



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
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# Icarus Falling

A Marxist Study of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

Anna Sundelius

Magister Essay

Supervisor:

Ronald Paul

Examiner:

Margret Gunnarsdottir Champion

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Author: Anna Sundelius

Supervisor: Ronald Paul

Abstract:

This is a study of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* using Marxist economical theory, from a position that we live in a postmodern capitalist society and that literature as a part of the superstructure can mirror society. The essay argues that the text is ideological, that it portrays a flawed society in order to unveil the realities of modern capitalism and thus tries to act as a starting point for an emergent counter discourse. Further it discusses the main character as both a psychologically credible individual of fictional creation, but also as a representative of the capitalist system. The theme of cybercapital in the novel is discussed together with Marx's theory of alienation. The essay answers the following questions: How is modern capitalism dramatised in the novel? How is the main character depicted as an individual and as a personification of a system? How does the novel's theme of technology and cybercapital fit in the economic context? *Cosmopolis* represents a powerful piece of social criticism; set in a fictional world but mirroring reality, it is a symbolically and metaphorically rendered version of our own time.

Keywords: Marxism, *Cosmopolis*, ideology, alienation, capitalism, cybercapital.

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## Introduction

Karl Marx has produced the most comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms of economic systems - the capitalist in particular - that we have, and as long as capitalism is the system in which we are forced to exist, the place for Marxist critique is a given one. As the current economic system shows little sign of change, to quote Terry Eagleton: "on the last sighting, capitalism appeared as feisty as ever" (*Why Marx Was Right*, 2), it would seem appropriate to continue the tradition of Marxist analysis. Rather than primarily a literary theory, Marxism offers us tools to analyse society, as Raymond Williams puts it: "hardly anyone becomes a Marxist for primarily cultural or literary reasons, but for compelling political and economic reasons" (2). Although as a theory to analyse the ideology of literature it is unsurpassed. My object of analysis is the novel *Cosmopolis* by Don DeLillo. It is the tale of the young billionaire asset manager who wakes up one morning and wants to go for a haircut. The journey that follows is as much a journey into the psyche of the main character as it is one across town, as we follow him slowly engineering his own downfall. In light of the economic context of the book and its description of modern day capitalism, Marxist literary theory is the natural alternative to use for analysis.

I will analyse *Cosmopolis* using Marxist economic theory, from a position that we live in a postmodern capitalist society and that literature as a part of the superstructure can mirror our society. A starting point will be Marx's description of the rise and fall of the bourgeoisie as described in *The Communist Manifesto*. I will account for the theories I base my analysis on in an introductory theory chapter, then go on to my analysis, combined with previous criticism of the novel, and finish with a conclusion where I summarise my findings. My argument is that the text is ideological, that it portrays a flawed society in order to unveil the realities of modern capitalism and thus tries to act as a starting point for an emergent counter discourse. Marx described this system as it was emerging in the mid 19th century, but with the further development of capitalism his writings are ever more relevant today. I will also argue that the main character can be viewed as both a psychologically credible individual of fictional creation, but also as a representative of the capitalist system. Finally, I will expand on Marx's theory of alienation to incorporate the novel's description of the cyberspace world the main character lives in. My analysis aims to answer the following questions: How is modern capitalism dramatised in the novel? How is the main character depicted both as an individual and as a personification of a system? How does the novel's theme of technology

and cybercapital fit in to the economic context? *Cosmopolis* represents a powerful piece of social criticism; set in a fictional world but mirroring reality, it is a symbolically and metaphorically rendered version of our own time.

## Theory

Friedrich Engels explained Marxism as being two things, first: "a general theory of modes of production, the forms their development, crisis and transformation, and their structuring role in human history" and secondly, and perhaps primarily: "a theory of the capitalist mode of production, its fundamental classes and their antagonisms, and of the organic relationship between working-class struggles against capital and the historical possibility of socialism" (Mulhern 1). Regardless of what direction of Marxism you take, some things are fundamental to your analysis. The ideological analysis is central, and ideology as a part of the superstructure will always be dependent on the economic base. Marxism is thus by necessity historicised due to its focus on the economic circumstances of any object of analysis. "Marxist criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it; and it needs, similarly, to be aware of its own historical conditions" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, vi). The historical aspect is important, both in terms of the literary analysis and the critic's perspective. The context is as such always historical to a Marxist critic, but rather in the way history is understood through a materialistic account rather than historicizing literature by explaining the context the author was in when the work was written. All culture is ideological and always reflects the economic base. Marxist literary theory is at its centre a discussion of the ideological nature of the text in terms of modes of production, the economic base and superstructure. The goal is to via a critical approach reveal the ideology of the text in an effort to challenge false consciousness and create resistant readers that reflect critically about society and its cultural production.

## Economic Theories

My analysis of *Cosmopolis* is focused on ideology and how capitalism and capitalists are portrayed and will thus largely be based on Marx's economic theories which is why I will go through them in some detail below.

"Ideological analysis [...] remains, I believe, the appropriate designation for the critical 'method' specific to Marxism" (Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, xii). In Marxist literary theory, ideology is the key to literature and while form and language also constitute parts of the analysis, ideology remains central. Williams writes: "the concept of ideology did not originate in Marxism and is still in no way confined to it. Yet it is evidently an important concept in almost all Marxist thinking about culture, and especially about literature and ideas"

(55). Williams distinguishes between three meanings all present in Marxist writing: ideology can refer to "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group", "a system of illusory beliefs - false ideas or false consciousness - which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge" or "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas" (55). Eagleton also defines ideology as such: "ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole" (*Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 16-17). Ideology is in this sense a part of the superstructure, creating and upholding false consciousness and thus plays a vital part in preserving the ruling or hegemonic ideas. Ideology can as such become a power with which one can reinforce the status quo. The first chapter of the *Communist Manifesto* famously starts with: "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". Jameson expands on why the struggle necessarily must be between the classes and argues that:

Ideological commitment is not first and foremost a matter of moral choice but the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups. In a fragmented social life - that is, essentially in all class societies - the political thrust of the struggle of all groups against each other can never be immediately universal, but must always necessarily be focused on the class enemy. (*The Political Unconscious*, 290)

Ideology is at the same time socially limited and utopian in its nature. Naturally, it is the solidarity and struggle of the working class against unfair working conditions that also starts an ideological struggle. The ruling class has therefore an incentive to create their own utopian ideology thus deepening the conflict.

The superstructure (including ideology) from a Marxist perspective is decided by a society's economic base. There we find the economic conditions: "the 'base' of society is the infrastructure or the mode of production which characterises the society" (Haslett 18). The base is important inasmuch as existence decides consciousness, i.e. the physical conditions in which you live will affect the values you adopt. "The base in Marxist analysis, is primarily economic because it is our own economic status which determines our status within society" (Haslett18). In *The German Ideology* Marx elaborates on how both the ideology of the individual and society emerge from physical conditions:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to

mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people.

Here are also described the various attributes of a society that are included in the superstructure. "The 'superstructure' of society incorporates non-economic forms of production: legal, political, philosophical, religious, aesthetic formations which are defined by the economic structure of the base" (Haslett 18). The superstructure also contains all forms of art including literature. As such, literature is a part of what is conditioned by the base, but it can also examine the superstructure, exposing the ruling ideology and challenging false consciousness. Marxism on the one hand argues that literature is defined by its economic base but also thinks that literature can exist as something not governed by the conditions in which it was produced. "Marxist approaches to literature are thus attempts both to articulate the relationship between literature and society and to call the separation which this implies into question" (Haslett 17). Thus when we study literature there is a conflict of theory and reality. "Pragmatically, we may have to separate art and society in order to explain their relation, but simultaneously we need to resist this separation by remembering that art is part of society" (Haslett 17). The question is then if an individual, or an individual work of art can ever step outside its own ideological predisposition, or if it will always be fixed inside an ideological prison.

The superstructure of a society is focused around a ruling ideology, but can also have residual traces of older systems and signs of emergent ideas. The interaction between the economic conditions and the ruling ideology is not a perfectly coordinated development. Aspects of ruling ideologies of the past can linger in a society as well as attempts at progressive ways of thinking can emerge. Organised religion has long been a power centre in society and although we become more and more secularised, the religious discourse remains strong. This is an example of a residual discourse; we have long since abandoned the word of the lord for the gospel of consumerism, yet religion and its traditions still have a large influence. One effective way to describe a certain period is what Williams calls epochal analysis, where a particular period in time is described through its dominant structure, for example capitalist or feudal society. No period, however, consists only of a hegemonic superstructure derived directly from the current mode of production, but is always a melting pot of different thoughts and ideas. "We have certainly still to speak of the 'dominant' and the 'effective', and in these senses the hegemonic. But we find that we also have to speak, and indeed with further differentiation of each, of the 'residual' and the 'emergent'" (Williams



121). One could argue that the protest depicted in *Cosmopolis* is an attempt at creating an emergent economic order that does not marginalise people.

The key to keeping the ruling ideology in a position of power is to make it seem like a natural law rather than the result of a system that can be changed. As literature is a part of the superstructure it is "an element in that complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as 'natural', or not seen at all. (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 5). This ideological normalcy is facilitated by our upbringing, by the difficulty to see the mental paths that our social class has prepared for us. Our consciousness is as such false, predestined by our physical conditions. Jameson describes Marx's greatest contribution as:

The lesson of false consciousness, of class bias and ideological programming, the lesson of the structural limits of the values and attitudes of particular social classes, or in other words of the constitutive relationship between the praxis of such groups and what they conceptualize as value or desire and project in the form of culture. (*The Political Unconscious*, 272)

This has an effect on both who we as individuals want to be, but also how we want our society to look like. The ability of the ruling class to stay in power is dependent on this ideological programming: citizens must necessarily think of the order as natural as well as favourable to them. Antonio Gramsci developed the idea of ideological hegemony in this context, since he saw that the revolution of the working class did not come as easily as expected. He argued that capitalism could in crises adapt so that the masses had the impression that they gained from the system, as well as making it seem like the system was a constant rather than changeable. The proletariat therefore has to be suspicious of such strategies, as it is only a way for the system to adapt in order to avoid confrontation. "The strategy of the working class in the West must be a strategy of 'anti-passive revolution', that is, we must realise and effect an active, democratic revolution in which the masses and not the state, play the fundamental role" (Mouffe 13). The idea of ideological hegemony is important to the analysis of *Cosmopolis*, the main character is enveloped in the ruling ideology and does not consider any other order. When he has lost most of his money and have travelled a bit on the journey towards his death, however, he starts experiencing life slightly different.

Marx's theories are more than anything else a description of an economic system, and specifically the capitalist system. His 1848 publication *Manifesto of the*

*Communist Party* describes how the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie emerges within the capitalist system. The workers are exploited by the bourgeoisie but this very fact is what will topple the system. I will argue in my analysis of *Cosmopolis* that the character of Eric Packer in many ways can be viewed as a symbol of the downfall of the bourgeoisie. The Manifesto describes the bourgeoisie as being central to social change, "the bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part", since it has effectively -and ruthlessly- erased all traditional values and replaced them with a "single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade". As this development continues, the bourgeoisie has become immensely powerful, expanding "over the whole surface of the globe":

The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times, with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own instruments of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.

However, the bourgeoisie as such has also created the proletariat as the international workforce to produce economic growth for the owners of the capitalist mode of production. Thus, subsequently, the proletariat unites against unfair working conditions and furnished with political knowledge and class consciousness starts fighting the system. The bourgeoisie have therefore produced "its own grave-diggers", which is a passage from *The Communist Manifesto* that Don DeLillo references in *Cosmopolis* (90). The proletarian revolution and fall of the bourgeoisie can lead to a socialistic society, but only if technological advances have turned production automatic. The historical basis for us to judge Marxism is thus almost nonexistent since the conditions have never been as Marx argued they would have to be in order to change to a socialistic society. Marx writes in *The German Ideology* that without the necessary development of production, revolution will change nothing, and "all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced" (part 1 section 5). Eagleton states that we cannot judge Marxism by what has been historically been called communism: "to judge socialism by its results in one desperately isolated country would be like drawing conclusions about the human race from a study of psychopaths in Kalamazoo" (*Why Marx Was Right*, 17).

Another central part of the capitalist system is the commodification of things and labour, i.e. people. Commodities are any object that "by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, sec. 1). Commodities have at the basic

level a value in what use they are to us, which Marx terms *use value*. "The utility of a thing makes it a use value", "use values become a reality only by use or consumption" (Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, sec. 1). When a commodity in a certain quantity is exchanged for another commodity in a certain quantity, it creates an *exchange value* that has little or nothing to do with the commodity's use value. "As use values, commodities are, above all, of different qualities, but as exchange values they are merely different quantities, and consequently do not contain an atom of use value" (Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, sec. 1). That we attribute an intrinsic value to things regardless of their use Marx calls the *fetishism of commodities*. The "real" value of a commodity, Marx argues, is measured "by the quantity of the value-creating substance, the labour, contained in the article" (Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, sec. 1). Although the use of labour as a measure of value is not necessarily the case today, the link that Marx shows between the labour that produces a commodity and the price we pay for it in the store is what the capitalist system tries to hide. It is easier to create a higher profit if a capitalist pays the workers very little, and were we to think about the hours spent sewing a shirt and under what conditions, we might be less likely to purchase the cheap one sewn by under-paid workers. This is how Marx describes this relationship in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*:

Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production. It is true that labor produces for the rich wonderful things – but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces – but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labor by machines, but it throws one section of the workers back into barbarous types of labor and it turns the other section into a machine. It produces intelligence – but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism. (First Manuscript, Estranged Labor)

The function of use value, exchange value and commodity fetishism is intrinsically part of the capitalist system and the fact that Marx analysed these mechanisms 170 years ago is remarkable. These terms are vital to an ideological analysis of *Cosmopolis*, as they help form the understanding of the novel's depiction of the economic system. The third question analysed in this essay concerns the novel's theme of alienation and cybercapital, and a orientation in Marx's theory of alienation is therefore needed.

The estrangement of labour is what Marx termed alienation, and occurs in four ways, as mapped out by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: The first consists between the worker and the product where the product is "an alien object exercising power over him" (First Manuscript, Estranged Labor). This might be the best

known type, an example is an industrial worker that fits a bolt onto a frame that goes on a door that goes on a Volvo, thus detaching the individual in the production chain and from the finished product. The second is between the worker and production, which "is the relation of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him; it is activity as suffering, strength as weakness, begetting as emasculating" (First Manuscript, Estranged Labor). As the worker is detached from the product, she is also detached from the compartmentalised work she carries out. "Here we have self-estrangement, as previously we had the estrangement of the thing. A labourer gets no self-fulfilment in his work, but works only to survive" (First Manuscript, Estranged Labor). The third aspect is between the worker and his species; alienation makes "both nature and his spiritual species-property, into a being alien to him, into a means of his individual existence" and "it estranges from man his own body" (First Manuscript, Estranged Labor). The worker gains no self-fulfilment from work but neither from her spare-time as there is little time for anything other than eating, sleeping and reproduction. Whilst these are inherently human attributes, the distinguishing quality of humans is the ability to reach beyond these basic facts of life, but the worker is denied that chance. Finally, alienation occurs between the worker and other workers. "An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man" (First Manuscript, Estranged Labor). As the worker is detached from the result of her labour, the very action of working, and the human species she is also alienated from her fellow workers.

To avoid alienation people need to be a part of the whole production chain but they also need to work less as to have more free time. There seems to be a common misunderstanding that Marxism means people working harder for less, but in fact the idea is the opposite. This is made possible through technological advances that automate production. "As Marx insists, socialism also requires a shortening of the working day—partly to provide men and women with the leisure for personal fulfillment, partly to create time for the business of political and economic self-government" (*Why Marx Was Right*, 18). Work should not constitute one's life, but be one part of self-fulfilment. The goal is that people can work with various creative tasks and remain close to the whole production chain so as to feel a sense of fulfilment as things get completed. In *A Communist Confession of Faith*, the answer to the question of the aim of communist society is: "to organise society in such a way that every member of it can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom and without thereby infringing the basic conditions of this society" (Engels). Marx effectively

mapped out the mechanisms of capitalism and yet the concept of communism is unfairly labelled as a totalitarian nightmare. Marx's ideas are really just tools to understand society, but are viewed as being dogmatic. In a reference to how Marx is talked about today Eagleton concludes: "was ever a thinker so travestied?" (*Why Marx Was Right*, 239).

## Form

The question of literary form is a debated one in Marxism; the theory is content-heavy rather than formalist, yet how the form correlates to the ideological analysis has been much discussed. There is no simple line to be drawn between form and content as they are dependent on each other. Eagleton states that "Marx himself believed that literature should reveal a unity of form and content"; "he shows [..] a dialectical grasp of the relations in question: form is the product of content, but reacts back upon it in a double-edged relationship" (*Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 20-21). The debate in Marxism about form has primarily been between classic realism and modernist formalist experimentation.

Whilst traditional Marxists like Georg Lukács believed in a harmonious unity that was realistic and as such great art, postmodernists like Jameson argue that capitalism is today fragmented and alienated and that the search for a unity is in fact not realistic. "One of the most crucial controversies in Marxist criticism is the debate between Brecht and Lukács in the 1930s over the question of realism and expressionism" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 70). As a classical formalist, Lukács developed an analysis on literary form, and argued that humans "cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment" (Lukács 189) and that modernists tried to separate the individual from all social connections. He thought that "modernism leads not only to the destruction of traditional literary forms; it leads to the destruction of literature as such" (Lukács 209). Lukács had the idea that great literature was a complex unit. Great writers are those who depict a complex society as a harmonious whole. "A 'realist' work is rich in a complex, comprehensive set of relations between man, nature and history; and these relations embody and unfold what for Marxism is most 'typical' about a particular phase of history" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 28). For Lukács, totality was realistic and to move away from that would undermine the creation of great literature. The idea of typicality is present in a lot of Marxist criticism. Individual characters are often viewed as representative types. "Engels remarked in a letter to Lassalle that true character must combine typicality with individuality; and both he and Marx thought this a major achievement of Shakespeare and Balzac" (Eagleton, *Marxism and*

*Literary Criticism*, 29). My own argument is that the main protagonist of *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer can in fact be seen as a representative of a modern day capitalist and as such as an image of the capitalist system.

Bertold Brecht argued in contrast that to create resistant readers or viewers one must use different forms, building his epic theatre on experimenting with form in search of the *Verfremdungseffekt*: creating estrangement between the performance and the audience. He argued that since modern capitalism is not unified, but fragmented and alienated, that was also the way to make the audience consciously reflect on the ruling ideology by being shocked into true consciousness. Walter Benjamin wanted art not only to lift the veil of false consciousness, but also for producers of art to transform the very production process. The aim was to gain new territories by working with the audience so as to make them co-producers. In fragmented urban life he saw the possibility of progressive art forms. He believed that traditional art forms had "an 'aura' of uniqueness, privilege, distance and permanence about them; but the mechanical reproduction of, say, a painting, by replacing this uniqueness with a plurality of copies, destroys that alienating aura and allows the beholder to encounter the work in his own particular place and time" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 62-63). Following on from art forms such as photography and moviemaking the consumer of art also becomes part of the artistic process, given the spread of technology usable by all and the sheer increased proliferation of art. If the technological advances and the mechanical reproduction of art challenged the ideological consciousness in the 1930's when Benjamin wrote about them, it is certainly even more true now after an explosive development of technology and communication. The array of channels with which to produce, show and sell art are today almost infinite. In view of this change, the previously hailed unity of classical Marxists has been deemed inadequate in the era of fragmented society and mass production. It is from this tradition that the idea of a postmodern Marxist analysis has emerged.

There has been some scepticism about postmodernism within Marxist theory based on the tradition of a unified text, and the debate remains ongoing between postmodernists and traditionalists. Fredric Jameson is an influential postmodern Marxist critic who argues that capitalism has changed and cannot be seen as a unity. "The reality with which the Marxist criticism of the 1930's had to deal was that of a simpler Europe and America, which no longer exist. Such a world had much more in common with the life forms of earlier centuries than it does with our own" (Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, xvii). Jameson argues further that our current fragmented system hides class structures making it more difficult to

combat them: "the development of postindustrial monopoly capitalism has brought with it an increasing occultation of the class structure through techniques of mystification practiced by the media and particularly by advertising in its enormous expansion since the onset of the cold war" (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* xvii). The class structures have not in any way disappeared, but the fragmentation of society makes it more difficult to see them. A result of this is that success and failures are more frequently attributed the individual rather than fortunate or unfortunate economic circumstances created by class structures. The solution is that we need to critically analyse the various forms of ruling ideology that envelope us. The postmodern point of view is an alternative way of seeing, since the previous unity of capitalism no longer exists. My analysis of *Cosmopolis* will follow the postmodern tradition rather than traditionalist since the novel is both written in a fragmented postmodern way and depicts a contemporary capitalist system in great turmoil. I also agree that whilst many of Marx predictions have proved eerily true, we are seeing an evolved capitalist system today where the search for unity is all but impossible.

## Literature and Society

As my analysis will attempt to link *Cosmopolis* to the economic system and also argue that the novel through its depiction of a troubled state of global cybercapitalism offers a critique of it, a short deliberation on the connections between literature and society is in order.

In Marxism, there is no ideal of art being political or revolutionary; on the contrary, there is an idea of art qua art, i.e. art for art's sake. However, if literature has a political purpose it would best to promote it obliquely. In a letter to Minna Kautsky in 1885, Engels wrote that novels are mostly aimed at the bourgeoisie and therefore one should tread carefully with motifs of class struggle:

It is my belief that the novel of socialist tendency wholly fulfils its mission if, by providing a faithful account of actual conditions, it destroys the prevailing conventional illusions on the subject, shakes the optimism of the bourgeois world and inexorably calls in question the permanent validity of things as they are, even though it may not proffer a solution or, indeed, in certain circumstances, appear to take sides. (Engels, MECW vol. 47:357)

Thus, in order to write a socialist novel one should strive to criticise the way that bourgeois society is seen as natural law, without explicitly promoting an ideological message or proposing political solutions. To unmask false consciousness is best done carefully so as not to drive readers away by too obvious party politics. Ruling ideology stays powerful because

its preconditions are seen as rules. In order to topple it these conditions need to be discovered as effects of the system rather than natural laws. If we think that people are poor because they do not work hard enough, it is easy to assume that capitalist society will force people to try harder. If we think that people are poor because of huge inequalities in the possibility to gain capital, we can assume that more re-distribution needs to be done by the state.

Whether one can draw conclusions about society based on literature is a point that needs to be discussed. One could argue that art reflects society, but in a somewhat distorted way. If literature is a mirror, it is as Pierre Macherey argues, "one placed at an angle to reality, a *broken* mirror which presents its images in fragmented form, and is as expressive in what it *does not* reflect as in what it does" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 49). Literature is created in the context of society, and can only provide a refracted image of it. The idea of the refracted mirror has been discussed by several Marxist critics, Leon Trotsky among others who "claimed that artistic creation is 'a deflection, a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar laws of art'" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 50).



## Analysis

The analysis is divided in three parts, each containing the analysis of one of the questions this essay aims to answer: How is modern capitalism dramatised in the novel? How is the main character depicted both as an individual and as a personification of a system? How does the novel's theme of technology and cybercapital fit in to the economic context?

### The Portrayal of Capitalism

"Marxist criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it" (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, vi). To analyse the novel's ideological structure, a short look at the context in which the book was written is necessary. In *Cosmopolis*, economics is far from being a subtext, but creates the very structure of the narrative. It covers the state of the current global economic system, i.e. capitalism, all centring around the digitally based dot-com bubble. DeLillo is quoted as saying in *Esquire* that he got the idea for the book "just about the time that the market was beginning to flatten out, which was spring 2000. I then realized that the day on which the action occurs would be the last day of the era – the golden age of cybercapital, with booming global markets and rampant dreams of individual wealth" (qtd in Merola 828). This comment underlines the three points of analysis focused on in this essay. Firstly, the global capitalist market, secondly, its human incarnation in the superfluously rich capitalist and finally, the core of the crash in 2000: the digital world of cyberspace. As economic crashes go, this one was unique in its focus on an internet-based market, which was contrary to the history of capitalist waves that have risen and fallen, centred on commodities with use-value rather than exchange value. Unlike one of history's biggest economic bubbles, the tulip mania of 1637, the dot-com bubble was an extreme consequence of capital used to making more capital without there being any commodities involved.

The novel takes place one day in April in the year 2000, which is around the time when the speculation in internet-related stocks peaked, soon after that the prices plummeted and the economic crisis was a fact. In the years before, there was a belief contrary to traditional stock market analyses that the market price of a stock did not have to be tied to a company's profit, but based on a large quantity of online-users a company could be expected to grow in worth, thus validating a high stock price. This could today be seen as somewhat naive, and studies of market transactions during that period have shown that "during the dot-

com bubble period the market may have behaved in a less rational manner than it did before or after" (Morris). This was, as DeLillo stated "the golden age of cybercapital" (qtd in Merola 828) the very basis of which is that things do not actually exist in physical form. The money, the companies, the expectations and hype only existed in digital space. The title of *Cosmopolis* plays off the society in which the novel is set, in the merger of the Greek word for world and for city. Löfgren argues that the title "suggests an extravagant imaginary economy, an overinvestment of both capital and desire that shapes the plot" (109). The title paints the picture of the whole world present in a confined physical space, but also that the idea of the city stretches across the physical world.

Aaron Chandler argues in his criticism of the novel that to view *Cosmopolis* only as a critique of the capitalist system is tempting but too simple, "but this interpretation, while both sensible and productive, risks ignoring *Cosmopolis's* subtle but sustained exploration of the philosophical foundations of Packer's cosmopolitan solipsism". He uses Heidegger and Levinas to understand Packer's split between worldly cosmopolite and the strangely self-centred human. I agree that Packer certainly does not bother himself with Levinas's idea of ethics; he is rather consumed with what Levinas calls *conatus essendi* - the sole focus of one's being. "Nothing existed around him. There was only the noise in his head, the mind in time. When he died he would not end. The world would end." (DeLillo 6). It is also possible to interpret this as a result of increased individualisation that by necessity occurs in capitalist society. The basis for such an economic system is that if you work hard, you earn money. If you fail to achieve success, it is your own fault and you must simply try harder. This fundamental rule makes self-interest essential. Contrary to Chandler, I would argue that the novel's critique of the capital system must remain at the heart of any analysis, and that the individual psyche of Eric Packer must be understood in this context.

As far as Packer is a personification of the capitalist system, the ruling ideology in *Cosmopolis* is liberalism or even consumerism, a world where "to own" and "to consume" make up the backbone of a person's worth. DeLillo comments on this in the quote mentioned earlier, when he talks about "rampant dreams of individual wealth" (qtd in Merola 828). The main character certainly represents this, with his 104 million dollar penthouse complete with a shark tank and lap pool. His lifestyle is the pinnacle of success in the current economic climate. As a contrast we are shown a large demonstration in and around the Nasdaq Center in New York, a building that represents the heart of the global economy. People are releasing rats, stopping traffic, violently taking over the stock exchange and changing the message of

the electronic display from stock prices to "a spectre is haunting the world - the spectre of capitalism", and "a rat became the unit of currency" (DeLillo 96). The first message is, of course, a travesty of the first line of *The Communist Manifesto*, and as the protests are occurring at a central economic institution and the protesters are quoting Marx indicates that they are discontent with the current economic system. The protests in the novel stand for an opposing ideology, which could be argued to be Marxism, socialism or possibly any alternative system that does not marginalise people. As his chief of theory, Vija Kinski tries to explain to Packer, "the more visionary the idea, the more people it leaves behind. That is what this protest is about. Visions of technology and wealth. The force of cyber-capital that will send people into the gutter to retch and die" (DeLillo 90). The second message is from a poem by Zbigniew Herbert, *Report from the Besieged City*, that was written in protest against the martial law imposed in Warsaw 1981 (Merola 827), with the fear that Warsaw would experience the same fate as other besieged cities before, where rats become the currency in the last stage before total collapse and chaos. DeLillo also starts the book with this quote from Herbert's poem. We can interpret this as a fear that conditions in consumerist New York will get as bad as in the poem about the besieged city, but as Merola points out, "In *Cosmopolis* it is capitalism that besieges the city and its inhabitants" (827). If capitalist society continues to marginalise people in its besiegement, the final stage before the total collapse of the system will make rats the unit of currency. The protesters are trying to say that the system is close to melt-down and that something needs to be done, that it is time for a new economic system.

The protests against the possibilities for a economic crash and a general discontent with the current economic system is a key element of the novel's critique of capitalism. The novel was published in 2003, but was more or less finished before the attacks of the *World Trade Center* in 2001. The storyline is indeed uncanny taking into account the attacks of 9/11 2001, the bank crash of 2008 and the *Occupy Wall Street* movement in 2011. The collapse of the main character symbolises a flaw inherent in the system. Randy Laist discusses the death of Packer in the light of the fall of the Twin Towers as representing blows to capitalist ideology: "Eric's collapse and the collapse of the World Trade Center are presented as eerie analogues of one another, both indicating suicidal tendencies in the heart of homo technologicus" (258). The protagonist becomes due to his position among the super rich a symbol of the prevalence of capitalism and his fall is momentous: "indeed, Eric himself is a kind of third Twin Tower, a monolithic symbol of global economic hegemony, and Vija's prophecy anticipates Eric's own crash—his plunge toward suicide—even as it resonates at a slightly further remove with the retrospective shadow of 9/11" (Laist 258). I also argue that

the fall of the main character can be seen as a blow to the capitalist system, as well as representing of the flaws in the system leading to economic crashes. I agree with Löfgren who argues that Packer's "flaws can be read as expressions of the economic and technological systems that he ultimately is unable to control" (109). To expand on the flaws of the economic system: there is a weakness within the capitalist market where gaining capital through exchange value rather than use value creates the basis for a collapse, as happened with everything from real estate to stocks to tulips in the course of history. The ultimate crash of Packer reflects that same cycle as he through hubris speculates on the basis of expectations which result in a economic - and personal - crash for him.

## Individual and Type

Eric Packer stands as both an individual figure and as a representative of the capital system. The portrayal is a large part of the novel's story and its economic context. He is presented as more or less the richest man alive. There is nothing that he cannot buy. A telling scene is when he talks to Didi Fancher and she proposes that he buy a Rothko painting. He replies instead that he wants the whole of *Rothko Chapel*:

Didi: "But people need to see it."

Eric: "Let them buy it. Let them outbid me."

Didi: "Forgive the pissy way I say this. But the Rothko Chapel belongs to the world."

Eric: "It's mine if I buy it." (DeLillo 27-28)

The idea is that you can own anything; money can buy anything and if you are that rich, you simply do not have to take into consideration what other people want or need. There is a huge level of narcissism in Packer's behaviour but this is also an example of commodification, where no other values are important except the profit, or the value for the individual to own. Commodities exist for that purpose alone, regardless of historical value, the future or what the common interest is. Even unique art is to Packer something to acquire for himself without any concern for others. The need to buy the Rothko Chapel for one's own amusement is representative of a commodity fetish where the sole purpose is to own rather than to benefit oneself or society.

The personal journey of the novel's protagonist is certainly a harrowing experience. Within a day (that turns to two) Packer loses everything, starting with the money when he is betting that the yen will decrease in value. He borrows staggering amounts of yen

to speculate in stocks, and assumes that since the yen will go down, the loans will be cheap to pay back. He gradually moves further and further away from being a successful individual towards his demise, at the same time as he seems to be moving gradually towards understanding something about his surroundings. It is a day of absurdity, but he successively widens his perspective. He understands that there are other people in the world, and that they all have stories, something that seemed impossible for him to see initially because his life is normally almost like a fantasy, isolated from the world in a bubble where he has all the money in the world but everything has lost its value.

In the combination of his huge wealth and other material attributes, Packer becomes a symbol of rampant capitalism. That combined with his psyche, highly intelligent, highly self-centred and to his own eyes invincible is what makes his character. Eric Heyne argues that "*Cosmopolis* is actually a graphic novel without the pictures, a mythopoetic vision of a moment of crisis in American history, and the portrait of a great American supervillain". He bases this conclusion on the description of Packer in the novel which is larger than life and virtually indestructible; he comes complete with his own technological lair on a par with any Bond villain. Heyne further compares the sexual encounters that Packer has throughout the day with "the eye candy in James Bond films and the cleavage in DC comics". He describes Packer as such: "the combination of such intellectual gifts and such a vast ego gives us our first clue that we may be dealing with a supervillain". The comparison with the classic graphic novel supervillain is an interesting one, Packer's intelligence and ego form a kind of supervillain of capitalism. In that spirit, Packer seems to rejoice as he picks a fight with the market and keeps betting against the yen, because that is the only fight worth having, the one between his own intellect and the market. As he says to one of his staff: "for someone your age, with your gifts, there's only one thing in the world worth pursuing professionally and intellectually [...], the interaction between technology and capital. The inseparability" (DeLillo 23). That is the game that counts, and Packer is not eager to lose by being beaten by the market. The fact that he cannot read the yen is detrimental to him. As Packer draws closer to death, Benno Levin explains why he could not figure out the yen, "You were looking for balance, beautiful balance, equal parts, equal side. I know this. I know you. But you should have been tracking the yen in its tics and quirks. The little quirk. The misshape" (DeLillo 200). This is only one of many examples of Packer being enveloped in the flawless universe he lives in, while failing to understand anything outside that life. Imperfection and archaic attributes have no place in Packer's world but as he heads to his ruin, people like Levin know

more than he, even about himself. This is a person Packer previously deemed erratic and discarded as dead weight when he fired him from his firm.

Packer is the ultimate example of the capitalist that has a neverending urge to gain more capital for no other reason but that he can. Vilja Kinski talks, for instance, to Packer about what he paid for his apartment, that it had nothing to do with security or power or taste, "you paid the money for the number itself. One hundred and four million. That is what you bought. And it's worth it. The number justifies itself" (DeLillo 78). Whilst ordinary people consider money to be a security, creating opportunities to do things, the super-rich have no such thoughts. Jerry Varsava describes Packer as the ultimate example of what Ayn Rand calls "the unknown ideal" of capitalism (82). He discusses *Cosmopolis* as an example of a long line of cultural expressions depicting the rogue capitalism of contemporary society. This is a form of capitalism that has grown far beyond anyone's imagination, into a kind of monster Ferris wheel that is spinning out of control, accumulating masses of capital for the already rich. Varsava argues that Packer does not exist in either the public or the private sphere, but terms it "self sphere", a place where nothing exists except Packer's self-interest. Kinski further discusses the theme of wealth with Packer: "All wealth has become wealth for its own sake. There's no other kind of enormous wealth. Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself" (DeLillo 78). This mirrors the self-interest formed in the capitalist system. The narcissistic perspective is revealing and certainly recognisable in contemporary society's development of consumerism. Yet the interest in Marxist ideas about capitalist mechanisms has become less, although one might argue that here has been some renewal of criticism of the way the capitalist economic system has such a destructive grip on the world. Eagleton discusses the decline in Marxism since the late 1970's, and argues that this is a dual consequence of the capitalist system. On the one hand, the victorious ruthlessness of the system makes people think that they are powerless in their protests; it is simply too much of a power structure to change. On the other hand, this is exactly why Marxist analysis and criticism are needed more than ever today (*Why Marx Was Right* 6). Contemporary cultural expressions, like *Cosmopolis*, can depict the flaws inherent in the system and with the use of an ideological analysis like Marxism one can highlight these aspects.

The novel's main protagonists are very far removed from the rest of society, today commonly referred to as "the 99 percent", the majority of society that has very little to do with the 1 percent of people where most of the capital is concentrated. Packer's wife says

that she enjoys riding taxis in New York because "one learns about the countries where unrest is occurring by riding the taxis here" (DeLillo 16). There is also an ethical dimension here. Capital is fetishised by the lifestyle of the *überraich*, a lifestyle that is personified by Packer who leads a life of his own, secluded from the community, but whose wealth is nevertheless based on manual labour at the other end of the chain. Regardless if Packer speculates with cybercapital, the yen he is betting against is based on the state of production in Japan, his materialistic assets are all produced somewhere by someone that may or may not have satisfactory working-conditions, and he himself employs many people that work in order for him to get rich. Marx's idea is that this link is hidden in the hegemonic ideology of capitalist society and that the secrecy of the link depends on false consciousness. Capitalism wants to make us believe that we are all gaining from the system, workers and capitalists alike, so that we will all wholeheartedly support it. One can argue that *Cosmopolis* is in a way an attempt to reveal that. How do we live? How could we live? Ideology is dependent on the economic base, existence determines consciousness, so when Packer's life in essence falls apart, this also alters his perception of the world. One could argue that this actually broadens his perspective and he gets more in touch with 'true consciousness'. Any real catharsis is not to speak of in the case of Eric Packer, but instead it is the reader who experiences this lifting of the veil of false consciousness vicariously through the main protagonist. Another passage in the book that ties commodity fetishism with the value of money and the production chain is when Levin explains to Packer why he has to die:

You have to die now for how you think and act. For your apartment and what you paid for it. For your daily checkups. This alone. Medical checkups every day. For how much you had and how much you lost, equally. No less for losing it than making it. For the limousine that displaces the air that people need to breathe in Bangladesh. This alone. (DeLillo 202)

Levin is basically trying to show Packer the chain between him and production, and that the connection goes both ways. High-level income countries exploit low-level income countries to produce commodities for them at low prices, but the largest polluters are countries with high income and a high standard of living. The latter is how Levin is trying to explain the connection to Packer by referring to his polluting stretch limousine.

The bourgeoisie as Marx describes it are the class that owns the means of production and make profit from the efforts of the proletariat. Even though Eric Packer is a far cry from the factory owner of the past, he is very much a capitalist, i.e. owner of capital. The bourgeoisie is no longer as easily defined as when industrialism emerged, but exists in

different shapes in the same way that the proletariat can no longer only be defined as a worker on a factory floor but can for example also include employees in the public sector. The modern capitalist system with its changed working conditions has not eradicated class structures but made the gap bigger between those that have and those that have not. Class struggle is ever more present but the system of hiding it is more advanced in our fragmented society. In the case of Eric Packer, he has used the global economic market and speculated in stocks to gather his billions. He ponders this in relation to his wife's circumstances: "she was rich, he was rich; she was heir-apparent, he was self-made; she was cultured, he was ruthless; she was brittle, he was strong; she was gifted, he was brilliant; she was beautiful" (DeLillo 72). As I have argued, the character of Eric Packer appears as a representative of the capitalist system, and I further argue that his downfall resembles the way Marx described that the bourgeoisie would fall in *The Communist Manifesto*: "The bourgeoisie itself [...] supplies the proletariat with its own instruments of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie". These lines are implicitly and explicitly present throughout *Cosmopolis*. Marx argues that the bourgeoisie requires the help of the proletariat to fight its battles, and so drags the workers into the political struggle, therefore giving them an understanding of the system that will topple it. The main character represents a literary metaphor of this event. Packer quotes Marx regarding this matter when he is talking to his chief of theory, Vija Kinski: "you know what capitalism produces. According to Marx and Engels. Its own grave diggers" (DeLillo 89-90). The passage he is referring to is "What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (*Communist Manifesto*). From this we can see how Packer's downfall is step by step similar that of the bourgeois class. Starting from this argument by Marx: "but not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians" (*Communist Manifesto*). The conclusion of Packer's death is that he has dug his own grave. He hires Benno Levin, a man who previously had a fulfilling job, a family and by all accounts a pleasant life and put him in a job where he was unhappy. He "called into existence" this man, only to fire him when he was deemed unfit. Through the employment of this man he "forged the weapons" used to kill himself. Levin has inside information about Packer's routines, he purchases the gun he uses with his salary from the company, he gains further information through the streaming webcam that Packer himself has set up and finally, Packer chooses voluntarily to continue his stroll into the derelict building where Levin resides. Were it not for these circumstances, Levin would have no chance to hurt



Packer in any way. Packer is therefore not only an example of the super rich but also a metaphor for the fall of the bourgeoisie, as predicted by Marx. I argue that *Cosmopolis*, as a contemporary cultural expression, dramatises the way Marx described that the demise of the capitalist system would be realised in society.

The fall of Eric Packer is the epitome of the self-centred hubris of the character. The title of this essay refers to something that Benno Levin says to Packer near the end. "I have my syndromes, you have your complex. Icarus falling. You did this to yourself. Meltdown in the sun. You will plunge three and a half feet to your death. Not very heroic, is it?" (DeLillo, 202). Levin refers to the Greek myth of Icarus who ignores his father's warning about hubris, flies too close to the sun and falls due to the wax holding together his feathered wings melting. Levin is saying that Packer did this to himself, a man that has "made and lost sums that could colonize a planet" (DeLillo 129), a man that has a self-centred disregard for other people's lives and who only exists in a detached fantasy whilst people are starving in other parts of the world. Although it does not turn out as Packer imagines, his plan was to be buried in a Hunter S. Thompson-esque manner by being shot in the air in his nuclear bomber along with his dogs and then crash into the desert, creating a permanent "work of land art, scorched earth that would interact with the desert" (DeLillo 209). Even in death Packer wants to outlive the rest of the world in a spectacular show resulting in a work of art.

## The Alienation of Cybercapital

In his limousine, Packer has created a touchless environment that is separated from any kind of physical reality. Nicole Merola discusses this and characterises it as the touchless space present in *Cosmopolis* (831). The touchless space reflects fictitious commodities, cyber capital and ultimately alienation. The theme of non-physical form in the novel, as represented by cybercapital and the touchless technology, echoes Marx's theory of alienation. Marx's theory does for obvious reasons not include the alienating effect of cyberspace, but the combined effects of the alienation of capitalism and the technological ambience Packer lives in creates a depiction of a modern version of the concept of alienation. This is a version where man is not only alienated from the product, production, himself and his fellow men, but also any real physical environment. Through Packer, we experience alienation in society not as manual labourers on the shop floor of a factory, but a type where global economy have moved production very far away from the urbanised human, as Jameson argues:

In psychological terms, we may say that as a service economy we are henceforth so far removed from the realities of production and work on the world that we inhabit a dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience: never in any previous civilization have the great metaphysical preoccupations, the fundamental questions of being and of the meaning of life, seemed so utterly remote and pointless. (*Marxism and Form*, xviii)

Several factors have contributed to modern alienation: the global economy has concentrated a large part of the production to low income countries, while high income countries have become more of a service-based economy. Urbanisation has created a further split between small-scale production, industries, and city centres where very little if anything is produced. Instead technological advances and the Internet have become the basis for an on demand, individualised culture where anything is accessible at anytime.

*Cosmopolis* reflects a reality of digital existence; Packer floats through reality without having to interact with things: "He used to sit here in hand-held space but that was finished now. The context was nearly touchless. He could talk most systems into operation or wave a hand at a screen and make it go blank" (DeLillo 13). Even people are superfluous in Packer's world; there are numerous examples of him not looking, not caring, or recognising people. "People hurried past [...] they were here to make the point that you did not have to look at them" (DeLillo 21). This includes the driver of his limousine: "Eric did not look at the driver. There were times when he thought he might look at the driver. But he had not done this yet" (DeLillo 32). And even his staff: "He did not look at Shiner anymore. He hadn't looked in three years. Once you'd looked, there was nothing else to know" (DeLillo 11). Closer towards the end, as the journey has become ever more disfiguring to the man that Packer once was, he suddenly stops and looks at the driver. "He'd never done this before and it took him a while to see the man" (DeLillo 157). When the touchless space is successively peeled off around him and he is forced to act in the physical world, Packer can approach the environment around him.

Davidson discusses the role of the car in the novel, and concludes that it can be seen both as a symbol of wealth, but also of danger: "the novel contributes to debates about urban congestion and loss of the open road and the function of the car as a symbol of power and prestige" (469). The car undoubtedly is a powerful symbol in the novel, but I primarily interpret it as an example of an extreme commodity fetishism. Packer describes why he likes it: "he wanted the car because it was not only oversized, but aggressively and contemptuously so, a tremendous mutant thing that stood astride every argument against it" (DeLillo 10).

Packer seems continuously to feel ill at ease with the commodity fetishism symbolised by the car but also the detachment from the world it represents. Whilst Packer projects an image of a perfect wealthy life, he often seems to have doubts about what is real. He suddenly ponders: "where do all these limos go at night?" (DeLillo 13). "I haven't been sleeping much. I look at books and drink brandy. But what happens to all the stretch limousines that prowl the throbbing city all day long? Where do they spend the night?" (DeLillo 13). Technological advance is a foundation for a socialistic society as it makes it possible for people to work less as production is automated. In *Cosmopolis* there exists a contradiction in the amount of technology that Packer possess and the alienation that he suffers from. Due to the unequal spread of wealth, advances in a capital society will never be available to everyone, but only those who can afford it, which ironically creates a greater sense of alienation and seclusion. The conditions that could bring equality are used to create the opposite.

The technological aspect of Packer's existence is intermingled with his personal journey and the novel's depiction of a postmodern capitalist society of floating signifiers. Anything and everything is changeable and can at any point become dated or gain an "anachronistic quality" as Packer puts it (DeLillo 9). The idea of the office (DeLillo 15), the word skyscraper, and the hand organizer (DeLillo 9) are all things that to Packer are more or less useless. When he is forced to do something that is archaically physical, it is noted sardonically in the text. "Eric lowered the window. Windows still had to be lowered" (DeLillo 35). This awkwardness with the physical surroundings is one example of the sense of searching present throughout the novel, one could interpret this as Packer trying to fight the ultimate alienation that he is suffering from. At the start of the novel Packer cannot sleep. "Every act he performed was self-haunted and synthetic. The palest thought carried an anxious shadow" (DeLillo 6). He does not feel at home in the world, and does not know what to do. "He didn't know what he wanted. Then he knew. He wanted to get a haircut." (DeLillo 7). But it is not *a* haircut Packer wants, it is *the* haircut. As they journey across town they pass several barbers. His chief of technology, Shiner, asks Packer why he wants to go to that particular one and he replies: "A haircut has what. Associations. Calendar on the wall. Mirrors everywhere. There's no barber chair here. Nothing swivels but the spycam." (DeLillo 15). There is a search for familiarity, of things known, of finding an authentic context to be part of. When he comes to the barber shop he has travelled all that way for, he listens to the barber exchanging the tired old platitudes and thinks: "This is what he wanted from Anthony. The same words. The oil company calendar on the wall. The mirror that needed silvering"

(DeLillo, 161). Is it this need for familiarity, to feel something, to understand something that makes Packer engineer his own downfall? He goes through a change as we follow his journey, and the more he loses of his wealth and technology the less alienated he seems to become, even if it still ends in death, he seems happy and relieved to go through it. He is as we have seen, much involved in creating his own fall, and one could argue that the change even stands as a grounding experience for the character. "The pain that Eric inflicts on himself, and the threat of death that he exposes himself to, place a limit on desire, restoring a sense of existential reality" (Löfgren 111); the end that Packer meets represents a brake between individual desire and physical reality were the latter is preferable.

Finally, to sum up the discussion of the questions posed: the modern-day capitalism described in *Cosmopolis* is a dramatisation of our contemporary economic system. It describes a global economy largely based on cybercapital without any real connection to use-value and where the link between production and the urban human is hidden. Capitalism is described as besieging the city and its inhabitants; to own and to consume is central in this system with the marginalisation of people as result. To exist in wealth is possible if you just work hard and focus on yourself. The flaws in the system are portrayed in the fall of the main character, where the hubris of gaining capital for its own sake through buying and selling, through exchange value, creates the weakness of exaggerated expectations creating economic bubbles. There is no use-value or even any real value (i.e. labour hours) in speculating with currency rates and stocks and this flaw makes the system sensitive to crashes. The marginalisation of people results in protests, which echo those made on Wall Street in 2011. "We are the 99 percent" they chanted, referring to the fact that 1 percent of the population owns staggering percentages of capital. As the majority of people are not gaining from the current system it could be changed, but taking into account Marxist theories of false ideological consciousness and social hegemony it is understandable that the system thus far prevails. The capitalist system is a very skilled survivor, and the thought that we all might work hard and get rich further slows down any attempt at a new world order.

As an individual, Eric Packer is an highly intelligent, highly egotistic person. He has all the wealth anyone could ever dream of and lives a luxurious life, yet he is not at ease. He cannot sleep, but instead drinks large amounts and takes long strolls in his massive apartment filled with everything, yet containing nothing. He is searching for something familiar, something that fits and in that quest he obliterates himself along with his capital. As Benno Levin tells him, the reason why he cannot figure out the yen is because he cannot think

outside his perfect symmetrical thought process. Packer comes across as a super villain of capitalism, selfishly gathering wealth for himself while the link between production, his lifestyle and how it impacts the world is invisible to him. When Levin tells him that he has to die because his limousine uses up the air that people need to breathe in Bangladesh, he is saying you need to die because you do not see the link between your lifestyle and others. Levin is saying that Packer's life is destructive because of what he paid for his flat, because what his car does to the environment and because he fired Levin and put him in a marginalised position. There is no redemption in sight as Packer journeys towards death, but he seems to find himself more at home in the world as his worldly possessions disappear. Packer stands as a representative for the capitalist system in his self-centred hubris, which ultimately brings him down. As he falls he becomes a metaphor for the fall of the bourgeoisie as described by Marx.

The theme of technology and cybercapital creates a touchless space for Packer, void of physical reality and depicts a postmodern society that combines the alienation of capitalism and technological advances to create a modern form of alienation. Packer is at once a ruler of the world and simultaneously totally alienated, in a way that Marx scarcely could imagine that a person could be. His stretch limousine represents commodity fetishism and also enables touchless alienation. His journey becomes about the search for familiarity, authenticity, and meaning in an effort to combat his alienated existence.

## Conclusion

As a method for analysing the ideological structure of a text, Marxist literary theory is unrivalled. In the case of *Cosmopolis* the theory is particularly apt, as the novel centres around the current global economic system and even references Marx. My argument is that the novel carries out critique against the ruling ideology, that it portrays a ruthless capitalist society in order to shine a light on the flaws in the economic system of contemporary society. The main character can be read as an individual of fictional creation that goes out on a journey to find familiarity but also as a representative of a capitalist system. I also argue that the themes of cybercapital and technology depict an alienation of the modern age. With the use of Marx's economical theories, from a postmodern perspective I argue that literature can mirror society in a refracted way.

The novel offers critique against the capitalist system as the narrative shows how people become marginalised by the selfishness of the rich. The economic system is also portrayed containing inherent flaws that makes it likely to crash. The main character lacks ethics and becomes a personification of rogue capitalism but also of a modern type of alienation that basis itself on the alienation of capitalism and on the technological advances as well as high income countries' role as a service economy, far removed from the production. The fall of the main character is self-engineered but his assassin becomes a representative of the proletarian revolution as he turns on the one that has destroyed his life.

*Cosmopolis* is a postmodern novel with a scattered narrative and it contains an intricate web of imagery: the title plays with physical space as it merges world and city, the Communist Manifesto is referred to during the protests against "the force of cybercapital that will send people into the gutter and retch and die" (DeLillo 90). While capitalism besieges the city, both the protestors and Packer refer to a poem about a besieged city where rats became the unit of currency. Themes of technology and alienation blend in the depiction of postmodern capitalist society. The image of Icarus falling due to his own hubris is travestied by a main character that represent the super rich, a supervillain of capitalism whose fall can be read as a metaphor for the fall of the bourgeoisie. The real importance of *Cosmopolis* is this kaleidoscope of narrative imagery that through an ideological analysis and use of theories of society and economics can create a refracted mirror of contemporary society.

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