming meeting with Ellis and the Costello picture: I'm reading „Less Than Zero“ again. After all, it's its 30. anniversary. Just like „St. Elmo's Fire“ and „Breakfast Club“. Ellis is to be rediscovered now. We owe everything to him. Before was Böll.

Todd and Ellis are inspecting my room praising the view of the Gucci billboard laughing

Todd and Ellis are inspecting my room, praising the view of the ocean, the balcony, laughing about the run down bathroom, the gross shower curtain – and speaking of shower curtain and Ellis, inevitably one has to think of Norman Bates from „Psycho“ and therefore of Patrick Bateman from „American Psycho“; to be part of a later born generation is also a blessing, all we know is the quote, the reference, we don't confuse it with the original work but we think it's more important just because we were born already when it occurred – the Bates (a German punk rock band) and Ellis referred to „Psycho“, and that's all I needed to know, it's not even necessary to watch through this old black and white rubbish, I'm sure it must be good, „important movie“, sure, sure.

I hand two Diclophenac pills to Todd, I didn't really understand where exactly he's hurting, I was missing some vocabulary, but if I got it right he had yawned and dislocated his jaw. If you think about it, another Hollywood-Ellis character damage.

I ask Ellis to sign the book for Arne, something about Costello he should write, and so he does, „to Arne – from one Costello fan to another – Bret Easton Ellis“.

I let the two leave into the night, Ellis is grabbing the Costello picture and after a hug and a polite and vague commitment to a consecutive meeting is asking from the side: I hope this wasn't too expensive?

Well, it was, Bret, I say not without pathos, he has to stick this out now, it was crazily expensive and I'm very glad to be able to finally give something to you as you have given me and so many others so much with your books. Ellis laughs, perhaps proud, perhaps ironically, perhaps „insecure“, who knows and then he disappears with Todd through the garden exit directly onto Sunset Boulevard.

„People are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles“, that's how „Less Than Zero“ began. On Sunset Boulevard people drive so crazily fast at night as if they had to make up for all the time they had lost in L.A.'s notorious traffic during the day.

I'm watching them leave and am shouting at Ellis: Everything we owe to you! Before was Böll!

But I think he hasn't heard it anymore. And I have rather whispered it than shouted.

(...)

The day before I went to the movies with Ellis (and, of course, Todd), „Steve Jobs“. On Bret's request we chose the 2:45 pm show in the biggest available auditorium to make sure that nobody's sitting right behind or next to him. He couldn't stand anyone next to him except Todd. Bret flashed his MEMBERSHIP CARD when he bought the tickets, if I wasn't a member in the Arclight Cinema Club?

No, why?

Well, one Dollar less per ticket, sometimes even free tickets.

We sit down in the completely empty cinema cafeteria. Bret has said he wanted to eat something even if the food was horrible here. We could also go to a, equally terrible, Japanese restaurant where the sushi circles around in little boats.

He went to pee, I asked Todd, how things were in the music business. Todd looked at me in a tired stare and said he had no idea, he had taken some time off from life, suspending everything for a while. He was depressed and gave himself to it.

Your eyes look quite smoked up, Todd.

Do they? Yeah, maybe.

I ask him if his finger knocking technique couldn't help, the one that had supported his positive thinking method?

Well, positive thinking, that's one of those things – he still thinks that this technique works but it seemed like he had exaggerated the positive thinking over all these years and had gotten somewhat stuck with it, it felt as if he was standing in front of a wall.

Then Bret came back from the bathroom, he was wearing black adidas sweat pants and a black polo shirt, Todd sported some sort of pajamas, we ordered salad.

Bret had said he didn't want anything to drink and then emptied Todd's water. He wasn't looking forward to seeing the movie at all, Bret said, he was only going to please us and because EVERYBODY was just talking about this movie but he wasn't interested in Steve Jobs and, besides, hated these Alan Sorkin dialogues. He laughed and ordered the check. Todd said he wanted to go to Palm Springs again. We got lucky, Bret said when we entered the completely empty gigantic auditorium, we got lucky that we were alone. He just hates people. almost all. that's the truth.

Todd: Not you, but your PERSONA. Maybe that's why I find it so hard to deal with this persona.

After the movie we went to the theater's parking garage where Bret had parked his black BMW, they offered to drop me off at the hotel. Bret turned on the air condition and the stereo: „Nights in White Satin“, THE close dance and soft porn song of the 70s (which you wouldn't expect Ellis to voluntarily listen to) inside of the rapidly cooled down BMW (which you would have absolutely expected Ellis to drive).

On the rear seat next to me I see a copy of the novel „West of Sunset“ by Stewart O'Nan, a literary conjecture about the tragic final years of Scott F. Fitzgerald in Hollywood. And „West of Sunset“ OPENS with THE Fitzgerald quote, and bit by bit this all becomes TOO much feed back, I could equally start taking drugs again: „There are no second acts in American lives.“

Good book? I ask Ellis.

Yes, he would recommend it.

How he, I ask Ellis, interpreted Fitzgerald's theory quoted upfront in the book, Fitzgerald could not possibly have meant it SERIOUSLY – didn't he himself have had AT LEAST three acts? Fitzgerald became famous as a young man with „This Side of Paradise“, then his wife lost her mind, the stock exchange collapsed and so did he shortly after. „Tender is the Night“ became a flop, he was forced to write short stories for magazines and to fix scripts for Hollywood that didn't get made, died there at only 44 as an almost forgotten writer.

Ellis was just merging the BMW into the afternoon traffic on Sunset, when he looked into the rear mirror as if just awaked, looked me directly into the eye and said, well, Fitzgerald did mean it, his idea was that the AMERICAN EXPERIENCE is stuck, fixed, which Ellis thought was a pessimistic and powerful notion that resonated even though it might not be real.

Did Steve Jobs have a second act, Todd asked pondering.

Of course, he had, Bret shouted slightly too loud, Fitzgerald had of course meant it as a METAPHOR! And, this just en passant, for this three-act movie about Steve Jobs one act would have done as well and we would have gotten through it quicker. What a cheesy bullshit! Unbelievable, such a garbage. Rich white men shouting at each other for two hours!

It was funny, Todd said, that Bret would say something like this because that was exactly what people said about HIS books!

As a precaution, Bret hurried to turn up the music volume:

Beauty I've always missed with these eyes before

Just what the truth is, I can't say anymore