Text Matters, Number 16, 2026
https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-2931.16.26

Check for updates

COPE
Member since 2018
JM13713

Yassine Najjar
University of Gabes

Enclosure and Urban Entropy in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how spatial forms of isolation and fragmentation in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* reflect the experience of postmetropolitan life in New York City. As the narrative follows Eric Packer's ride across Manhattan in his high-tech limousine, it presents the city not as a coherent urban environment, but rather as a hyper-mediated and destabilized space marked by fragmentation and disconnection. The limousine functions as a cocooned space of observation and a symbolic trope for the erosion of public space, bodily presence, and social interaction. Packer's movement through the city becomes a collage of hindered motion and eruptive violence, revealing a deeper pattern of systematic spatial detachment. From this vantage point, *Cosmopolis* stages the collapse of traditional urban coherence and imagines a postmetropolitan condition shaped by entropy, surveillance, and symbolic excess. Edward W. Soja's concept of Thirdspace offers a possibility of analyzing New York as a fragmented, ideologically produced postmetropolitan city shaped by the forces of late capitalism. This spatial reading is further informed by postmodern theory, which offers insight into how contemporary urban environments become saturated with signs and mediated abstractions. This paper examines how the novel maps a city in crisis and interrogates what it means to inhabit urban space when its material and symbolic foundations are disintegrating. It also considers the ethical and political implications of this spatial breakdown, asking what forms of presence or resistance might still be possible when the very ground of the city is no longer stable.

Keywords: postmetropolitan space, Thirdspace, enclosure, fragmentation, postmodernism, hypercapitalism, DeLillo.

creative commons

© by the author, licensee Lodz University – Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Funding information: Not applicable. **Conflicts of interests:** None. **Ethical considerations:** The Author assures of no violations of publication ethics and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Received: 21 Oct. 2025. Verified: 26 May 2026. Accepted: 2 June 2026.

INTRODUCTION

The experience of the contemporary city is increasingly marked by fragmentation and disorientation. The metropolis, once thought of as the mother city or the hub of political and social life, is witnessing an erosion of coherence. Fredric Jameson identifies a "mutation in built space" (*Postmodernism* 38) as a characteristic feature of postmodernity. In his analysis of the logic of late capitalism, Jameson reads the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as a "hyperspace" that exceeds available "perceptual equipment" (ibid.) resisting orientation through its "glass skin [that] repels the city outside" and "achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the Bonaventure from its neighborhood" (42). Within this context, Jameson situates urban forms at the heart of understanding the postmodern condition.

In this sense, Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) transposes the postmodern condition into the literary text, focusing on Manhattan as a space of enclosure and hyper-mediation. The novel exposes, in a compressed temporality, Eric Packer's one-day experience of traversing New York city in his high-tech limousine. The protagonist's itinerary across the city gives DeLillo the opportunity to portray the fragmentation of urban space as it is endlessly disrupted by protests, traffic jams, and erupting violence in the streets. The limousine—initially the vehicle that carries Packer to the hairdresser—acquires a symbolic dimension serving as a shield that isolates Packer from the chaotic entropy of the streets of Manhattan while exposing the isolation of the protagonist in a disorienting urban space.

Critics have often claimed that *Cosmopolis* carries DeLillo's critique of postmodernity. Jerry A. Varsava reads the novel as a revealing diagnosis of the cultural condition of the late 20th century and a condemnation of "rogue capitalism" (104). Similarly, Martina Sciolino suggests interpreting the work as a "[s]wan song for postmodernism" (217), noting that it functions as a satirical critique of a purely economic, two-dimensional spectacle. However, less attention has been paid to its chaotic spatial logic. As such, the present article offers a reading of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* informed by Edward W. Soja's critical urban theory. The article recontextualizes Soja's concept of Thirdspace to analyze the fragmentation of New York as a postmetropolis.

The article examines urban entropy as both a narrative form and a spatial condition showing how the city's disorder is translated into a text that foregrounds issues of narratability. It also contends that *Cosmopolis* transforms Manhattan into a postmetropolitan space where enclosure produces an intensified form of urban entropy. The novel does not simply

seek to expose a different model of spatiality but is effectively a critical literary laboratory of postmetropolitan space. Through the insulated interior of the limousine, DeLillo critically tests a spatial logic that favors the disintegration of material urban experience into digital data and symbolic excess. The article argues that the novel refashions the city of Manhattan as a collage of real and imagined spaces in which mobility transforms into stasis and information becomes an obliteration of meaning. At the same time, the literary space opens residual yet significant possibilities of resistance through lived spatial disruptions that unsettle the city's systems of mediation and control.

THE CITY AS A SITE OF FRAGMENTATION

Cosmopolis unfolds as a detailed and almost cartographic record of movement through Manhattan. Packer, a wealthy currency speculator, undertakes a journey to get a haircut at his childhood barber's shop. His movement is a catalyst that spatially structures the novel. In brief, the trip from First to Eleventh Avenue—a route already fragmented by the numerical codes and abstract signifiers of the urban grid—exposes different aspects of the city's fractured geography and mirrors the protagonist's disintegration. By documenting Manhattan's material topography, the narrative reflects on how this geography is reshaped through abstraction and mediation, mirroring the fractured spatial logic of contemporary urban life.

It is within this context that Edward W. Soja's critical urban theory stands as an illuminating framework for understanding the spatial experience presented in DeLillo's novel. In his book *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (2000), Soja conceptualizes what he calls postmetropolis as the late capitalist restructuring of the modern industrial city into a dispersed and fragmented space governed by global flows of capital. Soja accounts for the urban transformation in the late 20th century and attempts to explain the restructuring of urban life. He develops a framework of "six different discourses, each representing a different way of analyzing and interpreting the restructuring of the metropolis" (*Postmetropolis* 154).

These interrelated discourses offer distinct yet complementary perspectives through which the spatial, social, and symbolic dimensions of the contemporary city are interpreted. Accordingly, postmetropolis stands for a new spatial formation marked by uneven development and a reshuffling of social hierarchies. DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* is a crystallization of this theoretical framework into narrative form, depicting Manhattan as

a site of assemblage of differentiated and often contradictory spatialities. The novel neither contextualizes Manhattan as the mother city, with the literal meaning implied in the Greek root of the term "metropolis," nor as an emblem of modernity in the sense that it stands for a dense and dynamic space where industrial, economic, and cultural energies converge. Instead, the work presents Manhattan as a site of fragmentation, shaped by the intersection of technological mediation and financial capitalism.

The first pair of discourses emanating from Soja's framework, "postfordist industrial metropolis" and "cosmopolis," sets the stage for understanding the multiple meanings attributed to postmetropolis. Soja attempts to highlight the economic and cultural transformations that underpin the emergence of this new form of urbanism. Initially, he places emphasis "on the role of *industrial production* and the impact of *industrial restructuring* on contemporary life" (*Postmetropolis* 157, emphasis in the original) and then describes the evolution and passage from the industrial to the postindustrial city which led to the emergence of the postfordist industrial metropolis. Accordingly, Soja's postmetropolis represents "an outgrowth or, better, an extension of that modern and modernist urbanism" while at the same time preserving "traces of earlier cityspaces" (148). This model of urban organization also marks "an era of intense and extensive restructuring as profound in its impact on every facet of our lives . . . since the origins of the industrial capitalist city" (ibid.). This new urban formation obviously presents a profound change in what the city represents. What Soja terms as "the urban imaginary" (149) reflects the transition of cities into restructured entities defined by cultural symbolism. The tension between the industrial and postindustrial city in *Cosmopolis* is articulated through the felt antagonism between First Avenue and Eleventh Avenue. First Avenue embodies financial capital, services, and symbolic economies, materialized in Packer's vertical isolation or what Vija Kinski describes as a life lived in "a tower that soars to heaven and goes unpunished by God" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 103). By contrast, Eleventh Avenue marks the residue of a Fordist economy, with its tenements, car shops, and barber's shop anchoring the narrative in a space of material decay and social proximity. The tenement where Packer used to live is described as "grim," located on "a grim street, but people used to live here in loud close company, in railroad flats" (159). The barber's shop is also rendered as physically deteriorated: "paint was coming off the walls, exposing splotches of pinkish white plaster, and the ceiling was cracked in places" (160).

Soja's notion of cosmopolis designates the city's insertion into global financial and informational networks, where "the global is becoming localized and the local is becoming globalized at the same time"

(*Postmetropolis* 152). This discourse presents the postmetropolis as a new cosmopolis "generating the most economically, politically, and culturally heterogeneous cityspaces that may have ever existed" (154). Evidently, Manhattan in the novel is presented as a center of global finance and the protagonist as a speculator intrigued by the frenetic rise of the yen.

The paired discourses of the "exopolis" and "the fractal city" are useful for understanding the conditions of spatial and social fragmentation depicted in DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. Soja argues for the restructuring of the urban spatial form of the city and declares the emergence of "a new category of city [as] being invented, one that does not fit into the conventional definitions" (237). It is this decentered urban form that challenges the conventional boundaries of the city: a space where the distinctions between center and periphery, inside and outside, and the real and the imagined dissolve producing a kind of urban entropy. In *Cosmopolis*, this dispersal is inscribed into the narrative logic: Packer's journey takes place in a city where traffic immobilizes circulation, financial flows operate beyond physical space, and events unfold as disconnected episodes.

At the same time, the fractal city foregrounds the uneven, polarized nature of postmetropolitan space fraught with unequal socio-economic possibilities (266). Soja argues that cities reproduce social and economic disparities across multiple spatial levels. He emphasizes what he describes as "*metropolarities* . . . that produce and maintain socio-economic inequality" (265, emphasis in the original). The cityspace becomes a mosaic of differentiated zones amplifying starker hierarchies of class, race, and power. This logic is condensed in the figure of the limousine that sustains social and spatial inequalities by blocking access to Packer as a representative of high society. The fortification of the car is a marker of the strict dividing line between communities in Manhattan, echoing the spatial imaginary of Zbigniew Herbert's poem "Report from the Besieged City" where "a rat became the unit of currency" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 96). By repurposing this motif, which was first introduced as an epigraph, DeLillo critiques the systemic predation of late capitalism. Herbert's rat is a sign of the market's totalitarian agency (Sciolino 214) or what DeLillo identifies as "the specter haunting the world . . . the specter of capitalism" (*Cosmopolis* 96). This is, indeed, a satirical inversion of the famous opening of Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*. By inference, the corporate financial institutions in New York City are reducing human life to a debased financial existence embedded in the image of the rat. This metaphor highlights the divide between the exponential wealth of the elite and the destitution of the masses. Consequently, the limousine functions as a "self-sphere" (Varsava 104) isolating Packer from a public reality increasingly pauperized by the financial market forces he represents.

DeLillo's Manhattan echoes Soja's fractal city in which urban space presents an accumulation of competing spatialities. The narrative begins in Midtown, which is the beating heart of the corporate city alluded to in the text with reference to the "Chase Bank" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 40). The "midtown grid" is a place characterized by a physical vitality, which the narrative illustrates through the chaotic movement of the New York cityscape:

> Buses rumbled up the avenue in pairs, hacking and panting, buses abreast or single file, sending people to the sidewalk in sprints, live prey, . . . women in brisk skirts, half running, sandaled women wearing headsets, women in floppy shorts, tourists, others high and slick with fingernails from vampire movies, long, fanged and frescoed. . . . These were scenes that normally roused him, the great rapacious flow, where the physical will of the city, the ego fevers, the assertions of industry, commerce and crowds shape every anecdotal moment. (41)

However, this "physical will of the city" is in complete contrast to Packer's detachment and mopishness. Each stop along his itinerary reflects a different logic. Times Square, as a commercial hub, plunges the city in the undertones of the postfordist industrial metropolis that has completely restructured the way people live. The anti-capitalist protest zone and the class struggle refer back to Soja's fractal city and social polarities. The rapper's funeral, Brutha Fez, and the presidential motorcades throw glimpses of Manhattan as a simulated city engulfed by media images of lost origins. The cinematic montage of these images intensifies the similarity between Manhattan and Soja's exopolis. DeLillo's novel stages Manhattan both as a physical geography and a mediated construct. Exopolis is presented as a space of blurred borders that collapses the dichotomies between opposites, namely, the verticality of Packer's eighty-nine-story tower building and the flatness or horizontality of Manhattan's streets. The physical presence inside and outside the city is codified through Packer's movement inside or outside of the limousine. It is also important to highlight the tension marking Packer's lived experience in the city through physical presence and his mediated apprehension of the city though the numerous screens in his car. Packer

> was tired of looking at screens. . . . He watched the president of the World Bank address a chamber of tense economists. He thought the image could be crisper. Then the president of the United States spoke from his limo in English and Finnish. . . . He coded the screens into their hatches and cabinets, restoring the interior of the car to its natural grandness of scale, with sightlines unobstructed and his body isolated in space. (140)

This moment captures the paradox of the protagonist's mobility: while he crosses Manhattan, his experience of the city is one of isolation. It is a reminder of the dissolution of the material city into digital mediation producing as a result physical and psychological enclosure. Packer is *in* the city but not *of* it. This mutation of perception frames Packer's detachment as a condition produced by hyperreality.

The disintegration and fragmentation of the city of Manhattan manifested through incidents of violence and stalled motion draws attention to urban and physical entropy. The breakdown of ordered flows and the recurrence of disruptive events expose the fragility of the postmetropolis. In fact, the traffic jams that punctuate the narrative, the anti-capitalist demonstrations, the vandalism of the limousine and the encounter with André Petrescu, the pastry assassin (142), are all orchestrated episodes that build a narrative trajectory of entropy. These events reassert an unmediated contact with the lived space that cannot be fully assimilated by simulation. In practical terms, entropy has marked the narrative first through the expected market collapse and the exponential rise of the Yen. Secondly, it came to the fore due to the incidents of violence and bodily intrusions. In the postmetropolis, disorder is an emergent property of the system itself.

The final pair of discourses related to Soja's framework, the "carceral archipelago" and the "simcities," takes postmetropolitan analysis into the direction of control and simulation. The writer specifies that "the third pair of discourses is . . . more focused on the particularities of everyday life in the postmetropolis. . . . [They] explore the emerging institutional, behavioral, and ideological changes that are reorganizing what can be called a postmetropolitan mode of social and spatial regulation" (*Postmetropolis* 299). On the one hand, the carceral city foregrounds the omnipresent systems of surveillance and regulation transforming the postmetropolis into a space of enclosure. On the other hand, the simcities denote a virtual urban space where digital mediation triumphs over direct spatial engagement. This final discourse revolves around the de-/re-construction of contemporary world views and lived spaces, and approaches the city as a real place and a site of imagination (324). The carceral and the simulated city apply to DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* as Packer's limousine metaphorically stands for a control tower that surveils and isolates the protagonist, and Manhattan's details are minutely decoded through the use of monitors and data analysis. Although spatial experience is, for the most part of Packer's journey, mediated by digital and symbolic representations of different forms, it remains rooted in material reality.

Packer seeks to grasp the city uniquely through digital and symbolic manifestations, embracing the emblematic binary code of the digital world (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 24). However, DeLillo critiques this over-totalized

vision. Indeed, the novel interrupts the illusion of a purely virtual city by forcing the protagonist into unmediated, tactile encounters where the informational flow of his screens is aggressively replaced by the visceral immediacy of physical touch. This physical anchoring is given momentum through Packer's sexual encounters with three different women during his odyssey: his art consultant Didi in her apartment, his bodyguard Kendra Hays in a hotel room, and his wife Elise during the day-long journey. Those tactile encounters do represent a profound return to a dimension that the binary codes he lives by are not able to simulate.

Soja's concept of Thirdspace highlights the possibility of spatial resistance. The theorist presents Thirdspace as an encompassing lived space that reconciles and transcends the binary opposition between the perceived (physical) and the conceived (abstract) city. As a site of experience and imagination, it functions as a space of radical openness that resists closure. Thirdspace provides a framework to detect the last vestiges of spatial resistance. In this context, these vestiges represent the material frictions of the lived city that persist even as Manhattan accelerates toward a state of informational entropy in which the physical environment is both flattened and consumed by the mediated abstractions of global capital.

This study contextualizes the notion of Thirdspace "as a radically different way of looking at, interpreting, and acting to change the embracing spatiality of human life" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 29). As the name of the concept indicates, Thirdspace should be perceived as a space that "disrupts, disorders, and begins to constitute the conventional binary opposition into an-Other that comprehends but is more than just the sum of two parts" (31). By acquiring this transgressive dimension, Thirdspace becomes a meta-space of openness where everything can be found. It is in this sense that Thirdspace rejects any form of totalization that finitely encloses knowledge production in "permanent structures" or specialized compartments/disciplines . . . a constant search to move beyond (meta-) what is known" (57). This space should be seen as an "important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also" (60). What Soja calls "Thirding-as-Othering" is "designed to break down and disorder a rigid dichotomy and create a thirdspace, an alternative 'postmodern geography' of political choice and radical openness attuned to making practical sense of the contemporary world" (63). Thirdspace should be understood as a trialectic alternative to binary spatial logic, functioning as an encompassing lived space that integrates both material and mental dimensions. The Firstspace denotes the perceived physical space in terms of material geography, architecture, streets, and buildings. In *Cosmopolis*, material spatiality is expressed through the different details related to New York, Manhattan with its buildings

and procession of streets, and avenues that Packer traverses during his journey. Secondspace, however, presents the conceived or representational space which is related to the grids on a map, ideologies, mental images, or discourses woven about spaces. Thirdspace comes, accordingly, to stand for the lived environment where reality and simulation blur.

Soja's concept finds its full visceral expression in the limousine's navigation through Manhattan, acting as the site where the material and the virtual collide. This space erupts when the substantial action of protesters asserts its presence through the physical degradation of the limousine. The moment protesters rock the car and knock it back and forth (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 89) marks the collapse of Packer's detachment. The violent grounding of his armored, cork-lined vehicle is completed as people bang on the windows and hood (90) and spray-paint his sanctuary (93). The vehicle is transformed from a disembodied financial site where Packer watches digital tickers and discusses the abstract "visions of technology and wealth" (90) into a scarred, material object. This degradation serves as a scene "where the physical will of the city, the ego fevers, the assertions of industry, commerce and crowds shape every anecdotal moment" (41).

As such, Manhattan serves as both culmination and critique of the postmodern urban experience, a space in which entropy and paralysis are the twin results of a world saturated by abstraction. Physical paralysis is manifested in the inescapable gridlock of the material city, where Packer's limousine is trapped in "stalled traffic" (13) and forced to move in an "inchworm creep" (64) due to the different disruptions of a presidential visit, the rapper's funeral, and street riots. Paradoxically, this physical stasis is fueled by the informational entropy of the virtual city. Insulated from the street, Packer is surrounded by "polychrome numbers pulsing" (13) and a relentless flow of data. This abstract environment is identified by his chief of theory as a system "out of control" operating on "hysteria at high speeds" and "mass convulsions" (85). Through the contrast between the physical gridlock of the limousine and the convulsive speed of the market, DeLillo demonstrates how the postmodern drive toward abstraction results in a state where humanity is left paralyzed while its digital systems spiral into uncontrollable entropy.

THE LIMOUSINE AS A FORM OF ENCLOSURE

Soja's Thirdspace finds a strong resonance in Foucault's concept of heterotopia. In his article titled "Of Other Spaces," Foucault was concerned with the "problem of human site or living space" (23). He starts by apprehending binaries marking lived space. Then, he focuses on spaces

"that have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). "The counter-sites" (ibid.), what Foucault calls heterotopias, are real places that contain all other places. Foucault gives a portrait of the governing principles of these spaces. These heterotopias, Foucault claims, are found in all cultures but take diverse forms. Thus, their universality is foregrounded, and they are divided into "crisis heterotopias" associated with primitive societies with respect to change taking place at a personal level, and "heterotopias of deviation" which refer to places inhabited by people with deviant behavior like "rest homes, and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons" (25). Their functions shift over time. They juxtapose multiple spaces within a single real place. They are linked to slices of time (heterochronies) (26). They presuppose systems of opening and closing that isolate them, and finally, they create spaces that both reflect and contest all other sites. Such spaces, whether real or symbolic, expose the instability of spatial order and reveal how power, ideology, and subjectivity are negotiated in everyday life.

The malaise felt by Packer while navigating the city streets is also linked to the transformation of the limousine into a heterotopia that mirrors, inverts and resists the dominant metropolitan order. The limousine acts as the late capitalist equivalent of Foucault's ship which is defined as "the heterotopia par excellence" (27). He describes the ship as a "floating piece of space" and a "place without a place" that is "closed in on itself" while being "given over to the infinity of the sea" (ibid.). This corresponds precisely to Packer's armored limousine. It functions as an autonomous sanctuary that navigates the material city while remaining anchored in the infinite flow of global data. The "system of opening and closing" (26) that isolates this heterotopic vehicle is breached by the protesters, whose violent intervention disrupts Packer's simulated voyage and proves that he cannot escape the materiality of the streets. It is within view of the counter-sites, in Foucault's sense, that the contradictions of the urban condition are exposed and intensified. If Manhattan functions, in the narrative, as the entropic postmetropolis described by Soja, the limousine serves as its surrogate Foucauldian counter-site. This place without a place negotiates the trialectic of the city by isolating the subject. By applying Foucault's maritime metaphor to the limousine, one perceives Packer sailing/moving through the numerical grid of the Firstspace guided by the virtual infinity of the Secondspace. However, the material encounter between Packer and the protesters represents the eruption of the Thirdspace that engulfs and annihilates the closed world of global finance.

The limousine's function as a Foucauldian counter-site is not simply symbolic; it is constructed through the text's focus on the car's

relationship to the grid. The narrative is articulated through movement and stasis within the city of Manhattan. The initial and guiding idea of the story is Packer's ride from his penthouse on First Avenue to the barber's shop on Eleventh Avenue. Viewed from this angle, the story is about movement and mobility across Manhattan. However, the limousine—the very means of transportation—is slowed into almost stasis. The car destined to carry Packer across Manhattan to get a haircut is constantly obstructed. It moves through endless traffic congestion, political protests, and urban noise. Consequently, the sense of motion is overshadowed by immobility. Throughout the literary text, the limousine dominates DeLillo's spatial imagination and is perceived as "less an object than an idea . . . a tremendous mutant that stood astride every argument against it" (*Cosmopolis* 10). As an idea, the limo is related to collapsing the distinct social and spatial domains into a single enclosed environment monitored and controlled by human and digital sentries. The reversal of the function of the limo is directly related to a serious mutation in the perception of this privatized space. A close examination of *Cosmopolis* shows that the limousine does not simply facilitate movement across the city but also fulfills other functions. The limousine operates as Packer's alternative office, an idea stressed by his wife Elise Shifrin when she remarks, "I know you work en route" (16). Inside the limousine, Packer is monitoring financial work through data surveillance: he "looked . . . toward streams of numbers running in opposite directions . . . the roll and flip of data on a screen," studying "figural diagrams" that transform the interior into a mobile center of financial transactions and speculation (24). The car also functions as a professional meeting space, hosting advisors such as Michael Chin (22), Packer's currency analyst, and later Vija Kinski, his chief of theory, invited on her vacation day to provide counsel (77). In a dramatic episode, the limousine becomes a mobile clinic with sufficient medical infrastructure offering Packer daily examinations, as "Ingram did an echocardiogram" while listening to "his heart valves open and close" (44). Intimacy and bodily maintenance are similarly internalized as the vehicle is even equipped with a toilet (118) underscoring the car's complete self-sufficiency. Most importantly, the car is also described as a fortified engine constantly working as a mobile control tower designed to detect, assess, and neutralize external threats. Early in the journey to the hairdresser, Packer receives a "report from the complex" warning of "a credible threat. Not to be dismissed" (19). This risky atmosphere is paradoxically countered by technological reassurance in some other instances as he is told that the financial network "is secure . . . safe from penetration" (22). Security does not eliminate danger but manages it through constant surveillance and anticipation.

The mutant vehicle, perceived as a multifunctional space, is constructed to abolish the need to engage with the city in physical terms. Instead of connecting the protagonist to the city, the limo is equipped to render urban space an unstable exterior monitored from within. The vehicle functions like a site of implosion in which Manhattan is miniaturized and absorbed within the enclosed space of the car. The limousine also functions as what Marc Augé terms a "non-place," a space of transit and commerce that cannot be defined as "relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 77–78). In his limo, Packer is cut off from the shared history outside his window. As Moraru notes, building on Augé, Packer navigates through an "apathetic geography" (13), an environment deliberately designed to "de-socialize" (ibid.) him by replacing organic human interaction with the safety of individuality.

Operating within the same logic of deterrence and anticipatory security, Soja's concept of the carceral city provides a critical framework for understanding DeLillo's literary text. In *Postmetropolis*, Soja identifies an "intensification of social and spatial control brought about by new developments in the privatization, policing, surveillance, governance, and design of the built environment and the political geography of the cityscape" (299). Accordingly, urban space obeys the regulations of a regime that promotes risk management, control, and selective access. With reference to Mike Davis's *City of Quartz*, Soja contends that the carceral city is a mosaic of "protected and fortified spaces, islands of enclosure and anticipated protection against the real and imagined dangers of daily life" (Davis 224). In DeLillo's narrative, the concept of "islands" is both metaphorically and literally valid; Manhattan itself is an island. This geographical enclosure mirrors Packer's isolated limousine, which functions as a secondary, mobile fortification crossing the primary fortification of the island-city. Both islands are designed to filter out the perceived dangers of the urban outside.

Davis also insists that security in the postmetropolitan city becomes a "positional good . . . defined by income access to private protective services and membership in some hardened residential enclave or restricted suburb," functioning as a prestige marker that distinguishes "the merely well-off" from the "truly rich" (224). In this sense, security "has less to do with the degree of personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential, work, consumption and travel environments, from 'unsavory' groups and individuals, even crowds in general" (ibid.). Packer's vehicle perfectly materializes this logic in different instances of the text. As a mobile, armored, and technologically secured enclave, the limo translates the mechanisms of the carceral city into an individualized apparatus of enclosure. It is meant to shield Packer from danger and, most

importantly, to insulate him from the city, transforming the crossing into a privatized and surveilled experience that maintains social separation.

The vehicle of transit is transformed into a vehicle of withdrawal from the physical and social realities of Manhattan. The limo, with its fortified structure, cuts Packer off from the external world as he traverses it, unless he decides to step outside his sanctuary, which he does several times on his journey to the barber shop:

> "What about your car? Not so quiet surely. You spend a lot of time there."
>
> "I had the car prousted."
>
> "Yes?"
>
> "The way they build a stretch is this. They take a vehicle's base unit and cut it in half with a huge throbbing buzz-saw device. Then they add a segment to lengthen the chassis by ten, eleven, twelve feet. Whatever desired dimension. Twenty-two feet if you like. While they were doing this to my car, I sent word that they had to proust it, cork-line it against street noise."
>
> . . .
>
> "The vehicle is armored of course. This complicated the cork-lining. But they managed in the end. It's a gesture. It's a thing a man does." (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 70–71)

The description of the car as "prousted" and "armored" displays it as a mobile enclave of disconnection. "Prousting" the vehicle refers to insulating it from urban noise. In doing so, it functions as an ironic inversion of the aesthetic project established in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. While Marcel Proust sought to recover lived experience through sensory immersion, "prousting" the limousine enforces a regime of total sensory exclusion in the narrative. Evidently, Packer's cork-lined car suppresses experience altogether and filters street-level life. This form of isolation is both physical and existential as it shelters the protagonist's body, deepens his isolation from the vitality of the urban noise outside, and filters social interaction to a bare minimum. Hence, the limousine materializes what Soja theorizes as the carceral city: a space in which security operates as insulation to neutralize exposure.

The limousine functions as a spatial enclosure through which Packer's experience of the city, and the world more broadly, is ultimately navigated via technological abstraction and mediation, what DeLillo refers to as "the zero-oneness of the world" (*Cosmopolis* 24). Packer is seated "in the club chair at the rear of the cabin," experiencing Manhattan not as a lived

spatiality but through "an array of visual display units" and "polychrome numbers" pulsing across multiple screens (13). The vibrant, polyphonic city outside of the car, manifested in the "stray words in French and Somali" (17) or the "cross-roar of accents and languages" (69) that slip into his surroundings, is constantly reduced to background noise compared to the reflexive gaze of the spycams and "the streams of numbers running in opposite directions" (24). These languages and invitations of human engagement are systematically negated and replaced with a "nearly touchless" (13) context of abstraction which falsely signals the erosion of embodied perception.

What is perceived from within the limo is not the material spatiality of Manhattan associated with what Edward W. Soja terms Firstspace. Perception is mediated and conceived by data visualizations that simulate the spatial experience of the city. From this vantage point, the limousine nullifies the distinction between the circulation of capital and the paralysis of human experience. At the same time, the limousine could also be seen as a Thirdspace encompassing the intersection of the physical, the mental, and the lived dimensions. The friction of these different spaces—first, second, and third—does not resolve into coherence but instead exposes the instability of the postmetropolitan condition itself—the body's captivity, chaos, and alienation—marking Packer's journey while crossing Manhattan.

CORPOREAL ENTROPY

The logic of urban entropy does not remain confined to the streets and infrastructures of the city; it also migrates inward to inscribe entropy onto the body itself, transforming mortality into an expression of disorder. Despite the elaborate human, technological, and digital resources available, designed to insulate Packer from risk, death still emerges as a liminal space that no other spatial or technological strategy can contain. For instance, the permanent medical check-ups end with a final diagnosis "your prostate is asymmetrical" (54). This revelation operates as a corporeal crack within the system that promised symmetry and control. This minor physiological irregularity coupled with the death toll witnessed by the protagonist on one single day expose what enclosure seeks to deter: a disintegrating body undermining efforts of perfection and control. As Philipp Wolf argues, Packer is haunted by his physical body, which he attempts to discipline through excessive training and constant health monitoring. These strategies form, according to the critic, "a common attempt to manage the fear of death" (81). Yet, this effort intensifies alienation as "the intuitive relation

with our body is replaced with second-order information and the more physiological and objectified data one receives, the more the body eludes one's subjective and practical disposability" (ibid.). DeLillo makes this failure explicit when Packer reflects that

> [he] was here in his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss in theory even when he was shaping it under the measured effect of barbells and weights. He wanted to judge it redundant and transferable. It was convertible to wave arrays of information. It was the thing he watched on the oval screen. (*Cosmopolis* 48)

Within an environment that seeks to eliminate space, time, and corporeality, the body remains the one indomitable space asserting entropy in the form of pain and vulnerability. As DeLillo writes near the novel's end, Packer's wish "to extend the human experience toward infinity as a medium of corporate growth and investment" has failed because "this pain interfered with his immortality" revealing that the "things that lived and milled in his body" remain "not susceptible . . . to computer emulation" (207). In this sense, death does not come as an external catastrophe but as an internal counterforce exposing enclosure as a fragile defense against the untranslatability of embodied experience.

When urban fragmentation and bodily mortality converge to shape the two facets of entropy in *Cosmopolis*, enclosure is revealed as an illusion, and the possibility of resistance emerges not as opposition from outside the system but as a rupture within it.

THE POSSIBILITY OF RESISTANCE

DeLillo's work manifests a consistent penchant for openness, both formally, through unresolved, ambiguous endings, and thematically, through a process of becoming that defies strict linearity. While earlier works, such as *Underworld* (1997), cultivate this openness through interconnected sprawl, his later novels achieve a narrative Thirdspace through a more intensive form of suspension. In *Falling Man* (2007), this is realized through a circular structure that loops back to the trauma of 9/11, trapping the narrative in the moment the first plane strikes and denying the characters any forward progression. This traumatic stasis is maintained by the novel's performance artist, who suspends himself in mid-air to remain set forever in free fall. The suspension of the fatal fall in *Falling Man* tightly anticipates the odd time lag taking place at the end of *Cosmopolis*, where Packer exists in a state of being dead and alive depending on whether he is

measured by his biological pulse or his wristwatch camera (206). In both instances, the narrative refuses the closure of a single ontological state, creating a site of radical suspension where the virtual representation of death precedes the material event. By concluding before Levin pulls the trigger, the narrative leaves Packer in a "place of pure potential" (Boxall 232) that remains suspended between a space of possibility and a descent into nothingness.

Joseph Tabbi affirms that among contemporary novelists, DeLillo "share[s] an exemplary willingness to push beyond the limits of the literary, to bring [his] writing into contact with a nonverbal technological reality" (xi). In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo has chosen to leave room for micro-resistances. Amid the overwhelming systems of global networks, media simulations, and capital, one detects some fleeting moments of embodied experience which gratify temporary disruptions and open up spaces of compensation. DeLillo attempts to subvert dominant discourses through the use of language to "reframe, reconfigure, or subvert certain tendentious and reductionist elements in linguistics, psychology and literary theory" (Cowart 151). The novel seems to compete with other discursive tools presented as substitutes for fiction. These forms of resistance are implicitly shown through Packer's decision to leave the shielding cocoon of his car and walk through the chaos of the city in order to reengage with material spatiality. Walking through the chaos of the city can be understood as an attempt to map what Christian Moraru calls a "counter-topology" (13). This immersion is an entropic collapse and a desperate spatial practice aimed at recovering the ethical and relational ties severed by the hypercapitalist postmetropolis. Although these micro-resistances are fragile and easily absorbed by the vortex of the system's logic, they show cracks and breaches in the system and testify to the presence of possibilities. These micro-resistances, however, do not amount to an oppositional stance outside the system. DeLillo stages resistance as an invitation to probe into a problem constantly threatened with absorption by the very structures it seeks to unsettle.

The most pervasive of these structures is the regime of information abstraction, which *Cosmopolis* explores: Packer internalizes the logic of the information society as his perception of himself and the city is mediated exclusively through screens and data visualizations. However, as DeLillo demonstrates, information does not remain a purely dematerialized force. Corporeality is, at times, in tension with the information society that organizes Packer's perception. As Laila Sougri observes, DeLillo "does not seek to unveil the workings of information only as a dematerialized aspect of communication," but instead "locate[s] the subtle embodied manifestation of information in technocultural dailiness" (160). Accordingly, the novel

resists the fantasy of a fully disembodied subject by insisting on the body as a responsive and vulnerable interface. Information is turned to "the immaterial discourse to which embodied circumstances respond," yet without friction or cost (ibid.).

One of the most visible of these breaches is the irreducible materiality of the body, exemplified by Packer's asymmetrical prostate. This "lopsided" biological reality serves as a reminder that the living body cannot be wholly serialized or assimilated into a digital totality (Moraru 19). While technological extensions attempt to reconfigure the subject into a data-driven interface, the body remains an asymmetrical residue that resists total translation. Ultimately, corporeality eludes this regime of information abstraction through the immediacy of pain.

Packer's limousine, estimated to be the ultimate enclosure vessel, gradually reveals its failure. The narrative stages instances of breaches in the form of social exposure: protestors rocking the car, traffic interrupted several times, noise, and threats detected expose the limits of insulation. As Peter Boxall observes (225), the novel repeatedly returns the body to states of radical vulnerability, notably in scenes such as the self-immolated protestor or the film featuring naked bodies in a "city of stunned flesh" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 172) where embodiment is rendered "unprotected" and stripped of mediation. These moments are not to be falsely understood as acts of liberation; they are eruptions that the system cannot absorb.

Resistance is also sustained at the level of literary form. DeLillo constructs the novel as a fragmented, episodic assemblage foregrounding the logic of entropy it describes. The narrative similarly advances through interruptions: stalled traffic, abrupt encounters, sudden disappearance of characters, digressive dialogues, and unresolved scenes. The non-linearity of the story, cast in a collage-like structure, denies the reader the comfort of synthesis and sense-making. As Veggian observes, the novel deploys a language that "moves at light speed" and "transitions are abrupt and every detail and word quickly loses depth" (88). At different levels of the narrative, asynchronous time denies temporal continuity and interpretive closure. This chronological disruption is especially articulated through the novel's anachronistic handling of death. Packer's assassination is described multiple times and from different temporal positions, including chapters that precede the event itself. This generates a narrative structure that is "slightly out of sequence" (92–93). The novel structurally enacts what it thematizes: the exhaustion of simulation and the instability of meaning. As Sougri notes, postmodern technoculture reconfigures language itself into "a game of information" that generates infinite, fragmented possibilities (160). The narrative becomes a site where abstraction and embodiment collide without reconciliation. Instead of offering an escape from this data-

driven world, the novel exposes its limits by highlighting its breakdowns, gaps, and unresolved tensions. The novel concludes in a state of irresolution, confirming that resistance is structural rather than ideological.

These irregularities and disruptions of the system do not amount to a politics of resistance. They rather expose resistance as a small space, a limited condition emerging when systems of enclosure and abstraction falter. In this sense, resistance, like death, serves as a Thirdspace, a site of openness, that reconciles the material friction of the street with the virtual abstractions of the market. Embodied experience, moments of forced exposure, and the fragmented narrative form do not overturn the logic of the system but interrupt its claim to total control. In this sense, DeLillo's resistance is neither heroic nor emancipatory; it resides in the refusal of final meaning and the persistence of entropy, functioning as a lived space that reasserts the irreducible materiality of being.

CONCLUSION

DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* stages the postmodern city as an entropic system monitored by enclosure, abstraction, and mediated perception. DeLillo dramatizes the transformation of urban experience, marked by stasis, insulation, and simulation, through Packer's crossing of Manhattan. Examined through the lens of Soja's postmetropolitan theory, Manhattan emerges as a fragmented collection of carceral and simulated spaces foregrounding control.

Within this spatial logic, the limousine serves as a mobile vessel that condenses the irregularities of the postmetropolis. Initially designed to protect the protagonist and deter potential risks, the vehicle at once absorbs the city and transforms urban life into streams of images and abstractions. However, the promise of absolute insulation proves illusory.

The logic of entropy also shifts from the urban space and affects the physical body. Death asserts itself as a site of disorder where the corporeal vulnerability triumphs over technological insulation and financial abstraction. By bringing together urban and bodily decay, DeLillo unveils the fragility of the postmetropolitan system and frames resistance as a material rupture of the lived experience.

DeLillo offers glimpses of hope in the novel's possibility of resistance within this entropic spatial order. This form of resistance is not a proclaimed act of transcendence or total disruption of the system, but rather a form of negotiation of the lived space as an interesting form of openness and rehabilitation. Basically, resistance in this context is neither a denial of the structures of financial capitalism nor an escape from mediation but

a recognition of the instability of these discourses. The novel transforms the cityspace into a site of reflection in order to rethink the way urban life is experienced and narrated.

DeLillo's work seems to mirror qualitative transformations at the level of concerns, feelings, and lived experiences and explore the saturation of contemporary life by media and capital. As a writer concerned with the postmodern condition, he has produced texts that tap into "inner networks of global communication and information" (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 384). These new forms of writing are perceived as testing grounds for understanding postmodernity; "a kind of laboratory experiment in which the geographical-cultural light spectrum and bandwidths of the new system are registered" (385). Thus, DeLillo's work is a diagnostic tool used to explore what happens when technology, capital, and culture fuse into a single system. Contextualized within the dynamics of late capitalism, his works chart a fundamental change initiated by a new world order.

Works Cited

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe, Verso, 1995.

Boxall, Peter. *Don DeLillo. The Possibility of Fiction*. Routledge, 2006. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203315422

Cowart, David. "DeLillo and the Power of Language." *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, edited by John N. Duvall, Cambridge UP, 2008, pp. 151–65. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521870658.012

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. Verso, 1990.

DeLillo, Don. *Cosmopolis*. Picador, 2003.

DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. Scribner, 2007.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22–27. https://doi.org/10.2307/464648

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Verso, 1991. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822378419

Moraru, Christian. "Heterotopics: Space, Time, Identity." *University of Bucharest Review*, vol. IX, no. 3, 2007, pp. 8–20.

Sciolino, Martina. "The Contemporary American Novel as World Literature: The Neoliberal Antihero in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 57, no. 2, Summer 2015, pp. 210–41. https://doi.org/10.7560/TSLL57204

Soja, Edward W. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2000.

Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996.

Sougri, Laila. *Representations of Technoculture in Don DeLillo's Novels*. Routledge, 2024. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003407768

Tabbi, Joseph. *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk*. Cornell UP, 1995. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501717642

Varsava, Jerry A. "The 'Saturated Self': Don DeLillo on the Problem of Rogue Capitalism." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 46, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 78–107. https://doi.org/10.1353/cli.2005.0017

Veggian, Henry. *Understanding Don DeLillo*. The U of South Carolina P, 2015. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6sj90p

Wolf, Philipp. *Death, Time and Mortality in the Later Novels of Don DeLillo*. Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003289937

Yassine Najjar is Assistant Professor in the English Department at the University of Gabes, Tunisia. He holds a PhD in Contemporary American Fiction with a dissertation focused on the work of Don DeLillo. His research interests include American literature, metafiction, experimental narratives, and cultural studies. Najjar's work explores the intersections of literature, media, and identity in postmodern and contemporary American literature.

https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6145-4454

yassine.najjar@islgb.u-gabes.tn