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3 – Bodies in Urban Space: *Cosmopolis*

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After a discussion of postmodern urban space in *Lot 49* as non-place that engenders a generic subject, or an “average man” in Augé’s words, one problem immediately presents itself: the generic may be a key quality of postmodern spatiality, but it does not cover everything. On the one hand the workings of non-place, exemplified in the airport lounge that requires identification in order to become an anonymous generic subject, clearly foregrounds the ways in which the subject is subsumed in the discourse of postmodern spatiality. Yet on the other hand, it is also immediately apparent that the generic is not total, if only because each instance requires a (new) individual to subject him- or herself to becoming the generalized subject. A specific *instance* of interaction (with a specific individual) is necessary for the subject to become generic.

Hence, non-place cannot be seen as a given or predetermined (generalized) condition, but a spatiality that one *enters into*, in an instance that produces the condition of the generic for the subject in postmodern urban space. Even if one enters non-place repeatedly (or goes from one non-place to another) and the general principles of the space(s) may be the same, they are predicated upon an event of entering. This event marks the entrance itself as the *limit* of the discourse of the generic non-place. So while a space may be characterized by the generic, the event of entering such a space is itself specific and situated.

In other words, the generic/non-place of postmodernity may not foreground it, but it certainly depends on the specific. Whereas non-place is characterized by discursivity, the event that constitutes its limit (the identity check, for example) is marked by materiality: objects like passports, bank cards, and tickets; physical spatial elements like turnstiles, customs booths, or ATM machines; and bodies, standing in queues, following dictated paths, or pressing buttons as instructed. In short, non-place hinges on materiality and bodiliness. The position of the individual in the city is not just a matter of abstract considerations, but also a matter of a physical individual engaging his or her material surroundings, of individuals in an immediate and physical sense. In the example of the airport lounge, it is easy to identify the material objects

involved – the airline ticket, the passport, the architecture, signage, etc. However, there is a key element in this configuration that still requires exploration: the individual as a physical, material entity – as a body in space. Hence, the question remains: what about the body in postmodern urban space?

The point is to find a conceptual framework with which the body can be considered in its relation to the city. However, in a dominant tradition of thinking about urban space that privileges the mental, the systematic, and the overview from above (rooted in Cartesian conceptions of both space and the subject), the bodily easily slips out of view – a tradition that reinforces the foregrounded discursivity of non-place even further. Yet one need only evoke some stereotypical images of the modern and postmodern cities to illustrate that the body is a factor that ought to be taken into consideration. For example, if one contrasts the individual in the urban masses of the subway in the modern metropolis and the individual behind the steering wheel of a car on a freeway cutting through urban sprawl, one can see not only a difference on the level of spatial formations and practices that one can understand at a systematic level (e.g. by focusing on the different traffic systems). Even though there need not be a difference in the bodies themselves (in their physical constitution, etc.), the position of the body in relation to its urban surroundings, as a material element in very different spatial practices is almost radically different. So regardless of concrete changes in (Western) bodies themselves in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (based on medical advances, dietary practices, changing conceptions and practices of beauty, etc.¹), the question of the body in the city particularly concerns not so much what the body is, but how it relates to the surrounding space.

Two common points in discussions of the body in the city can also provide here the angle of approach for the question of the body in the postmodern city. Firstly, the body in the city is often treated as a problem to be solved or overcome, e.g. in the classic discussions by Simmel and Jameson (which will be the starting point for exploring the question of the body in detail below). This is of course the obverse of conceptions

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¹ The development of changing practices and discourses on the modern body is discussed excellently in Tim Armstrong's book *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998), which is addressed specifically for its analysis of prosthesis below.

that privilege the mental, but this problematization of the body is paired with a noteworthy “medicalization,” for example in the terms used (e.g. speaking of “diagnosing the problem,” and a host of metaphorically used diseases). Secondly, and in line with this medicalization, the problem of the body is often approached with an “interventionist” attitude. The body is often thought of as needing physical alterations, e.g. in the “new organs” that Simmel and Jameson call for, but also in the discourses related to the concept of the cyborg (whether going back to nineteenth-century literature or the influential critical work of Donna Haraway).

132 These two points can open up the issue of the body in urban space, and particularly the differences between modern and postmodern conceptions. I would argue that the desire to intervene in the body should not be taken literally or as a technological ideal/goal, but as a framing of the (modern) attitude taken towards the body. With a conventional idea of subjectivity as being rooted in thought, the body is positioned as a given and as a passive substrate for the subject’s engagement with the world. Accordingly, the city is taken to be an encroachment on the body, against which the body must be armed – especially in the example of the urban masses in the metropolis. Simply put, in this conception the body is faced with a modern city as an imposition coming from outside. However, as urban spatialities change in a postmodern world, the position of the body changes as well. My argument is that this change is not simply a reversal of directions (e.g. the body now extending into the city), but a more complex relationship between the body and the city. The hierarchical distinctions that mark the modern conception become untenable; instead, the relationship between body and city is characterized by virtuality – a term drawn from the work of N. Katherine Hayles, discussed below, which centers on the interpenetration of the material and the informational. In a movement away from a (conceptual) separation between the individual and the world, body and city become systems that extend into each other – which will be discussed in relation to Don DeLillo’s novel *Cosmopolis* below.

New organs?

The framework for the question of the body in urban space – and specifically the body as a problem – can be drawn from a metaphor used in two key texts already briefly touched upon in the previous chapter: the

need for “new organs” for coming to terms with a new spatiality, which occurs in Simmel’s classic essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” and Jameson’s analysis of the Bonaventure hotel. The recurrence of this call for new organs stresses the limitations of the body – and the body as a limit – with respect to the discursive regimes that dominate the spatiality of the (post)modern city. At the surface, the propositions discussed in both texts are, of course, not to be taken literally; neither text aims to put forward a sci-fi-like argument to augment the body. Rather, I would argue that both texts use the metaphor in a strategy of displacing the body – and by doing so, reinforcing a spatiality in which the dominant factors are discursive rather than material (cf. Lefebvre’s objection to abstract space). A closer look at the terms and issues involved in these two texts provides the coordinates for situating the (role of the) body in postmodern urban space.

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Simmel’s argument pits the individual against a modern city that imposes itself from the outside. His focus is on the ways the individual maintains independence in “its adjustment to the forces that lie outside of it.” (325) He argues that, because of a “swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (325) life in the metropolis privileges the mental, which is contrasted with “the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence.” (325) In order to maintain independence and gain the intellectual freedom that the city accords as well, the individual needs to arm himself against the overload of stimuli: “the metropolitan type – which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications – creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it” (326). Two points should be underlined: the city is explicitly external here, and the solution for the external threat is specifically phrased as a *protective organ*. Although it is to be taken figuratively, one should note that this choice for a physical metaphor (rather than simply abstract terms like “a defense” or “a strategy”) resonates with some of his other bodily terms in addressing the phenomenon of metropolitan life. For instance, Simmel also speaks of the stimulus overload as “atrophy of individual culture through the hypertrophy of objective culture” (338), casting the problem in medical terms.

While these metaphors serve to construct (and privilege) the “mental

life” in the modern metropolis, they equally point to the material and corporeal. One could concentrate Simmel’s point into an “urban scene” of the dense crowd in the subway, where technical development, population density, and societal structures of the metropolis come together. This phenomenon leads, for Simmel, to an intellectual freedom, which stems from the material, technical, and physical dimensions of mass transit. Hence, there is a significant material “ground” for the privileged mental life of the metropolis. Simmel identifies this issue explicitly, in emphasizing the combination of physical proximity (in the urban masses) and intellectual distance between individuals. So while intellectual freedom is the primary focus here, it also underscores the physical conditions and, more importantly, the different role of the body in this modern spatiality. This is how one could (symptomatically) read Simmel’s proposal for a new “protective organ”: as a nominal attempt to get beyond the limited body, but in effect anchoring the subject firmly in the physical, stressing the bodily dimension of the city, so that the subject can come to terms with a new spatiality – in terminology that in fact veers away from the body, towards privileging the disembodied.

Despite the historical differences between Simmel and Jameson (the former speaking of the modern metropolis, the latter of postmodern space – to be addressed briefly below), Jameson’s discussion of the Bonaventure hotel shows significant similarities with Simmel’s argument. Jameson takes the implications of this view of the body in space even further, particularly in the metaphors he uses. He speaks of his analysis of the Bonaventure’s relation to the urban fabric as a “diagnosis” (42) and of its exterior as a “glass skin,” likening it to the wearing of reflective sunglasses (with the implication that the interior of the building parallels a head). More importantly, he emphasizes that “[y]ou are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body (43) – apparently separating the eyes from the rest of the body, in a quiet affirmation of the traditional conception that privileges the disembodied eye as the means through which the knowing subject engages the world. In this light, it is even more poignant that Jameson claims that “this latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the *individual human body* to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world” (44, emphasis added) – again

implying that the “individual human body” depends upon perception and cognition (or even looking-as-knowing). Such an idea of the subject here acknowledges bodiliness yet accords it only a passive role as “material ground.” Hence, his overall point on postmodern hyperspace is cast in similar terms:

My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore—like many of the other cultural products I have evoked in the preceding remarks—stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions (38-9).

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The (new) mode of spatiality of the Bonaventure poses a problem for the subject in space, but in this formulation Jameson can be seen to try to salvage his conventional notion of the subject. As can be surmised from his focus on *perceptual* equipment and habits, he does not seek to change his conception of a looking/known subject (a disembodied knowing eye, metaphorically), but rather seeks a modification of the body as material ground for the subject, in calling for “new organs” for even better ways meet the challenges of postmodernity. In addition, the use of “mutation” can be taken to have biological/genetic overtones here too.

Yet in both Simmel’s and Jameson’s descriptions, the call for new organs is not simply the symptom of an attempt to save a conception of the subject that centers on perception and knowing, relegating the body to a passive role, and locating any challenge for that subject in the (external) realm of the bodily. However much one might see both diagnoses as primarily affirming a particular (modern/Enlightenment) conception of the relation between subjectivity and the body, they still address a real problem in the relationship between the body and the city.

How to read these two problematizations of the body in urban space, then? Firstly, these calls should be taken as rhetorical strategies for positing a body that is unequipped for a new urban space. One can take this argument as reinforcement of the foregrounding of abstract space, as a correlate of privileging the mental/intellectual. If one downplays the role of the body, the material, and the specific, it might seem as if the relationship between the subject and urban space is stable, unproblematic, and to be sought primarily at the level of the discursive. The relegation of the body is reinforced in both texts by building on a discourse of technological progress (which also aligns well with the medicalization of terms in both texts). Jameson, for example, focuses more on escalators, elevators, and revolving cocktail lounges, as technological elements that determine the properties of the hotel, than on their usage by actual people. Simmel, likewise, suggests that if all the pocket watches in Berlin were not synchronized, “its entire economic and commercial life would be derailed for some time,” because “the technique of metropolitan life in general is not conceivable without all of its activities and reciprocal relationships being organized and coordinated in the most punctual way into a firmly fixed framework of time which transcends all subjective elements” (328). The position of the subject, therefore, is presented as tied more to the technological than to the embodied – let alone the social. Phrased differently, one could say that the interface between the individual person and the city (as a discursive entity that provides a subject position) is presented in technological terms. The call for new organs is in effect not a call for change, but a call for extension of a body that is positioned as being limited. The call would thus steer one *away* from questions of the body in the direction of technological progress.

However, while both Simmel’s and Jameson’s arguments may not focus on the body, and downplay it to some extent, embodiedness remains a (problematic) presence that looms large in both texts. The fact that the same problem has apparently persisted throughout the twentieth century from Simmel to Jameson also indicates that the issue is, at any rate, a genuine one. For that reason, I would suggest that one should take the call for new organs literally as well, in the sense that it addresses the physical and material interaction between body and urban space. Even the terms of specific organs are relevant literally, to the extent that they evoke a discourse that speaks of the body along those lines

– analytically, split up into different parts with different functions. Hence, I take both Simmel's and Jameson's call to actually signal the need to take into consideration the materiality and physicality of the individual in the city, and in a way they set out the coordinates within which this should be done. Taking off from these texts, then, I aim to argue that especially when it comes to the individual in the postmodern city, one should foreground the urban subject as being notably *embodied*.

Lastly, for more direction for exploring the question of the body, Simmel and Jameson need to be situated historically as well. After all, what is at stake for Simmel is the independence of the individual in the modern metropolis circa 1900, whereas Jameson's argument springs from Los Angeles in the 1980s. I would argue that Simmel's argument attempts to equip the individual to meet a new urban modernity, making it a positive argument to "enable" the subject (or "metropolitan type" in his words). As Simmel's argument moves from "small-town and rural existence" to the metropolis, he brings into view the elements that make up urban modernity, as well as the way in which the individual can cope with the city as an imposition from the outside. Jameson's point, on the other hand, can be taken, in my view, largely as a defensive argument to keep the individual from leaving behind urban modernity, from drowning in what he calls "hyperspace." Yet while Jameson reaffirms the modernity signaled by Simmel, he also offers a general direction for exploring the position of the body in postmodern space. Apart from the signaling what a postmodern subject would move away from (e.g. the emphasis on the perception and knowledge etc.), Jameson suggests that we are "to expand our sensorium and our body to some new ... dimensions." (39) Though the difference with Simmel is subtle, it can be read to indicate a different "direction": rather than barricading the individual against a bombardment of external stimuli, the subject needs to find ways to *extend* into or towards the world around it. While I would argue that the position of the body in postmodern urban space is more complex than a simple reversal of directions could account for, Jameson's point here is at least an invitation to explore how the individual can "expand into" the city. Therefore, the recurring call for new organs in Simmel and Jameson, placed in their respective historical contexts, provides a framework in which to understand the body in the postmodern city.

Taking off from this call for “new organs,” this chapter will continue to explore the question of the body further by close-reading Don DeLillo’s novel *Cosmopolis* (2003). Concerns of the body and the city are prominent in the work of DeLillo, and *Cosmopolis* addresses these in depth. Hence, for the purposes of this study, this novel is treated not just as a representation of the role of the individual and the body, but also as a theoretical reflection in the form of literary fiction. Moreover, *Cosmopolis* is particularly apt as final major literary work to be examined here: it is set explicitly in the year 2000, a suitable endpoint of the period I consider in this study. Especially since the novel is set in New York, the setting in the year 2000 is even more marked since *Cosmopolis* is a post-9/11 novel, set in pre-9/11 New York. While I see little point in engaging the question whether 9/11 was a major turning point or not (also see the coda after this chapter, on DeLillo’s essay “In the Ruins of the Future” for further discussion), it is nevertheless a marked point in the history of New York – making the setting of the novel all the more suitable here to serve as final literary work under consideration. Moreover, in considering *Cosmopolis*, all facets of the postmodern city discussed in the previous chapters can be brought back to Manhattan as a marked postmodern urban space.

***Cosmopolis*:**

The body, technology, and capitalism

In a nutshell, DeLillo’s novel tells the story of 28-year-old billionaire Eric Packer on a day in April in the year 2000, who has made his fortune as a brilliant trader on the stock and currency markets, building his business empire from scratch. Hence, he is the embodiment of the self-made man, of new money, and of ruthless capitalism. He exercises, meditates, reads poetry, collects art, and lives atop a skyscraper in an apartment with 49 rooms. All of this also makes him the embodiment of the Western, white, male heterosexual who seeks profit in every facet of life.

The novel is based on an episodic journey across Manhattan, which starts with Packer deciding to have a haircut at his and his father’s old barber’s on the other side of town in Hell’s Kitchen. He is driven there in his anonymous white limousine, but the journey across town is slowed down by a range of interruptions – including a funeral procession, a presidential motorcade, and an anarchist demonstration – which frame

the story's different episodes. Packer is accompanied by his chief of security and several bodyguards, and the different stages of the journey are marked by his encounters with different people, such as employees meeting him in the limo, or a number of encounters with his wife.

Simultaneously, Packer is involved in a risky investment strategy in which he borrows immense sums of money to invest in the yen, based on the expectation that the yen will drop – which it does not. Throughout the day, this strategy appears to become ever more dangerous and self-destructive, but rather than cut his losses, Packer continues to borrow yen and work toward financial suicide. The story progresses to see Packer actively destroy his fortune, as well as the people around him, and in the end he lets himself be murdered by a disgruntled former employee, whose threats to Packer's life also mark the day leading up to their (chance) encounter. In short, the novel is a journey that spirals towards the collapse and destruction of Eric Packer, in all possible senses.

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The point of *Cosmopolis*, then, is not so much to portray the city (or the main character) realistically, which in part accounts for the many negative or apprehensive reviews when the novel came out. Walter Kirn in the *New York Times*, for example, warned “[b]eware the novel of ideas, particularly when the ideas come first and all the novel stuff (like the story) comes second.” Likewise, earlier in the *New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani had labeled the novel “a major dud,” “lugubrious and heavy-handed,” for the fact that “most of the descriptions of New York City are oddly generic” and that its “central theme, that chaos and asymmetry will trump the search for order and patterns, is a familiar one,” for example. In the *New Yorker*, John Updike commented that in *Cosmopolis* “implausibility reigns unchecked” and that “the trouble with a tale where anything can happen is that somehow nothing happens. How much should we care about the threatened assassination of a hero as unsympathetic and bizarre as Eric Packer?” The point of the present argument is not to prove these reviewers wrong (because even though the novel has been reevaluated to an extent in the years since its publication, it would be hard to argue it is one of DeLillo's best works), but the criticisms of the book can serve as a compass for what it can be read for instead of “novel stuff” such as plot, character, plausibility, and central themes that could be rendered in a single sentence.

In fact, *Cosmopolis* is better read as a meditation in fiction on issues

that are prominent in DeLillo's work in general and in a postmodern world. The novel is full of explicit discussions of the large themes around which it revolves: capitalism, technology, and time. In line with what the initial reviewers seemed to object to, it seems to matter little which character utters what; especially Packer and his associates seem to align with each other, as well as with the structure of the narrative (the notable and obvious exceptions being Packer's killer Benno Levin, Packer's wife, and his nostalgic barber). The novel's dialogue, Packer's reflections in free indirect discourse, and the settings of the different scenes all work together to present the main themes and, in a way, take them to their extremes. However, these themes are not just discussed, but are also mobilized to let them play themselves out in the context of one specific man and the events of a day in April in the year 2000, set in Manhattan. In other words, the novel explicitly addresses large, abstract socio-cultural themes, but at the same time these are brought into play in a specific and situated context – which turns these large themes into questions of limits, bodies, and the city (which is the reason for reading this novel here – and which might in fact veer away from reading for “novel stuff” like plot indeed).

Of all the large socio-cultural issues that DeLillo takes on in the novel, capitalism is the most foregrounded. In this light, Packer's wealth is perhaps his most immediately noticeable feature, not so much because of the extent of his fortune (and the concomitant position of power), but the way and the arena in which it was garnered. Packer is not simply the embodiment of capitalist enterprise, but of two very particular aspects that are especially important in the later twentieth century – even more so specifically in the novel's historical moment (the year 2000) – which can easily be connected to a more general framework of postmodernity via Jameson's term “late capitalism.” Firstly, Packer is the epitome of what Jerry Varsava discusses thoroughly as “rogue capitalism,” which is “that subspecies of capitalism that seeks special advantage and unfair profit” by way of “a double assault, one on the immediate agreement at hand, the other on the very system of guarantees and expectations that makes all contracts possible and indeed appealing.” (79) Packer's fortune rests on actively exploiting and abusing the capitalist system – a strategy that undermines and counteracts the very basis of the system, yet yields the greatest returns when measured against the terms of the

system, i.e. profit.

While this in itself is not limited to postmodernity/late capitalism (Varsava discusses a number of interesting examples from other historical periods), the problem is exacerbated because it is connected to the second feature of Packer's wealth: he generates money based on the capitalist system itself, exploiting the changes, patterns, and risks inherent in the stock and currency markets. The scale at which this happens is at the same time huge in terms of trade volumes and money, as well as infinitesimal with respect to time – operating not simply within a continuous and permanent flow of information (with the capitalist system reduced to a constant stream of numbers), but having to make decisions based on fluctuations in the markets in time frames that approach the instantaneous. The point of Packer's wealth is thus not a matter of extent or simple numbers; it is a (moral/ethical) transgression of the sociopolitical and economic system of capitalism, exploiting the machinations of the system itself at a level of abstraction and scale only possible in "late capitalism." In this respect, Packer's wealth embodies postmodernity, and one can say that Packer is the embodiment of his wealth.

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A second major issue throughout the novel, closely connected to capitalism, is technology. As Packer says to Michael Chin, his young currency analyst, "there's only one thing in the world worth pursuing professionally and intellectually... The interaction between technology and capital. The inseparability." (23) The close connection between the two goes beyond the mechanics of the way in which Packer makes his money; the connection has repercussions for the ways in which we interact and come to terms with the world, relegating the physical aspect of engaging the world to the background. Technology and information thereby become categories that are implied in each other. For Packer this goes so far as to say that

It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the

planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole. (24)

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Information is presented here as inseparable from the tools to convey it, such as writing generally, but more specifically the electronic and digital technologies that form the backbone for Packer's world. Moreover, information/technology is imbued with life here. Vija Kinski, Packer's chief of theory, even proposes a continuity between life and information: "People will not die. Isn't this the creed of the new culture? People will be absorbed in streams of information. I know nothing about this. Computers will die. They're dying in their present form. They're just about dead as distinct units. A box, a screen, a keyboard. They're melting into the texture of everyday life... Microchips so small and powerful. Humans and computers merge... And never-ending life begins." (104-5) In this passage, devices such as computers serve to give primacy to a flow of information that fuses with life. Technology therefore bridges two domains, and in the process renders its own materiality of boxes and screens and (by implication here) the materiality of people obsolete. The novel thus puts forward a view that technological development serves to transcend the limits of existence, by way of rendering obsolete and leaving behind.

This leads to the third major theme: time. Time is not presented as some neutral continuum, but the text expresses a view that privileges a drive toward the future. The novel explicitly dismisses the past and favors the future, which is apparent throughout the text but most explicitly addressed by Vija Kinski. For example, when Packer uses the word "doubt," Kinski picks up on this with an argument that is a clear departure from a Cartesian position: "Doubt. What is doubt? You don't believe in doubt. All doubt rises from past experience. But the past is disappearing. We used to know the past but not the future. This is changing... We need a new theory of time." (86) The departure from a Cartesian doubting subject is explicitly framed here through time. Kinski's rejection of knowledge rooted in past experience here adds considerable weight to the dimension of time; instead the drive to futurity or speculation about the future (the source of Packer's fortune) becomes the ground for subjectivity. Again, time is closely tied to the other major themes; for example, in a reflection that takes Simmel's point about

clocks even further, Kinski claims that it is “cyber-capital that creates the future... Because time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent.” (79) When Kinski asks Packer how small a nanosecond is exactly, he immediately takes the “technologizing” of time even further by identifying the smallest units of time – zepto- and yoctoseconds. Likewise, the anti-capitalist demonstrators they encounter are dismissed by Kinski as holding a “protest against the future. They want to hold off the future. They want to normalize it, keep it from overwhelming the present.” (91) Therefore, time is subsumed in a constellation with capital and technology, with an aversion of the past, the future as focal point, and a present that vanishes as it extends into yoctoseconds.

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So far, then, the major themes addressed in *Cosmopolis* are familiar themes of postmodernity and globalization. In its joining of technology, time, and capitalism, the views presented in the novel are fully compatible with, for example, Harvey’s focus on time-space compression, or in fact Jameson’s approach as well. The presentation of Packer as a ruthless capitalist is – in line with the critical reviewers’ objections – the stereotypical one as well (in this respect one might see Packer as akin to Gordon Gekko in Oliver Stone’s film *Wall Street* [1987] or perhaps Patrick Bateman of Brett Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho* [1991]). However, while “[t]he temptation to read DeLillo’s novel primarily as a critique of the oligarchs of global capitalism is strong,” as Aaron Chandler rightly notes (241-2), *Cosmopolis* revolves less around straightforward critique of Packer or capitalism than around other tensions. In fact, the major themes discussed above only provide the coordinates within which the novel explores less clear-cut issues of boundaries and bodies.

Furthermore, it is important to situate the novel in its proper historical moment: published in 2003, and set in April of the year 2000, literally the endpoint (if not the highpoint) of many twentieth-century developments in capitalism and globalization. About a decade after the end of the Cold War and fall of communism, the end of the twentieth century offered unbridled wealth, within the parameters that Packer has pushed

to their extreme and beyond.² However, the point of *Cosmopolis* (unlike that of DeLillo's magnum opus *Underworld* [1997], which provides a social history of America in the second half of the twentieth century, for example), is not to look back historically, but to look ahead. When compared to a text like *The Crying of Lot 49*, a work of the 1960s, one can see how postmodernity and the postmodern city are approached there by way of a transition into them, coming from a modern perspective – asking more or less “where are we now, in relation to where we were?” For *Cosmopolis*, on the other hand, postmodernity is a given, a point of departure, and no longer necessarily defined in terms of historical contrast – and the question for *Cosmopolis* is “where to now?”

144 This orientation is clear from the start of the novel, where, like so many novels of the city, *Cosmopolis* presents a view from above. However, instead of some form of insight or meaning abstracted from the city below, for Packer this view leads to thoughts of the materiality of the city, rather than an abstract reflection on the city:

He stood at the window and watched the great day dawn. The view was across bridges, narrows and sounds and out past the boroughs and toothpaste suburbs into measures of landmass and sky that could only be called the deep distance. He didn't know what he wanted. It was still nighttime down on the river, half night, and ashy vapors wavered above the smokestacks on the far bank. He imagined the whores were all fled from the lamplit corners by now, duck butts shaking, other kinds of archaic business just beginning to stir, produce trucks rolling out of the markets, news trucks out of the loading docks. The bread vans would be crossing the city and a few stray cars out of bedlam weaving down the avenues, speakers pumping heavy sound. (6-7)

There is nothing here of the transformative or interpretive look that belongs to the knowing subject of modernity, whether it is de Certeau's “text before one's eyes” or a *flâneur* like in Baudelaire (or Benjamin). A

2 Alison Shonkwiler even discusses *Cosmopolis* under the heading of a “financial sublime,” with wealth and capitalist enterprise pushed beyond what regular frames of reference can cope with – “[t]he farther capital's ‘flight’ into increasingly spectral realms, the more the numbers and charts symbolize its denarrativization, its striving toward the altogether nonrepresentational.” (252)

long view from above, over the city and into the distance, only gives rise to thoughts of prostitutes and commerce, particularly concerning food, picturing the city streets as places of almost ancient business concerns (food and sex). This view does not abstract meaning from the street, but instead moves “into” the street – thereby zeroing in on its materiality. The starting point nods to the conventional modern entry into the city, but the description follows a different trajectory.

This move away from the modern perspective is continued in a passage that sets up questions of the body, space, and technology. As Packer leaves his building, it becomes clear that the terms in which these issues are framed throughout the novel are related to those in Simmel and Jameson, focusing on tensions and questions of limits and boundaries:

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He rode to the marble lobby in the elevator that played Satie. His prostate was asymmetrical. He went outside and crossed the avenue, then turned and faced the building where he lived. He felt contiguous with it. It was eighty-nine stories, a prime number, in an undistinguished sheath of hazy bronze glass. They shared an edge or boundary, skyscraper and man. It was nine hundred feet high, the tallest residential tower in the world, a commonplace oblong whose only statement was its size. It had the kind of banality that reveals itself over time as being truly brutal. He liked it for this reason. He liked to stand and look at it when he felt this way. He felt wary, drowsy and insubstantial.

The wind came cutting off the river. He took out his hand organizer and poked a note to himself about the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper. No recent structure ought to bear this word. It belonged to the olden soul of awe, to the arrowed towers that were a narrative long before he was born.

The hand device itself was an object whose original culture had just about disappeared. He knew he'd have to junk it.

The tower gave him strength and depth. He knew what he wanted, a haircut, but stood a while longer in the soaring noise of the street and studied the mass and scale of the tower. The one virtue of its surface was to skim and bend the river light and mime the tides of open sky. There was an aura of texture and reflection. He scanned its length and felt connected to it, sharing the surface

and the environment that came into contact with the surface, from both sides. A surface separates inside from out and belongs no less to one than the other. He'd thought about surfaces in the shower once. (8-9)

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Several concerns emerge from this passage. Firstly, the major themes of technology and time are brought together in the reflection on the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper, which extends into the inevitable obsolescence of Packer's hand organizer. More importantly and less clear-cut, though, this passage also addresses the issue of the relation of Packer (or, by extension, the individual generally) to the urban world in which he finds himself. By highlighting the shared boundary between man and skyscraper, Packer positions himself in the city differently compared to a conception of an urban subject who is not part of what he observes/knows, with the traditional *flâneur* or detective as icons, for example. Packer's feeling of contiguity, in contrast, assumes not a separation but a comparability between man and built environment. The implication is that the building's sheath of glass parallels the human skin (which is indeed the conventional metaphor in architecture). The question is how the nature of the comparability should be read. On the one hand, it could be taken discursively, pertaining to the constructedness of both the individual urban subject and the city itself. On the other hand, one could see the parallel between skins of humans and buildings as moving away from the conventional categorical distinction between subject and object, foregrounding the material rather than the essential. Both readings, though, move away from Cartesian notions of a subject set apart from its urban world; instead, the relationship between subject and city is rebalanced to make them contiguous, comparable, and compatible with each other.

Lastly, the passage above adds a further element of bodiliness – the remark about his prostate, a first mention of a key concern throughout the novel – into the reflection on the building. This sentence is out of context, and only later when Packer has his daily medical exam does the full impact of his thoughts about his prostate become clear. This remark displays a stylistic aspect of the novel; the text interweaves several layers, such as Packer's thoughts, focalized description, dialogue, and narratorial description. The effect is a density of the discourse, which can be

read as a strategy for representing the fullness and plurality of the world constructed in the novel. While the remark is discontinuous with the rest of the description of the scene, it enforces a simultaneity of Packer's surroundings and his more persistent concerns. The disjunctive remark thus grafts the issue of bodiliness onto the scene being described, adding another layer to the reflection on the relation between skyscraper and man.

More importantly, the remark about the prostate here raises the question of how the building, surface (and skin) and the body and its organs relate to each other.³ The focus on the sharedness of surfaces – the glass skin for the building, physical skin for the man – here also establishes some relationship between the insides of buildings and bodies. Yet the implication is not that the two interiorities are straightforwardly comparable; there is no point in comparing internal organs (like the prostate) to interior spaces like kitchens or hallways, for example. The prostate remark, then, presents the space of the body as different from the space of a building. Furthermore, the remark also establishes a difference between the surface/skin and the prostate. The prostate belongs to a different order: that of the body, internally, which does not come into contact with the outside world, both literally and in the sense that the body is conceived as its own enclosed space. The contiguity between man and skyscraper, then, points to a tension: surfaces are shared by the building and the individual, but the body remains distinct from the city too. Both stand in close contact (to the point of ambiguous boundaries even), but they do not dissolve into each other.

This passage serves as an opening for the way the novel addresses the relationship between subject, body, and space, which cannot be taken for granted, or as unproblematic. In line with the novel's general rejection of a Cartesian centered subject, it seems to call for a new take on the role of the body – and thereby in effect explores issues that the call for new organs in Simmel and Jameson points toward as well. The question is, however, what kind of framework can enable such a new relationship between subject, body, and space.

³ While it is not the aim to take the present argument into a more philosophical direction, one could mobilize Deleuze's (and Guattari's) notion of the Body without Organs here, particularly as dealt with in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988).

Prosthesis and the posthuman

Isolating a single organ like the prostate reverberates with a strain of thinking about the body in modernity, of which Simmel and Jameson are expressions too, which centers on thinking in terms of extension and technology. In his book *Modernism, Technology, and the Body* (1998), Tim Armstrong gives an excellent overview of this tradition. Even though his focus is on the role of the body and technology in modernist texts, his study explores discourses on the body not just based on literary works, but on a range of scientific and medical discourses as well. This enables him to investigate technologies of the body in a cultural context, as well as the relationship between bodiliness and the constructions of subjectivity.

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Armstrong's point of departure is the development throughout the nineteenth century of technology and thought pertaining to the body, ranging from evolutionary thinking to the applications of electricity, that have all affected the role of the body in modernity. He broadly identifies two currents within this development: "Modernity... brings both a fragmentation and augmentation of the body in relation to technology; it offers the body as lack, at the same time as it offers technological compensation." (3) These two directions coexist without necessarily contradicting each other. Armstrong frames modernism (in art, literature, etc.) as concerned with these general tendencies in modernity – in line with the common view of modernism as reaction to modernity – claiming that modernism is "characterized by the desire to *intervene* in the body; to render it part of modernity by techniques which may be biological, mechanical, or behavioral." (6) This conceptualization of the body as lack to be compensated and extended situates the techniques of intervention in the realm of the material – both in terms of mechanical/physical devices as well as practices such as dietary regimes. Both technology and the body should primarily be thought of on the plane of the material keeping intact the conventional separation between mind and body.

Within this general context, Armstrong identifies prosthesis as one of the key technologies to reshape the body. Prosthesis underscores the (notional) fragmentation of the body, as a collection of parts (or organs) that can be replaced or added to, shifting any notion of the body as a whole to the realm of the immaterial. He distinguishes between

two forms, which relate to the two currents identified above: negative prosthesis, which “involves the replacing of a bodily part, covering a lack”; and positive prosthesis, which involves “a more utopian version of technology, in which human capacities are extrapolated.” (78) Positive prosthesis fits in with a discourse of (techno-historical) progress and the extension of human faculties.

The impact of the dynamic between fragmentation of the body, compensation for lack, and expansion through technology, Armstrong argues, feeds into a larger discourse of consumption of the body. One evident example is the use of bodies in war, which sees the maimed being “repaired” with artificial limbs, etc. (with advances in prosthesis being made particularly in the American Civil War and World War I), as well as extension of the body through drugs and military technology, for example. Another area Armstrong convincingly identifies is advertising, where the body is separated into parts (hands, legs, etc.) in advertising for cosmetics and clothing, for example. This industry exploits the dynamic between fragmentation, lack, and extension to the fullest: “the bodily part is knitted into a system of virtual prosthetics: a system which both exposes and remedies defects, implying a ‘whole’ body which can only be achieved by technology; a whole which is constantly being deferred.” (100) With war and advertising as major arenas for the consumption of the fragmented body, the modern discourse on the body aligns itself with the logic of capitalism, making it possible to treat the body as a commodity. Technological development – in line with a discourse of progress – offers, “in the modern era, both utopian possibilities and a wounding and fragmentation of the self which is an incorporation of those possibilities in the form of the commodity; both mechanical extension and systemic subordination.” (101) In other words, the discourse on the body in modernity (within Armstrong’s framework, firmly anchored in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) goes hand in hand with the developments of capitalism in the nineteenth century. By the late twentieth century and the stage of “late capitalism,” this treatment of the body as commodity (usable, tradable, fixable, expandable) has become a conventional norm.

The fragmented body-as-commodity of modernity is part of the construction of the Enlightenment and modern subject as well. Armstrong discusses, for example, Descartes’ view that the possibility of phantom

pain after amputations entails that the limb is “disposable, a tool used by the soul.” (78) The subject is rooted, then, in the “soul” or self, rather than in bodiliness – in fact making matters of the corporeal a secondary concern at best. This pervasive view of the body in modernity is the context for the call for new organs in Simmel and Jameson. The confrontation with the stimulus-overload in the modern metropolis, in Simmel, can be taken as the external/material world encroaching on an urban subject that is conceived in non-corporeal terms. The suggestion to grow a protective organ, then, should be seen on the same plane: not calling for a modification of the subject position, but of the fragmented repairable/expandable body. The same is true for Jameson, and this is why his suggestion that postmodern hyperspace “has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself” is misleading, for the body of modernity (which he tacitly assumes), as a fragmented body/commodity within (late) capitalism, has always consisted of shortcomings and never had a “self” to locate.

This discourse on the body in modernity and prosthesis as a key technology, as Armstrong discusses it, can be recognized in the position from which *Cosmopolis* takes off. The relationship between the body and technology – rooted in the logic of fragmentation, compensation and extension – underpins the strategies by which Packer has exploited the capitalist system to make his fortune. The flow of data and information, as discussed by Kinski and Packer, is used to extend the human capabilities for interacting with the market system. In fact, the technological/informational systems are exploited in such a way that they push the possibilities of extension to their extreme, a point on which Packer explicitly reflects in the moment of his death:

O shit I’m dead.

He’d always wanted to become quantum dust transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in a whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from the void.
(206)

In accordance with the modern logic of extending a deficient body, Packer has always taken the position that the bodily needs to be extend-

ed into the realm of the technological to such an extent that it relegates the body to the role of an obstacle to be overcome.

This perspective is sustained by the actual devices used in Packer's world, whose aim is to create as few barriers between the subject and the market/information systems as possible. His wristwatch, for example, offers direct network access with which he hacks into his wife's back accounts to steal and throw away her inherited fortune. The dismissal of the body – as lack on the one hand, and to be extended on the other – is taken to the point where physical interaction with technology is perceived as obsolete too. Packer's limo, as supreme example, is fitted with a range of devices to push the physical body into the background as possible:

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There were medleys of data on every screen, all the flowing symbols and alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing.... There was a microwave and a heart monitor. He looked at the spycam on a swivel and it looked back at him. He used to sit there 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. (13)

Touching buttons is just as archaic here as the word skyscraper. Packer's chief of security, for example, even has a voice-activated handgun. The technologies with which Packer has saturated his world all serve to create a regime of instant and persistent surveillance and access, so that Packer – as the subject of modernity and capital – can maintain absolute control, without any form of resistance.

Yet the modern logic of the body is not only pushed to its extreme by Packer; the novel also shows that the recession of bodiliness is ingrained in the city. When his limo is in the diamond district, Packer watches the Hasidim walking in the street, interprets this as a scene from either the 1920s or Old Europe, and reflects on the movements of people in the street:

He felt the street around him, unremitting, people moving past each other in coded moments of gesture and dance. They tried to walk without breaking stride because breaking stride is well-mean-

ing and weak but they were forced sometimes to sidestep and even pause and they almost always averted their eyes. Eye contact was a delicate matter. A quarter second of a shared glance was a violation of agreements that made the city operational. Who steps aside for whom, who looks or does not look at whom, what level of umbrage does a brush or touch constitute? No one wanted to be touched. There was a pact of untouchability. Even here, in the huddle of old cultures, tactile and close-woven, with passersby mixed in, and security guards, and shoppers pressed to windows, and wandering fools, people did not watch each other. (66)

152 This passage recalls de Certeau's comments on the "forest of gestures" (102) that (physical/material) everyday practices in the city constitute. However, the scene in *Cosmopolis* emphasizes that in these practices people are solitary or isolated in the crowd. Physical contact is out of the question, rendering the body nothing but a means of transportation for the subject. Furthermore, even the eye, the privileged organ for the modern/Enlightenment subject, is presented as a unidirectional tool for relating to the world: it is a tool for perceiving, but not for intersubjective contact. In other words, the idea of the body as lack to be overcome, or as cumbersome obstacle to the individual's unmitigated access to the world, is not just particular to Packer, but is an inherent part of the city – here associated particularly with the modern metropolis of the 1920s and with Old Europe, the seat of modernity. In short, the novel here affirms Simmel's analysis of the metropolitan street scene as one of physical proximity, but of distance between individual subjects.

However, while modern conceptions of the body as fragmentary are prominent in Packer's idea about himself and about the city, *Cosmopolis* takes these conceptions as a basis (with inherent shortcomings and problems) for exploring where to go from there. Packer's reflections on his hypermodern/hypercapitalist world and his gradual self-destruction, in my view, argue for a postmodernity in which the body is not positioned as fragmentary or a lack to be compensated, as a deficient body that needs to cope with an external world. Instead, as prefigured early on in the novel, *Cosmopolis* argues for a notably embodied subject for whom the body and the city share their surfaces – physically as well as conceptually.

Here the notion of the posthuman, and in particular the work of N. Katherine Hayles is relevant. While the idea of the posthuman is still being debated and the term has no solidified meaning yet, Hayles' major work *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) builds an open and workable notion, within a framework that is capable of bringing together different disciplines (from cybernetics to literature). She basically presents the posthuman as a perspective that "privileges informational pattern over material instantiation" and undoes the central importance given to consciousness "as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition." (2-3) Furthermore, the posthuman posits "the body as the original prosthesis, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born." (3) Lastly, the "posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines." (3). The posthuman, therefore, can include and expand upon the (modern) logic of prosthesis as identified by Armstrong.

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These key features of the posthuman perspective clearly show its roots in the work of Donna Haraway as well as in cybernetics, and a focus on subjectivity. However, as in Haraway, the terms in which these conceptions are cast (such as "intelligent machines") should not mislead one into taking the metaphors, such as that of the cyborg, too literally. With respect to Haraway's work, Hayles argues that the "conjunction of technology and discourse is crucial" (114), because the cyborg is "both technological object and discursive formation" that "partakes of the power of the imagination as well as of the actuality of technology." (115) The point is not to privilege technological development or to let whatever technology happens to be at the cutting edge at the moment (be it digital, networked, nano-scale, etc.) determine how to conceive of the world. Instead, drawing on the history of cybernetic theory, such as the work of Norbert Wiener, Hayles argues that the analysis of information technologies opens up a (cybernetic) paradigm that "can potentially annihilate the liberal humanist subject as the locus of control." (110) The stakes, then, concern not so much the role of the machine, but the (non-central) position of the (human) subject in the world. The posthuman, therefore, is not "post-" in the sense that we are no longer human beings, but that the definition of "we" is no longer built on a presumed centrality and predetermined nature of the human.

In this sense, the posthuman is akin to the postmodern. While Hayles' aim is not to partake in debates of the postmodern, I would align her work with postmodernity (in my usage of the term). In line with the idea that postmodernity is a historically specific term, anchored to the late twentieth century, Hayles is also very explicit about her understanding of the posthuman as "historically specific and contingent term rather than a stable ontology." ("Unfinished Work: From Cyborg to Cognisphere," 160) In *How We Became Posthuman*, she aligns her approach to the posthuman with that of (Lyotardian) approaches of the postmodern as an incredulity towards metanarratives. She seeks to "replace a teleology of disembodiment" that emerges from (technology-oriented) discourses that focus on "the transformation of the human into a disembodied posthuman" (22); she wants to stay away from a techno-fetishistic view that would privilege computers and digital networks, as superseding the human (or one could say privileging a literal cyborg). In the context of Armstrong's work discussed above, one could see this teleology as coming out of the dominant tradition of modernity. In other words, this long-standing discourse that moves towards disembodiment is precisely a metanarrative that Lyotardian approaches would be apprehensive about – as is Hayles (so in this sense, the posthuman is fully compatible with the postmodern). What she aims for, instead, is to explore the many narratives in and through which stakes and claims regarding the (post) human are contested and fleshed out.

More specifically, key in Hayles' argument (and mine) is her understanding of virtuality. She defines virtuality as "the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by informational patterns." (13-14) The crux here is that this positions the virtual not as opposed to the material (as in the commonsensical understanding of the word, with connotations of cyberspace, etc.), but as a recasting of the relationship between materiality and information – or, to use a different term more in line with the previous chapters here, discursive orders. Furthermore, she anchors this understanding of virtuality as the interpenetration of the material and the informational by making a case for a new meta-physical framework. She argues that, especially in an age of electronic media, the (philosophically conventional) primacy of questions of presence/absence should shift to questions of pattern/randomness. A simple example, which she builds on the work of Friedrich Kittler, is the

word processor, which differs from the typewriter or typeset text in that little is gained by conceiving of the flickering light of a computer monitor in terms of presence or absence – instead, the relevant questions concern pattern and randomness. Hayles claims that today pattern and randomness are now “dominant over presence and absence” but that the “pattern/randomness dialectic does not erase the material world; information in fact derives its efficacy from the material infrastructures it appears to obscure.” (28) Hayles redefines the virtual, therefore, as a concept that brings into view both the material world and the informational (or discursive) – moving away from understanding signification as hinging on absence; indeed, Hayles substitutes the idea of the floating with the “flickering signifier” that affects “the *codes* as well as the subjects of representation.” (30, emphasis in original)

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Next to virtuality, Hayles’ other major concept, in my view, is her understanding of embodiment. She quotes Elizabeth Grosz in saying that “there is no body as such; there are only *bodies*.” (196, emphasis in the original) The idea is that speaking about the body as a general category or concept subsumes embodiment into discourse, with a loss of specificity and thereby containing the drawbacks of a universalist perspective. However, “[f]issuring along lines of class, gender, race, and privilege,” according to Hayles, “embodied practices create heterogeneous spaces even when the discursive formations describing those practices seem uniformly dispersed throughout society.” (195) Questions of embodiment can therefore slip out of view if one does not (conceptually) allow for specificities and contingencies. Accordingly, Hayles explicitly distinguishes between “the body” and “embodiment”: the body “is always normative relative to some set of criteria” that are historically and culturally determined (she gives the example of Renaissance medical discourse), whereas embodiment is “the specific instantiation generated from the noise of difference... other and elsewhere, at once excessive and deficient in its infinite variations, particularities, and abnormalities.” (196-7) The point is not to privilege embodiment over the body – which would simply be a reversal of the previous structure – but to make sure both concepts, as well as the interplay between them, come into view. The two are different aspects that form what Hayles calls a “polarity” of the new type of subjectivity that emerges in the posthuman. While the body is a useful concept at the level of discourse (and therefore abstracted from

immediate material practices), embodiment is “inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational,” and is always “tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person. (197-8) Embodiment, then, is a concept to be used when considering practices and matters that cannot be abstracted from their specific situations.

Lastly, Hayles makes a distinction between what she calls inscribing and incorporating practices, which together with the body-embodiment distinction forms her framework for “embodied knowledge,” belonging to the new type of subjectivity of the posthuman. Inscription is akin to the body, “normalized and abstract, in the sense that it is usually considered as a system of signs operating independently of any particular manifestation.” (198) One might conceive of Hayles’ usage of “inscription” as analogous to a (poststructuralist) notion of “text.” Incorporation, on the other hand, is inextricably linked to its material embodiment. As an example, Hayles discusses the gesture of waving goodbye, which cannot be seen separately from the hand doing the waving, unless it is represented in a different medium – like a drawing or words, i.e. an inscribing practice, which is communicable. Even though the two axes of body/embodiment and inscribing/incorporating together form the framework for posthuman subjectivity, Hayles does attach greater importance to embodiment and incorporation when it comes to the present posthuman condition. In her argument, the (technological) developments in the late twentieth century require a focus on embodied knowledge (for which she also turns to the work of Bourdieu) and a departure from Enlightenment assumptions – “to turn Descartes upside down.” (203) Embodied knowledge, gained through incorporating practices, is contingent (because of the improvisational elements in embodiment), “deeply sedimented in the body,” and “partly screened from conscious view because it is habitual,” and can define “the boundaries within which conscious thought takes place,” (205) with the possibilities for changes and developments in this type of knowledge being intricately tied to new technologies. In other words, Hayles’ emphasis on embodied knowledge is a strategy to gain access to the material reality and practices that define (the conditions for) the modes of knowledge and thought that have heretofore always been privileged. Her framework, therefore, aims not to displace one perspective with another, but produces a perspective

in which the physical and informational extend into each other. The result, I would say, is a subjectivity that is not abstracted from the material world (like the Cartesian subject of liberal humanism), but prominently embodied.

The treatment of the body in *Cosmopolis* can be seen along the lines of the posthuman perspective. In effect, the posthuman is the concept that can bring into view not only the way in which the novel pushes to the extreme the different techniques for extending the body (along the lines of thinking of the body-as-lack as expandable through prosthesis), but also the novel's argument *beyond* those extremes. The type of virtuality that underlies the posthuman for Hayles, centering on the interpenetration of the material and the informational, also underlies Packer's approach and financial empire. In the novel, this attitude towards the material and informational is expressed, for example, in Packer's view of data as "soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process" (23), and the balance between the two is tipped to one end in Vija Kinski's proposition that "[p]eople will be absorbed in streams of information." (104)

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The posthuman perspective is particularly apt for a key scene in the novel where issues of the body and technology are played out on a conceptual as well as a very material level. In a nutshell, the scene is a bringing together of two components of Packer's daily routine. Firstly, Jane Melman, chief of finance, hops into the limo, having been forced to interrupt her jog on her day off because of the situation with the yen. Secondly, Dr. Ingram, a replacement for Packer's usual doctor, hops into the limo for Packer's daily full medical examination, which includes an ECG and a prostate exam. The scene thus joins a discussion of finance capital with very literal physicality. As the conversation between Melman and Packer progresses, along with the medical exam, their talk becomes charged with physicality and eventually sexuality. At the highpoint of the scene, Packer and Melman openly express their sexual desires for each other, culminating in mutual masturbation (without touching one another, though) – at the moment the doctor is palpating Packer's prostate. The scene therefore plays out concerns of the body, technology and finance in a very literal sense – and is pivotal in the way in which it anchors the prostate as emblem of concerns of the body throughout the novel. Subsequently, the way in which key elements of the posthuman

are brought into play in this scene can be taken as “blueprint” for a posthuman perspective on the body in urban space throughout the rest of the novel.

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The medical exam itself contains many elements that fit in with the posthuman perspective. For Packer, this daily routine – not prompted by any indication of illness – aims to push back physicality as far as possible, privileging the informational over the material: “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.” (48) The point of the routine is to convert the state of Packer’s own body into information, into *knowing about* his physical condition rather than feeling it. The doctor uses a number of tools to achieve this conversion. First of all, he uses a stethoscope to listen to Packer’s heart – a device that Packer sees as antiquated, like the word skyscraper: “He looked past Ingram while the doctor listened to his heart valves open and close. The car moved incrementally westward. He didn’t know why stethoscopes were still in use. They were lost tools of antiquity, quaint as blood-sucking worms.” (43) More strongly than with the word skyscraper before, though, the actual use of the stethoscope here disproves Packer’s judgment of it being antiquated. Regardless, the tool is used to isolate specific organs here – the heart valves – thereby reinforcing a notion of a fragmented and knowable body.

Next, the doctor does an ECG, a more technologically advanced tool, where the effect of conversion of a bodily organ to information is even more pronounced: “Ingram did an echocardiogram. Eric was on his back, with a skewed view of the monitor, and wasn’t sure whether he was watching a computerized mapping of his heart or a picture of the thing itself.” (44) What appears on the monitor is a pattern of lines, yet for Packer this blurs the distinction between information and the body itself even further. The explicit process of conversion of the body into the realm of the informational facilitates the process of extension of the body, in line with Packer’s aim to overcome the body through technology. Yet this conversion – unlike (strict or literal) prosthesis – also establishes a contiguity between body and information systems (along the lines set out in Packer’s reflection on the skyscraper), allowing the body to be extended but also to be affected by the informational. In

other words, the exam establishes *virtuality* as in Hayles' usage: the interpenetration of information systems and the material body (with a clear preference for one end of the spectrum for Packer).

The culmination of the medical routine is the prostate exam. Whereas the stethoscope and ECG reinforce the move away from bodiliness, the examination of the prostate underscores the physical and its irreducible presence. Unlike the two other techniques that perceive the body from without, the prostate is examined manually: "He heard a slight rustle of latex. Then the Ingram finger entered." (46) The exam itself underscores the immediacy of physical sensation: "Ingram examined the prostate for signs. He palpated, the finger slyly prodding the surface of the gland through the rectal wall. There was pain, probably just muscles tensing in the anal canal. But it hurt. It was pain. It traveled the circuitry of nerve cells." (47) In affirming the immediacy of the physical, the pain counteracts the logic of the medical exam⁴; rather than aid in the dismissal of the physical, it even displaces the seat of consciousness to the material body:

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The pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it, organs, objects, street sounds, words. It was a point of hellish perception that was steady-state, unchanging in degree, and not a point at all but some bundled other brain, a counter-consciousness, but not that either, located at the base of his bladder. He operated from within. He could think and speak of other things but only within the pain. He was living in the gland, in the scalding fact of his biology. (50)

The prostate exam, in effect, explores the axes that Hayles sets out for subjectivity in the posthuman. In one regard, the exam firmly belongs in the "conventional" area of Hayles' framework: the point of the exam is to produce "the body" as culturally encoded, which is to say fragmented and dismissible. The techniques involved in the exam are inscribing practices, aimed at converting the body into coded signs that are communicable, archivable in medical records, etc. This is very clear with the ECG, a technique that requires (standardized) operation of

⁴ Russell Scott Valentino also points out that pain here is "a clear bodily counterweight to thought," (147) particularly in the second half of the novel, as Packer seeks the sensation of pain, to the point of his self-destruction.

equipment, which converts the heart inside Packer's chest to lines on a monitor, producing a coded "body." However, the other techniques necessary – stethoscope and manual palpation – also rely on incorporating practices. The stethoscope is used to listen to and judge the sounds in Packer's blood flow, relying on the doctor's training and experience. Packer's objections to the tool as antiquated, therefore, can be taken not so much in the light of a discourse of technological progress, but as a resistance to techniques that rely on the specificities of a particular person (with certain manual skills, training, and experience), rather than some mechanically reproducible technique. What Packer objects to is in fact the incorporating practice of the medical exam, of which the prostate exam is the prime example: without using any tools, it is simply one body penetrating and investigating another. The doctor's position, then, involves a mixture of the elements of Hayles' framework: the exam requires both inscribing and incorporating techniques; and the doctor is hired as a "faceless" and barely communicative professional (a body coded and reduced to its profession, making him a tool, effectively), but executing his duties involves the specificities and contingencies of the particular instance.

For Packer himself, the setting of the medical exam establishes a framework – essentially Hayles' – that presents him with elements that are at odds with his aims and assumptions. The purpose of the medical exam, for Packer, is to arrive at *disembodied* knowledge of his body; in terms of Hayles' framework consisting of the axes of "body"/embodiment and of inscribing/incorporating practices, Packer focuses entirely on two extremes: the coded "body" and inscribing practices. However, the procedure of the prostate exam underscores a degree of physicality that veers away from Packer's view of his body, even in the setup in the limousine where all elements are geared towards overcoming the physical.

Many of the tensions that arise from this scene are brought together in the culmination of the episode, which is the sexual encounter between Packer and his chief of finance during the prostate exam. Packer enjoys the physicality as underscored by the prostate exam and cultivates this bodily immediacy into the domain of the sexual, in his connection with his chief of finance: "Something passed between them, deeply, a sympathy beyond the standard meaning that also encompassed these

meanings, pity, affinity, tenderness, the whole physiology of neural maneuver, of heartbeat and secretion, some vast sexus of arousal drawing him toward her, complicatedly, with Ingram's finger up his ass." (48) Their sexual connection springs entirely from their conversation, without any physical contact: "man and woman reached completion more or less together, touching neither each other nor themselves," (52) with Packer wearing his sunglasses throughout. This non-physical nature of the sexual connection here resonates with the movement away from the physical that inheres in the medical exam (in Packer's aim to overcome the body by converting it to knowledge about the body). Yet at the same time, like the prostate exam, sexuality affirms the physical and an immediacy of sensation – but then again the sexual connection here is immaterial; insofar as there is an exchange between Packer and his chief of finance, it is entirely verbal. The sexual tension is thus relieved not so much a-physically, but *informationally*. Therefore, this sexual encounter too exemplifies *virtuality*, the interpenetration of the physical and the informational. In that sense, the sexual connection capitalizes on the issues of the (posthuman) body brought into play by the whole procedure of the medical exam.

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Yet this sexuality is not the only facet of physicality that the scene foregrounds; the prostate is also charged with significance that keeps recurring throughout the novel (as already prefigured in the early reflection on the skyscraper). Specifically, the *asymmetry* of Packer's prostate escapes his drive to subsume the (coded) body into information. The reason why the knowledge of his asymmetrical prostate haunts Packer so much lies not in the realm of the possible medical consequences: there are none, as his assassin Bruno Levin also tells him ("It's harmless. A harmless variation. Nothing to worry about. Your age, why worry?" [199]). Packer's preoccupation with his prostate, as already evinced in the early scene with the skyscraper, arises because the asymmetry cannot be accounted for in his own perspective on his body. In its asymmetry, the prostate does not behave as an "organ" in the sense that the fragmented body of modernity would see the body split into identifiable, manageable, and preferably replaceable organs that are subservient to the (discursive) construction of the body. In other words, the asymmetry confronts Packer with the limits of his take on the body; in isolating the organ, it becomes apparent that the logic of isolating

organs (as part of converting the body into information) has boundaries, precisely in the specificity of those organs, in the fact that Packer's prostate deviates from a "norm." In Hayles' terms, Packer only pursues "the body," whereas his prostate forcefully brings "embodiment" into the picture. The asymmetrical prostate, therefore, becomes an emblem for the limits of "the body," and for the fact that virtuality cannot be total or all-encompassing. Of course, the fact that the prostate is a male organ only adds to the impact of its asymmetry – limiting embodiment to the specifically male here (reinforcing the contrast with a body to be overcome, which basically lacked specification along gender lines), and also undermining Packer's foregrounded masculinity. For alongside his pursuit of profit throughout the novel, Packer actively and aggressively pursues sexual conquest (and particularly his wife – a point that will be addressed below) – and the concern about his prostate adds a degree of (male) anxiety, associating the word prostate with "pissed pants, one, and limp-dick desolation, two" (53). Overall, then, the exam does not produce Packer's body as coded "body," but establishes Packer as markedly embodied, and contrary to the nominal purpose of the exam, the crux of the knowledge about the asymmetry of his prostate is precisely that it is embodied knowledge.

The point to be stressed here is that the novel does not argue for a return to some primacy of embodiment. The complete destruction of Packer and everything he stands for as a cyber-capitalist does not mean that the logic he follows is entirely wrong. The novel shows the exclusively modern/capitalist perspective to be limited, only a part rather than a totality, and that bodiliness and specificity – embodied by the asymmetrical prostate – have a necessary place in thinking about a (post-modern) world. This point is perhaps best captured in the episode with the anarchist anti-capitalist demonstration, simultaneous with Packer's meeting with Vija Kinski, his chief of theory. After Kinski has argued the demonstration to be a fantasy of the very market system against which the protest is directed, one of the protesters sets himself on fire. This extreme form of protest has an impact on Packer: "A man in flames... What did this change? Everything, he thought. Kinski had been wrong. The market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate his act. Not such starkness and horror. This was a thing outside its reach." (99-100) Kinski continues to label the act unoriginal, an appropriation

and imitation of the acts of Buddhist monks, whereas Packer focuses on the more immediate (physical) aspects of this (non-verbal) act of protest: “He poured the gasoline and lit the match... Imagine the pain. Sit there and feel it... To say something. To make people think... Does he have to be a Buddhist to be taken seriously? He did a serious thing. He took his life. Isn’t this what you have to do to show them that you’re serious?” (100) For Packer this act is also communicative (as protest) and meaningful, precisely because of its extreme nature. Therefore, despite his own efforts to escape the bodily, Packer here acknowledges the legitimacy of the physical – not as being superior or primary, but as being relevant and meaningful as a specific (embodied) act.

The novel thus argues for a role for the body that is significant rather than subservient. This is also exemplified by a phrase the doctor uses during the medical exam. Packer points out “a plug of sebum and cell debris on his lower abdomen, a blackhead, slightly sinister,” (45) which is entirely banal and medically irrelevant. His exchange between Packer and the doctor is poignant here:

[Packer:] “What do we do about this?”
 [doctor:] “Let it express itself.”
 “What. Do nothing.”
 “Let it express itself,” Ingram said.
 Eric liked the sound of that. It was not unevocative. (45)

Initially Packer’s attitude towards his body here is that it is something to be controlled, or against which action can be taken (in line with the logic of prosthesis) to solve the problem. This is reinforced by his first response to the doctor’s suggestion to let the thing express itself: rather than acknowledge any possible agency on the part of his body, Packer focuses entirely on a subject-centered agency and translates the doctor’s suggestion into “doing nothing” – as if Packer himself (as a subject) is the only entity capable of action (against his body). As the doctor insists, the possibility of the body being capable of expression, of communicating itself, becomes clear as an attractive idea (though the double negative in “not unevocative” retains some of Packer’s resistance to the suggestion). Therefore, Packer’s initial view of the body – as passive, something against which action should be taken, with deficiencies to be

overcome – gives way to a view of the body as capable of expressing itself, as a communicative agent in itself.

Again, the prostate is the emblem for this shift with respect to the physical. Packer's killer, Benno Levin, aligns Packer's failure to understand the movements of the yen with the failure to accept the asymmetry of his prostate: "The importance of the lopsided, the thing that's skewed a little. You were looking for balance, beautiful balance, equal parts, equal sides. I know this. I know you. But you should have been tracking the yen in its tics and quirks. The little quirk. The misshape... That's where your answer was, in your body, in your prostate." (200) The implied shift here is towards a view of the body that has something to say, that is worth listening to, that can speak back. The argument, therefore, is for including the specificity of the physical in a framework of understanding the world, for according the body a place that cannot be displaced by modern/Enlightenment perspectives on the physical/material.

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Body and urban space

So far I have read *Cosmopolis* in order to situate its treatment of the body, technology, and capital, but this still leaves the question how the body can be seen in light of (postmodern) urban space. Backed up by the posthuman perspective and the logic of prosthesis, the novel can be taken to provide an answer to the question why Simmel and Jameson both relate a new spatiality to the need for a new conceptualization of the body. However, the novel can also be taken to be even more specific about the relationship between the body, the subject, and urban space.

The descriptions of the city in *Cosmopolis* show how to situate the individual in the postmodern city. As much as it may be a novel of ideas filled with theoretical reflections, the entire text is also strewn with observations and descriptions of street scenes, such as the description of the diamond district discussed above. In that respect, Packer would seem to belong to a long line of urban observers that could be traced back to the figure of the *flâneur*. There is a similarity, for example, in that both Packer in his limo and the *flâneur* are separated from the scenes they observe. The *flâneur* engages the crowds and public spaces of the city with a certain detachment, foregrounding visual perception rather than bodily experience, for example. However, the isolation inside the car is

different; the driver or passenger is not detached-yet-in-the-midst (cf. Simmel's intellectual freedom), but located in a small world of its own where other worlds come together. From the limousine, Packer can look at the world either in his screens or out the window, which results in descriptions such as this one in the episode with Jane Melman and the medical exam:

Buses rumbled up the avenue in pairs, hacking and panting, buses abreast or single file, sending people to the sidewalk in sprints, live prey, nothing new, and that's where the construction workers were eating lunch, seated against bank walls, legs stretched, rusty boots, appraising eyes, all trained on the streaming people, the march-past, checking looks and pace and style, 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, and the workers were alert for freakishness of any kind, people whose hair or clothing or manner of stride mock what the workers do, forty stories up, or schmucks with cell phones, who rankled them in general.

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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)

Unlike the *flâneur*, this scene does not result in a creative gaze or provide a ground for the viewing/thinking subject. Within the context of the whole novel, the street scene can better be read as the *data* of the city, akin in its "rapacious flow" to the flow of data on the screens inside the limo. The windows are more complex than the screens here, though. In effect, the screens, with their "medleys of data" (13), are not just a technological extension for Packer, but they also provide an interface through which he can access the system of cyber-capital; hence, they make Packer's relationship to the world a virtual one (in Hayles' sense). The windows, in comparison, perform a double function. As with all windows, they give (visual/informational) access to the world, while at the same time separating the viewer from the world – especially in the case of the windows in the limo, through which one can look out, but not

inside the car. In this respect the window fits in with the conventions of urban observers like the *flâneur*. Yet one could also say that the windows, as part of the moving limousine, here also take on the dynamic of the screen: they give access to the “data” of the city and thereby make up the interface that allows Packer to interact with the (informational) city. So while the windows are emblematic for Packer’s separation from the city in the limo, they also give access – like the screens – to the flows of data that make up a (virtual) world.

Packer situates himself between these different kinds of data, changing the centered position of the observer to one in which the individual is the relay point between different kinds of data flows. It is not even so much the limo, with its screens and windows, where these systems come together, but specifically in the individual accessing, using, and interfacing with these flows – and in doing so becoming part of those systems. *Cosmopolis* shows that the interpenetration of the material and informational (in Hayles’ definition of virtuality) is not an abstraction; one can precisely locate a site for this interpenetration: the body, and particularly the body driving through the city in a car.⁵

Hence, especially within the context of prosthesis and the posthuman, the element *par excellence* that connects Packer to the city is his limousine. Just as the screens tie into the (information) systems of cyber-capitalism, the limo itself connects Packer to the “systems” of the city. In effect, the car is a prosthetic extension into urban space, and a key tool in rebalancing the relationship between subject and city. The limo is not just a rich man’s mode of transport, it mediates his experience of the city space and events, as is exemplified in the anarchist demonstration. The entire episode is filled with detailed description of the events outside in Times Square – a significant location because it is a node in the city where a lot comes together (commerce, crowds, entertainment, news in the form of the famous ticker, etc.). Furthermore, demonstrations in general are events that are both markedly public and specific for cities. In short, the

5 In a framework akin to the one used here, Rob Shields also seeks to update the figure of the *flâneur*, by drawing on the figure of the cyborg, specifically expanding on the work of Donna Haraway. Shields presents the cyborg as “granddaughter” of the *flâneur* (210), with a focus on the spaces of the cyborg (which he updates from Haraway’s 1980s text) as “milieux interlaced with political and biotechnical processes happening at nano-scale,” (217) for example. While the thrust of his argument (basically moving away from the 19th century *flâneur*, into the 21st century) is similar to mine here, the sense in which he uses the cyborg remains close to the framework of its technological/science-fiction origins (especially in his focus on nano-technologies). So while I use similar conceptual “ingredients,” Shields’ approach is less suited for my analysis here than Hayles’, for example.

scene is characteristic for the urban. While the limo is in the middle of this situation, Packer himself is removed from the goings-on of the demonstration outside, basically safe in the cocoon of his private car. Nevertheless, the whole exchange with Vija Kinski inside the limo is completely geared towards what is happening outside. Packer is thus not entirely isolated inside his limo, but stands in mediated contact with the scene outside. This becomes clear when they get stuck in the riot, when Packer sticks his head out of the sunroof to see what is going on. As his bodyguards beat protesters off the car, Packer “lowered himself into the body of the car and eased the sunroof shut” (88) – where the phrasing in terms of the “body” of the car is significant here of course. This is immediately followed by the view that “It made more sense on TV,” (89) as Packer and Kinski watch the news coverage on the screens inside the limo. Therefore, the formation here simultaneously places Packer into contact with the events unfolding outside and separates him from them. The limousine has become a *prosthetic skin*: it protects Packer from the outside world (the bodyguards violently make sure of that, though the car does get damaged) and it allows him to perceive the outside world, though not through a sense of touch but by creating an envelope with information systems and media coverage of the world. If one conceives of the relationship between individual and city along the Simmelian lines – i.e. an overload of stimuli coming from an external world – the limo can be interpreted precisely as the “protective organ” Simmel called for, just as the screen-mediated contact with the outside world could be seen in line with Jameson’s call for extending our “sensorium.”

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However, making the shift from a unidirectional conception of the relationship between subject and city to one better equipped for a post-modern city, in which the two extend into each other, the limo takes on another function as well. Like real skin, the limo is also the organ with which the individual engages the world; the limo is fully fitted to allow Packer to view and, most importantly, interact with the flows of data in the world, both in the realm of cyber-capital and in the material urban setting. The point of the limo, therefore, is a double one: it protects Packer from the city outside, but simultaneously it enables him to engage the city and the world.

This double function of the limousine as prosthetic skin drives home the implications of Packer’s early reflection on the nature of surfaces,

prompted by the skyscraper he lives in. As discussed above, he anchors his sensation of contiguity between himself and the skyscraper in the view that “a surface separates inside from out and belongs no less to one than the other.” (9) This sharedness of surfaces is especially poignant with regard to the limo. As much as the limo separates inside from out, the whole point of the car is that it is a way of engaging space, of traversing the city, and like a skin, it delimits the individual and serves as an “organ” for contact with the outside world. Yet more specifically in the urban context of Manhattan, the limousine should be taken as a surface/skin that belongs simultaneously to Packer and to the city. The white stretch limo, after all, is not a neutral car, but is rather a mode of transport that is very particular for urban spaces like Manhattan, as nodes in the network of global capitalism. It is anonymity and capitalism materialized in the vehicular, a point brought up repeatedly in the novel and precisely the reason why Packer travels in one: “He liked the fact that the cars were indistinguishable from each other... He wanted the car because it was not only oversized but aggressively and contemptuously so, metastatizingly so, a tremendous mutant thing that stood astride every argument against it... Long white limousines had become the most unnoticed vehicles in the city.” (10-11) The limo, therefore, is not so much an object that expresses the wealth of the individual in it, but it is a fixture of the Manhattan as a center of global capital. It is mobile, but nonetheless an integral part of the city in the same way that skyscrapers and streets are. Accordingly, it belongs indeed as much to the city as it does to Packer. As a skin/surface, therefore, it is the precisely in the limo that man and city come together – as a material instance of global capital in the city streets on the one hand, and as a prosthetic skin for Packer.

Even more specifically, the limousine can be taken as a tool or interface for engaging urban space that is dominated by automobility – a feature especially prominent in the postmodern city. Such space already came into view in *Lot 49* in the previous chapter, just as the French *autoroute* is among Augé’s examples of non-place, but is explored and implemented to the fullest extent in *Cosmopolis*. The term automobility has been used recently as a heading under which to explore the social,

cultural, economic, and political impact of the automobile⁶ – an impact so pervasive and everyday that it is easily taken for granted. Obviously, in the course of the twentieth century the rise of the private car has led to tremendous social and spatial changes. To some extent the development of mass transit and public transport has remained from the modern metropolis, but postmodern urban space also has different facets that follow a different logic. Mass suburbanization after WWII, for example, went hand in hand with a privileged role for the automobile (and an increase in car ownership), as the density of the metropolis (along with public transport) was traded in for the urban sprawl and the private car. Especially in the U.S., this prominence of the automobile has provided a model for moving through (urban) space that is not necessarily dependent on the density of mass transit.⁷ These developments are characteristic for the second half of the twentieth century, for a postmodern world with new configurations of mobility, compared to the spatiality of the modern metropolis for example. While this automobility may be more visible in the type of landscape of which Southern California is exemplary, its properties are no less relevant for Manhattan, as a modern metropolis that has carried over into a locus of postmodernity (especially in light of the city as a node in a network of global finance capital as foregrounded in *Cosmopolis*).

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Two features of what John Urry discusses in a short inventory of a “system of automobility” are particularly relevant for the role of the limousine in *Cosmopolis*: a changed role of the body in a culture and practice of automobility, and a heightened flexibility with respect to socio-spatial structures. Firstly, the body is positioned and used differently when it comes to moving through space. Urry points out that “although automobility is a system of mobility, it necessitates minimal movement once one is strapped into the driver’s seat.” (31) The driver’s body is locked in place – an immobile torso, limbs extended to the parts

6 Cf. a special edition of *Theory, Culture and Society* (2004: 21.4-5) dedicated to automobilities, for example.

7 This development is notably discussed in Reyner Banham’s classic book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971), where he identifies “Autopia” as one of the ecologies that typify L.A. For Banham, the historical development of the city before the dominance of automobility made it particularly compatible with the car: “the less densely built-up urban structure of the Los Angeles basin has permitted more conspicuous adaptations to be made for motor transport than would be possible elsewhere without wrecking the city.” (75) L.A. Was not built for the car, therefore, but the city was able to adopt and adapt to automobility particularly well. Accordingly, one can take Banham’s analysis of “autopia” as an ecology for L.A. as a relevant description for other cities in late-twentieth-century America generally, for example in the city spaces formed and affected by the mass suburbanization of the 1950s.

of the car that require minimal movement for the sake of driving the machine, and the eyes fixed on traffic and the gauges and lights inside the car. The result is, in Urry's words, a "disciplined 'driving body'" (31). Effectively, this configuration displaces the capacity for movement from the body to the machine, in line with the logic of prosthetic compensation/extension. In *Cosmopolis* this immobile body is taken even one step further, since Packer does not even drive his car himself, of course. Another effect of the encapsulation of the body inside the cocoon of the car is the (further) depersonalization of public space. As the city streets change from bodies walking past one another to metal cars driving past, the already delicate matter of eye contact in the street (as perceived by Packer in the diamond district) becomes an even more remote possibility. "Communities of people," according to Urry, "become anonymized flows of faceless ghostly machines." (30) This change in the nature of public space is another facet of Packer's choice for an anonymous white limousine.

A second feature of Urry's system of automobility stresses an increased and necessary flexibility on a number of fronts. While the car accords the driver a certain degree of flexibility and (notably "unbodily") freedom of movement, automobility also "divides workplaces from homes, producing lengthy commutes into and across the city," and it "splits homes and business districts, undermining local retail outlets to which one might have walked or cycled, eroding town-centers, non-car pathways and public spaces." (28) In other words, the possibilities offered by the car as a machine for transport at the same time require systemic changes in spatial arrangements, as well as in residential patterns, commercial spaces, etc. The car, therefore, is not simply a prosthetic technology of mobility; for Urry automobility "coerces people into an intense flexibility ... extending the individual into realms of freedom and flexibility ... but also constraining car 'users' to live their lives in spatially stretched and time-compressed ways." (28) The systemic impact thus goes far beyond the realm of transport; it has changed cities and the way urban space is used. In *Cosmopolis*, the limo underscores this aspect of automobility too. For example, the limo itself is an example of a radical change in the spatial organization of work: it is a fully equipped movable office. Rather than use cars to get to work, Packer's employees need to get to the limo (on foot) as a mobile place of work. The limo envelops

all that automobility has achieved to separate spatially (work, home, and even doctor's offices), while remaining automobile to the fullest – it is an automobile emblem of automobility. In this sense, all of the postmodern city comes together inside Packer's limo; it embodies all the flexibility of automobility, concentrated into a mobile node in the network of global capital.

The configuration of the individual in his car (be it as driver generally or as passenger specifically in Packer's case) also has consequences for how one sees the individual moving through the city. Basically, the car requires a shift in the "model" or paradigm for viewing movement in the city street – from movement on foot to movement by car. A consequence of this shift is that familiar ways of interpreting the individual moving through the city – such as the act of walking and the figure of the *flâneur* – lose considerable force, or at least need to be adapted. Departing from a convincing argument that de Certeau's exclusive focus on the pedestrian needs to be updated, Nigel Thrift zeroes in on driving, rather than walking, as a way to understand the city.⁸ In an approach that resonates with the posthuman perspective, Thrift argues for departing from an understanding modeled on language (as in de Certeau) when it comes to driving; instead, he argues for "driving (and passengering) as both profoundly embodied and sensuous experiences." (46) By focusing on the increasing implementation of software and ergonomics in cars (e.g. GPS systems, ABS braking, etc.), "intelligence and intentionality are distributed between human and non-human in ways that are increasingly inseparable." (49) The car, therefore, is one of the most prominent arenas for the further development of virtuality (in Hayles' terms) as the interpenetration of the physical and informational. The effect of the car and automobility is so pervasive for Thrift that the result is "a world in which knowledge about embodied knowledge is being used to produce new forms of embodiment-cum-spatial practice which are sufficiently subtle and extensive to have every chance of becoming a new

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⁸ In his move from walking to driving, Thrift offers convincing criticism of de Certeau on three main points. Firstly, he signals in de Certeau a persistence of a model based on reading and speech and doubts whether "these operations can be extended to other practices" (43) without problems. Secondly, Thrift objects to a notion of everyday life as "in some sense 'hidden' away, obscured, silenced, and able to be recovered only by tapping into the narrative harmonics of particular sites." (43) Lastly, Thrift questions de Certeau's "implicit romanticism, which comes... from a residual humanism." (44) While these three (in my view legitimate) points of criticism would not invalidate de Certeau's perspective – it remains a fertile basis for thinking about spatial practices (as I have attempted in a previous chapter) – they provide a convincing basis for Thrift to indeed move on from de Certeau.

background to everyday life.” (52) In the course of the twentieth century, therefore, the development of the car has gone beyond the purely technological and functional – it has altered the framework within which to think of the individual in (or moving through) space. The car has been at the forefront of recalibrating the role of the body in relation to the world, part of a shift from a primarily knowing/disembodied subject of Enlightened humanism to an embodied subject that needs to be seen as interwoven with the world, both materially and informationally – a development exemplified in Packer’s limousine. Automobility, then, might be seen as an essential yet often under-examined feature of postmodernity, especially in the way that it reconfigures the body in urban space.

172 In sum, then, one should see Packer in his limousine as representative of not just the excesses of ruthless capitalism but also of the general automobility of a postmodern world. The limo is not a device for moving through the city anymore; it is a moving part *of* the city. At the same time, it is a prosthetic skin for Packer, and therein exhibits the complex “directionality” in the relationship between body and city. It offers protection against an encroaching world and it allows the subject to extend into and interface with both the informational world of cyber-capitalism and the material world of the postmodern city. As a body inside his limo, Packer exemplifies the posthuman subject that belongs to postmodern urban space; it is precisely the configuration where the material and the informational interpenetrate. The city in *Cosmopolis* thus departs from the convention of a mobile individual in a spatially static and socially dynamic city, but rather features a mobile subject in a mobile part of the city – and in this mobility the notably and irreducibly embodied subject shows how the relationship between the body and the postmodern city is marked by virtuality.

Overall then, the question of the body in the city, as addressed in *Cosmopolis*, is a matter of reframing – not of radically changing positions, but of acknowledging and incorporating the body and embodiment in a conception of the subject, and thereby of the city. It bears repeating that one should not read the novel as arguing for a (reactionary) tipping of the scales back toward the body, presence, or history. It is in this light that one should read some of the other elements of the novel that I have not addressed in detail – specifically the haircut (the reason for going across town in the limo in the first place), Packer’s sexual pursuit of his

wife, and his death. All of these are elements present throughout the novel and are wrapped up in the last chapter. They all underscore, by way of conclusion in the novel (I would suggest), that a return to the (pre-)modern is not a viable option for Packer, driving home the fact that Packer's take on the world leads to a cul-de-sac.⁹

The first two of these elements can be read as leading to the third. The episode in the barbershop is in many ways nostalgic, to the point of being stereotypical: the traditional shop is located in Hell's Kitchen (an area well suited for being presented as "the old neighborhood"), the Italian barber used to cut Packer's father's hair too, and he tells stories of when Packer was young – making the barber almost a stock character. Accordingly, while Packer is comfortable there and even falls asleep in the chair (the novel started with him being unable to sleep), a return to such a nostalgic stereotype holds no ultimate appeal for Packer: he leaves in the middle of his actual haircut, before the barber is done. Even though he tests the waters, longing for the past is explicitly not for Packer, as he reflects already before entering the shop: "He wanted to feel it, every rueful nuance of longing. But it wasn't his longing or yearning or sense of the past. He was too young to feel such things, and anyway unsuited." (159) While the barbershop was the original goal of the journey across town, a return to a nostalgic past is no solution for a man primarily bent on collapsing the future into the present.

Likewise, the sexual pursuit of his wife (or, one might say the "search for love" as conventional motivation for a quest) does not offer any solution for Packer. During his journey, he has several sexual encounters (with a mistress, his female bodyguard, and the scene with his chief of finance) as well as several chance encounters with his wife, during which he expresses his desire for her, though she remains aloof. After the haircut, Packer encounters his wife again in a pile of 300 naked people in the street (for the purpose of shooting a movie scene, presumably artistic) – a scene where both (along with hundreds of other people) are literally and figuratively stripped bare and are equal, after which they have sex in an alley. The scene is short and uncomplicated, especially in comparison to the explicitness and extent of the description of the other sexual encounters. Yet while the scene is the culmination of a pursuit,

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⁹ One can construe the novel in this respect as a diagnosis by way of a negative example, though one need not be tempted into reading the novel's ending as a traditional moral "cautionary tale."

with an emotional charge that steers towards a loving relationship between husband and wife, it does not provide Packer with a (stable) alternative for his self-destructive path: “The instant he knew he loved her, she slipped down his body and out of his arms.” (178) She gets dressed and disappears; love, too, is not the answer for Packer.

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Both the haircut and the sex between Packer and his wife thus emphasize a traditional bodiliness that offers no recourse for Packer. In comparison to Packer’s transactions in the realm of global finance, for example, the haircut is basic, bordering on the primal, and in this context markedly “non-virtual” as a physical act. Similarly, with Packer and his wife having just stepped out of a pile of naked people (which one can take in this context as “stripping down to bare essentials” of the individual), the conventional pairing of physicality and love proves as fleeting as the yoctoseconds of cyber-capital. By the end of the novel, Packer’s self-annihilation seems as inevitable as it is inherent in his desire to push time, technology, and cyber-capitalism to their extremes; nostalgia and love are no remedy for Packer’s excesses.

Packer’s death, finally, is then best viewed as a denouement, as playing out the course set out by Packer’s views and actions. As Randy Laist underscores, the end is “really only a more explicit rendering of the implication of all of Eric’s visions of the future in which human experience becomes redundant and obsolete.” (269) The beginning of the episode resonates with Oedipa’s isolation at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*, with Packer standing in the street without a sense of direction:

He stood in the street. There was nothing to do. He hadn’t realized this could happen to him. The moment was empty of urgency and purpose. He hadn’t planned on this. Where was the life he’d always led? There was nowhere he wanted to go, nothing to think about, no one waiting. How could he take a step in any direction if all directions were the same? (180)

However, while the moment in *Lot 49* is pregnant with possibility, on the threshold between the failure of the detective plot (and its modern epistemology) and postmodernity (extending out into America), the moment in *Cosmopolis* is just a dead end for Packer. Rather than adopt the alternatives that have come into view during the course of the novel (e.g.

to acknowledge irregularities instead of focus on chartable patterns, as his murderer tells him, embodied in the asymmetrical prostate), Packer has persisted in his pursuit of extremes, with self-destruction as the only available avenue left. Tellingly, only in his resignation to his death – as he goes in, guns blazing, to face his assassin – does he adopt some of the doctor’s advice: “He entered shooting. He did not aim and fire. He just fired. Let it express itself.” (186)

More specifically, in the context of my argument here, the interest in the final episode does not lie in the somewhat artificial major elements of the episode (e.g. the monologue in which Packer talks to his gun, or the fact that Packer shoots himself in the hand, for example) but in the way Packer is presented as no longer being a subject. This is made explicit when Packer and Levin both have their guns drawn: “The man fired a shot into the ceiling. It startled him. Not Eric; the other, the subject.” (187) After this, Levin is referred to several other times as “the subject.” In my view, the point here is not so much to construe Levin as a subject in binary opposition to Packer. Both are presented by their first names as well in the remaining dialogue, for example, and Levin as subject resonates with the phrase “subject reduced” (141) used by Packer’s bodyguard once they take out a pie-wielding assailant. Moreover, the novel certainly does not argue for Levin as positive example (he is as mad as Packer is cold-blooded), so one should not read this passage morally either. The crux, in my view, is that the presentation of Levin as “the subject” serves to underscore Packer’s position as one in which subjectivity crumbles; it is the consequence of the cul-de-sac that Packer, in pushing matters to their extremes, has ended up in.¹⁰ Packer’s death can be taken as the physical correlate of the demise of the discourse on which he bases his perception of himself and the world, of himself as a subject. In this respect, and to explicitly adopt medical metaphors in line with Simmel and Jameson, *Cosmopolis* can indeed be taken as a *diagnosis*: the novel’s reflections on capitalism, technology, time, and the body in the city are all in light of a “case” of excess, which proves to be terminal.

In conclusion, then, *Cosmopolis* can be read as symptomatic, particu-

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¹⁰ In a reading of *Cosmopolis* in the light of Levinas, Aaron Chandler remarks that “Packer’s inability to see others becomes one of the novel’s leitmotifs.” (250) The acknowledgement of Levin as other and subject in this final episode only underscores this, much like the adoption of the phrase “let it express itself” coincides with Packer’s resignation to his demise.

larly when it comes to questions of the body and urban space. One can see this best in Packer's objections to what he deems archaic, if one reads them for more than their face value – such as the reflection on the skyscraper or the stethoscope. By way of a final telling example here that also coincides with an example that Augé gives: after the medical exam, Packer sees someone at an ATM (his assassin Benno Levin, in fact) and reflects on its antiquated nature:

He was thinking about automated teller machines. The term was aged and burdened by its own historical memory. It worked at cross-purposes, unable to escape the inference of fuddled human personnel and jerky moving parts. The term was part of the process that the device was meant to replace. It was anti-futuristic, so cumbersome and mechanical that even the acronym seemed dated. (54)

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This exemplary passage condenses Packer's view on the problem (also identified and thematized by Barthelme) of how language can relate to the world: the word is not transparent, but it bears the traces of its relations to the world – which in itself is a burden or problem. However, Packer does not offer any sort of alternative; his view is a negatively oriented one, in which the progressive present (which has supplanted the future) is defined in negative opposition to the past. He does little but lament the slow-down caused by anything that stands in his way – and it is this lamentation that the novel rejects. In line with Augé's treatment of the ATM as an element in non-place, the point of the machine is that one should not situate it in a discourse built on a modern/Enlightenment mold or a discourse of technological progress. One should rather take the ATM as exemplary for reconfiguring the relations between the subject, the body, and space in a new framework of virtuality – as well as emblematic for the way in which *Cosmopolis* explores the post-modern and posthuman. Hence, reading the novel as a diagnosis lays bare not only the dead end of Packer's take on the world, but also that the cure should not be sought in "simple" alternatives. Instead, to also bring into view issues like embodiment and incorporation, one needs to think within (postmodern and posthuman) coordinates to be able to account for the more complex (virtual) configuration of subjectivity and bodiliness in the postmodern city.