

## A Flâneur for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

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### Introduction

Walter Benjamin's flâneur - the stroller, Rambler, explorer, detective of the city - has had a continual presence in the literature of the city since Benjamin first evoked the figure in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. In Benjamin's conception of the flâneur, we find the quintessential figure of modernism; one who explores, enjoys and is at home in the urban space rather than the pastoral; a stroller who is not alienated by the city, but embraces it. However, for the flâneur's longstanding role in literature, he remains, in part, linked to the 19<sup>th</sup> century city of Paris in which he was conceived. Yet what becomes of this figure outside of this temporality? What becomes of this figure in a world governed by the digital space? Bijan Stephen, in his article "In Praise of the Flaneur" published in *The Paris Review*, explores the idea of the flâneur in the digital age; he asks: "how often do we search our physical surroundings for things to post on Instagram? How long do we wander the depths of the internet to find the perfect GIF? How many hours do you spend clicking the random button on Wikipedia? Where is *real* life?" Stephen theorises a time and place whereby the digital world subsumes the physical, and the notion is important during a technological age where we exist in both a physical and digital spaces, along with distinct identities and behaviours in each.

This relationship between the real and the digital presents itself in Don DeLillo's 2003 novel *Cosmopolis*. Told across a single day in April 2000, the narrative follows the protagonist Eric Packer as he makes his way across Manhattan, toward financial ruin and his own eventual death. Whilst other DeLillo novels often contain scenes of flânerie, notably Nick Shay in *Underworld*, or Keith and Lianne in *Falling Man*, it is in *Cosmopolis* whereby DeLillo can be seen to make his greatest comment on the figure in a digital age. This is because Packer exists and is active in the digital finance space, but also in the physical space of New York. Through this relationship, DeLillo presents a uniquely contemporary imagining of the flâneur, and of the city in which the flâneur figure explores. It is the task of this essay to explore the specific iteration of the flâneur that can be evoked in Don DeLillo's 2003 novel, *Cosmopolis*.

### **The Stroller of the City**

The flâneur, as read by Benjamin in the poetry of Baudelaire, makes the city his home. In a passage from his essay "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century", Benjamin writes that:

Paris becomes for the first time a subject of lyric poetry.

This poetry is not regional art; rather the gaze of the allegorist that falls on the city is estranged. It is the gaze of the *flâneur*, whose mode of life still surrounds the

approaching desolation of city life with a propitiatory luster. (*Reflections* 156).

The French term “flâneur” itself first appears in English in 1854, defined as a “lounger or saunterer, an idle ‘man about town’” (Miller 4). This is, perhaps, the iconic image of the flâneur, an “aimless stroller rather than a walker with a destination” (Miller 4). Critics have often read Benjamin’s assessment of Baudelaire’s poetry as one which emphasises walking as the means to explore a city, but also as a detective and explorer of the urban landscape. Gregory Shaya, for instance, describes the flâneur as “a power symbol. He was a figure of the modern artist-poet, a figure keenly aware of the bustle of modern life, an amateur detective and investigator of the city” (47). Similarly, Graeme Gilloch contends that the “*flâneur* is the aimless, complacent, haughty bourgeois who wanders through the urban complex in search of nothing more than diversion, to see and to be seen” (152). Benjamin himself wrote that “if the flâneur is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it legitimates his idleness” (*The Writer of Modern Life* 72). The flâneur roams the city like a detective, though one who has no case to solve.

The flâneur is not so shallow a figure to be defined by activity or behaviour alone; aside from this the flâneur takes on a certain outlook.

Apart from the figure's activity, the flâneur may also be understood as a mode of being, pertaining to a particular gaze, one who is always on the cusp of modernity. Consequently, this allows the flâneur to be considered as both locked in or free from specific temporalities. However, the figure, who is on the "threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class" (Benjamin, *Reflections* 156), exists beyond the explicit temporality of 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris. It is the detective like qualities, the particular gaze and outlook onto the city which allows this flâneur to be reiterated across various temporalities and spaces.

A more contemporary understanding of the flâneur, and specifically of a flâneur in New York, can be found in the writing of Paul Auster. Through Auster's novels *The New York Trilogy* and *Leviathan*, Auster explores both New York and the flâneur figure. Auster describes the character Quinn's experience of New York in the "City of Glass" as "an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost" (3-4). Similarly, in *Leviathan*, a novel dedicated to DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, Auster sketches another iteration of the flâneur figure. This comes through the character 'Sachs' who often partakes in the act of flânerie:

With Sachs, however, impromptu meetings were the norm. He worked when the spirit moved him (most often

late at night), and the rest of the time he roamed free, prowling the streets of the city like some nineteenth-century *flâneur*, following his nose wherever it happened to take him. He walked, he went to museums and art galleries, he saw movies in the middle of the day, he read books on park benches. He wasn't beholden to the clock in the way other people are, and as a consequence he never felt as if he were wasting his time. (45)

Auster touches on several important ideas in the passage. Firstly, Auster's understanding of the *flâneur* is distinctly linked to Benjamin's. Benjamin describes of the city and *flâneur* that "the street becomes a dwelling place for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among house facades as a citizen is within his four walls...Buildings' walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; newsstands are his libraries; and café terraces are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done" (*The writer of Modern Life* 68). Sachs is a character in line with Benjamin's traditional notion of the *flâneur*, notwithstanding it is 20<sup>th</sup> century New York being explored rather than 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris. Secondly, Sachs is in no way governed by time; he takes "impromptu" meetings and "worked when the spirit moved him". Finally, Auster marks out that the 20<sup>th</sup> century *flâneur* is different to that

of a 19<sup>th</sup> century flâneur, as although Sachs is “like” a 19<sup>th</sup> century flâneur even though he will never be one. As such, Auster demonstrates the temporal flexibility of the flâneur. Rather than explicitly locked to Benjamin’s framework of 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the flâneur becomes a plastic figure who can be moulded and extrapolated from Paris to New York, and from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Yet this is an approach that places the flâneur, rather than the city, at its centre. While the flâneur figure remains more or less the same, it is the city that has undergone the more dramatic change. If the city cannot be understood in the same way that it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then it follows that the flâneur might not be reconceived of in the same way. Before arriving at the question of what the 21<sup>st</sup> century flâneur might look like, something addressed by DeLillo throughout *Cosmopolis*, we might instead establish what it is that the 21<sup>st</sup> century city looks like.

### **A Cityspace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

For all the discussion of the flâneur as an individual subject, Benjamin’s flâneur is still a figure inexorably linked with the urban and the city space. Discourse on the flâneur has typically focused on the explorative activities of the flâneur, and the individual subject in terms of a mode of being; it takes for granted the idea that cities are being imagined in the same way they were in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. Hence the first section of this article will explore how the city is being imagined in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, not in comparison to how the city has been imagined before, but as an anchorage point for how the flâneur is being imagined in the present.

The New York presented in *Cosmopolis* is not the boundless labyrinth discussed by Paul Auster at the beginning of "City of Glass", but rather, it exists almost exclusively between first and eleventh avenues in Manhattan. Similarly, the imagining of the city is locked in a specific time; the entire narrative takes place during a day in April, in the year 2000. Real world geographic markers point toward the city as the city of New York. As the streets are titled in numerical sequence, the use of street names allows the reader to map the geographic trajectory of Packer as he moves from one part of the city to another. The periodic mentions of these markers reflect how Packer plods through the city and thus ground the reader in the rhythm of trying to cross New York, whilst also allowing the reader to partake in Packer's brand of flânerie.

The text is grounded in the real place of New York, but it exists side by side with another space, the digital. This digital space is represented throughout the novel by screens.

The screens adorn both the city and the inside of Packer's personal limousine in which he travels through the city. At one point the narrator describes the abundance of screens inside of the limousine: "they were

deployed at graded distances from the rear seat, flat plasma screens of assorted sizes, some in a cluster framework, a few others projected singly from side cabinets. The grouping was a work of video sculpture” (35). The image provided resonates on two levels. Firstly, the “clustered” screens of “assorted sizes” evoke New York itself, in particular the layered oblong shapes that make its cityscape. However, secondly and perhaps a more overt allusion, the abundance of screens evokes an image of Times Square which is famous for its clustered, screened surfaces. Packer’s screens denote the economics controlling the space around him and bring into focus the relationship between the digital and material. The city that Packer moves through also begins to resemble the inside of Packer’s limousine. At one point, the narrator describes how:

They were able to get a partial view of the electronic display of market information, the moving message units that streaked across the face of an office tower on the other side of Broadway... This was different from the relaxed news reports that wrapped around the old Times Tower a few blocks south of here. These were three tiers of data running concurrently and swiftly about hundred feet above the street. Financial news, stock prices, currency markets. The action was unflagging. The hellbent sprint of numbers and symbols, the fractions,



decimals, stylized dollar signs, the streaming release of words, of multinational news, all too fleet to be absorbed

(80)

The image presented to the reader is of a flâneur figure who is constantly surrounded by screens, be it in the interior space of his limousine, or on the surfaces of skyscrapers in the physical city of New York. The passage also presents an image of New York whereby the urban space is constructed through digital means; the facades of buildings are laden with data and the market as it is related through digital values. It alludes to the way in which this digital space exists alongside the physical space.

The screens serve as an entry point into this digital space. Within the novel, it is a space of digital finance, an economic mode that “relies pre-eminently on the creation of fictitious values unbacked by the production of actual values in the “real” economy” (De Marco, 663). The screens become the medium through which this intangible economic mode is accessed. In one instance the narrator tells us that “data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realised in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions” (24). It is the “zero-oneness” of the world that Packer understands as governing the space around him; rather than conceiving of this space existing side by

side with the physical city, Packer understands them as embedded within one another.

The object between each entity is the “surface”. Surfaces play a role throughout the novel, as the object which both dichotomises and conflates these different spaces at the same time. When assessing the tower in which Packer lives, the narrator describes how Packer “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” (9). The point is similarly made when the narrator describes that “there’s a common surface, an affinity between market movements and the natural world” (86). As a surface that denotes the “natural world” from the digital markets, the screen also mediates interaction between the two. During the riot scene at the Nasdaq Center, DeLillo uses the images of both screens and surfaces to describe a confluence between a material, physical world and a digital one. The rioter’s main objective is to attack the immaterial world of digital finance through the physical world of the city. The narrator imagines that the rioters “would break into control rooms, attack the video wall and logo ticker” (87). A more pertinent example of this confluence between the physical and the digital comes when the narrator describes that “on one of the screens he saw figures descending a vertical surface. It took him a moment to

understand that they were rappelling down the façade of the building just ahead, where the market tickers were located” (92). The result is a remarkable image whereby these protestors are rappelling down market tickers and digital data, down the common surface which separates “the natural word” and the digitally controlled “market movements”.

### **The post-9/11 City**

The scene at the Nasdaq Center is also indicative of the text’s relationship with the events of September 11. The scene echoes several noticeable events to have occurred on Wall Street over the past century, and also events which take places after the novel’s publication. Thus the scene is thus both evocative of history, and prophetic of the future. The narrator describes “there was a detonation, loud and deep, near enough to consume all the information around him. He recoiled in shock. Everyone did” (93). That the detonation, “loud and deep”, consumed all of “the information around him” adds a figurative element to the attacks, but also resonates with terrorist bombings, specifically September 11, but also the 1993 World Trade Center bombing where a car bomb was detonated in the North Tower. Similarly, the narrator describes how the “zoom lens caught a man in a parachute dropping from the top of a tower nearby” (89), an allusion to the Richard Drew photograph titled “The Falling Man”, the same photograph which DeLillo’s novel *Falling Man* is

titled. The scenes described are also prophetic of the Occupy Wall Street Movement protests in 2011, which took place after the novel's publication.

DeLillo's exploration of New York as a post-9/11 space is furthered through his examination of the skyscraper, or "tower". Skyscrapers have long formed a part of the writer's imagining of New York and from a wider perspective, the city. The Skyscraper has "cast a long shadow over twentieth-century literature...[it] epitomizes what we "assume" of cities, and its shadow obscures whatever does not fit the "characteristic shape"" (1). Through Packer, DeLillo explores the symbolic significance of the skyscraper in the post-9/11 city. The narrator describes that Packer notes the "anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper" and that "no recent structure ought to bear this word" (9). Instead, DeLillo's skyscraper is reimagined as the tower. Packer's residence in the city is the most powerful instance of this; it is the symbolic significance of the structure which allows Packer comment that "the tower gave him strength and depth" (9). Furthermore, the repercussions of the word "tower" ring throughout the text. Aside from the immediate linking of "tower" to the World Trade Center Twin Towers, the tower has historically become a symbol of identity and hegemonic power. The Twin Towers have often been thought of in this way; during the "Bush administration, the twin towers became, in retrospect, embodiments of America's physical

invulnerability, which was adjunct to its moral invulnerability, its absolute innocence” (Berger, 343). Similarly, Gary Genosko contends that the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center have a long history of symbolic significance for the United States, observing how the Twin Towers were something of a logo for the hegemon (Genosko, “The Spirit of Symbolic Exchange...”). Since the events of September 11 the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, albeit with a cruel irony, have continued to be imagined as indicative of American neo-liberal capitalism and as symbols of American economic hegemony, something that has been reinforced by novels like *Cosmopolis*.

Though the Twin Towers are never explicitly mentioned in the novel, they are projected onto the other skyscrapers which make up the city, most explicitly through the aforementioned apartment building where Packer lives. Packer’s residency has been commonly read as an allusion to the World Trade Centre Twin Towers, or at least something with a similar symbolic significance, due to the narrator’s monolithic description of the apartment building:

It was eighty-nine stories, a prime number, in an undistinguished sheath of hazy bronze glass...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. (8)

Joseph Conte perceives the towers in which Packer lives as a clear allusion to the September 11 attacks, as he describes it as “the residential complement of the Twin Towers, at 110 stories and 1,368 feet the tallest buildings in the world at the time of their completion in 1973” and is “symbolic of his [Packer’s] brutal avariciousness” (181). Similarly, Nichola Merola argues that “although the novel does not name the building, Packer lives in the Trump World Tower, on First Avenue between Forty-Seventh Street and Forty-Eighth Street, a fitting address for a cybercapitalist” (835). Much like the rest of New York City, Packer’s residence takes on a symbolic significance in the aftermath of the attacks.

However, the key change in the novel is that in the post-9/11 world, rather than a symbol of hegemonic strength, the Twin Towers instead communicate vulnerability. In *Cosmopolis* the reader is privy to the fact that the towers will eventually fall; yet as the novel is set in April, 2000, Packer is not. The result is a cruel irony where the reader knows that Packer’s faith in the tower is misplaced, and what Packer understands as a symbol of invulnerability is instead a brutal reminder of this vulnerability. DeLillo explores this in his post-9/11 piece “In the Ruins of the Future”. He writes that in the post-9/11 city “the ruin of the towers is

implicit in other things...the new Palm Pilot at a fingertip's reach, the stretch limousine parked outside the hotel, the midtown skyscraper under construction, carrying the name of a major investment bank – all haunted in a way by what has happened, less assured in their authority” (DeLillo, 2001). In the novel it is the skyscraper, or tower, which becomes the symbol of an economic power expressed in the form of digital finance. Toward the end of the novel, the fragility of the world of digital finance and the vulnerability of the Twin Towers is symbolically represented by the collapse of the global financial system.

### **The Flâneur in *Cosmopolis***

What then, of DeLillo's flâneur who's task it is to navigate this 21<sup>st</sup> century city? If Paul Auster in *Leviathan* understands the flâneur as being a nineteenth century concept, then DeLillo's imagining of the flâneur is undoubtedly the twenty-first century version. The “figure” of the flâneur, who “wanders through the urban complex in search of nothing more than diversion” (Gilloch, 152) remains in a curious position in *Cosmopolis*, as Packer both embodies and contradicts this notion of the flâneur at the same time. DeLillo's contemporary iteration of the flâneur does not stroll through the city, but instead travels from block to block in a limousine flanked by security guards. The image of

the limousine slowly moving through New York is consistently reiterated throughout the novel. At one point Packer is in the car with his wife whilst his security guards Torval and Danko walk either side of the vehicle: the guards “flanked the limo and it moved deliberately down the street in light taxi traffic, husband and wife assessing the prospects of immediate eating places” (117). Similarly, the narrator notes that “Eric saw his security aides, one to each side of the limo, walking at a calculated pace and wearing similar outfits” (63). The act of *flânerie* is dislocated from Benjamin’s original conception of the idea. The two security guards walk through the city yet do not embody the *flâneur* figure in any other way. Though they fulfil the activity of the *flâneur*, this is only as it is their job to do so; the elements of freedom and carelessness associated with the *flâneur* are removed. Torval and Danko instead act as a barrier between Packer and the city; they perceive and interact with the city’s phenomena on Packer’s behalf, and are thus indicative of Packer’s relationship with the city.

Furthermore, Packer constantly places barriers between himself and the space around him. As an example, the narrative places a specific focus on Packer’s sunglasses: he “put on his sunglasses. Then he walked back across the avenue” (9). When Packer arrives at the barbershop he has them on, and it is narrated that the barber “eased the sunglasses off Eric’s head and place them on the shelf under the room-length mirror”



(160). In another instance, the narrator describes that he “took off his sunglasses and looked closely at Ingram. He tried to read his face. It was empty of affect. He thought of putting his sunglasses on the associates face, to make him real, give him meaning in the sweep of other people’s perceptions, but the glasses would have to be clear and thick-lensed and life-defining. If you knew the man ten years, it might take you all that time to notice he did not wear glasses. It was a face that was lost without them” (53). The ambiguous passage suggests a variety of things, but above all, for Packer, the face is not real unless it is mediated by the glasses: as put forth by the narrator, to mark him in “the sweep of other people’s perceptions”. That the glasses would have to be “thick-lensed and life-defining” has repercussions in itself; as though the mediation, the physical barrier between everyday phenomena and the subject, becomes that which is “life defining”. This idea aligns itself with Packer’s travelling through the city in his limousine. Like the sunglasses, the windows of the limousine offer a barrier between Packer and the outside world; there is a physical barrier between Packer’s perception and the objects being perceived. Whilst Benjamin’s *flâneur*, the strolling detective of the city, might seek to draw closer to the city, Packer does not. This image of the Packer, as a *flâneur* who mediates his relationship with the city, is at odds with that of the freewheeling *flâneur* put forth by Benjamin.

But what does it mean to say that the world around Packer can only be understood through this mediation? It certainly reflects on a flâneur figure who is tentative at best to engage with the city around him, and perhaps suggests a world which Packer fails to understand through direct contact, that is, through its concrete tangibility. If Packer is to be considered a flâneur figure, he is certainly a different iteration than Benjamin's flâneur who goes "botanizing on the asphalt" (*The Writer of Modern Life* 68). Though Packer would seem alienated from the physical city around him, it is only in this physical sense. Through assessing the novel as one exploring the effects of digital finance and digital space on the individual self, Packer is not so much alienated from the physical city as much as he is comfortable in the city's digital space.

We might revisit the aforementioned passage whereby the narrator discusses this relationship, as Packer and one of his employees look over data in his limousine. The narrator describes that the:

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).

Packer's understanding of the space around him is not one that disregards the physical, but rather, one that acknowledges that the physical space is intertwined and essentially governed by the digital. Yet we can take some kind of understanding from the passage, as it demonstrates that in the world of *Cosmopolis* things do not signify as we might expect them to. The digital world is presented as some kind of underworld, defining and controlling the space around Packer. Packer considers the physical environment around him as significant only for the digital which it signifies.

That the physical city becomes remarkable for its ability to signal a digital space is reaffirmed through the physical city's relationship with traditional forms of finance. When driving through the diamond district, the narrator describes "a scene that was rocking with commerce" (64). The narrator tells us that hundreds of "millions of dollars a day moved back and forth behind the walls, a form of money so obsolete Eric didn't know how to think about it. It was hard, shiny, faceted. It was everything he'd left behind or never encountered, cut and polished, intensely three-dimensional" (64). DeLillo's focus on the physical attributes of a diamond, that it is "hard, shiny, faceted...cut and polished" and "intensely three-dimensional" reinforces the materiality of the object. Yet it is during this scene where the narrator muses that the "street was

an offense to the truth of the future” (65); the street, like these physical examples of wealth, form part of “everything he’d left behind or never encountered” (64).

The notion is further explored when Packer is discussing property with a colleague, Vita Kinski. It is remarked that property “no longer has weight or shape. The only thing that matters is the price you pay...What did you buy for your one hundred and four million dollars? Not dozens of rooms, incomparable views, private elevators...You paid the money for the number itself. One hundred and four million. This is what you bought. And it’s worth it. The number justifies itself” (78). DeLillo again demonstrates this relationship later in the novel. The narrator states of the number “seven hundred and thirty-five million” that the “number seemed puny, a lottery jackpot shared by seventeen postal workers. The words sounded puny and tinny and he tried to be ashamed on her behalf. But it was all air anyway. It was air that flows from the mouth when words are spoken. It was lines of code that interact in simulated space” (124). DeLillo inverts the typical understanding of space: the real, physical space is understood as “simulated”, while the simulated, digital space becomes what is real.

Thus as Packer understands the world around him as “simulated” or governed by a digital space, Packer’s *flânerie* can be understood as an action that takes part in this digital space. The key basis for this comes

through the way in which Packer imagines himself throughout the novel, and echoes an argument suggested by Nichola Merola. Merola argues that for “Packer, the digital, as experienced through bits of electronic information, often displaces the biological” (832). Packer comes to view his existence almost entirely in terms of the digital. This comes to a head during one of his medical examinations, when Packer receives an echocardiogram, a procedure which produces a sonogram of the heart. The narrator tells us how “Eric was on his back, with a skewed view of the monitor, and wasn’t sure whether he was watching a computerised mapping of his heart or a picture of the thing itself” (44). Yet this digital reproduction of Packer’s heart causes him to have an existential moment. Packer feels “dwarfed” as the heart “throbbed forcefully on-screen (44)”. Packer’s experience is likened to an epiphany, as the narrator describes the “mystery” Packer glimpses and that he “felt the passion of the body, its adaptive drive over geologic time, the poetry and chemistry of its origins in the dust of exploding stars” (44). Perhaps most importantly, Packer seemingly understands this digital reproduction of the heart as the real thing; “it awed him, to see his life beneath his breastbone in image-forming units, hammering on outside him” (44), as in the same moment, the idea forms that Packer’s life can continue outside of his physical self, and in the digital space, the same way he seemingly already imagines it. The narrator’s description of the scene

resonates with the exploration earlier in the novel, whereby the narrator considers “the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions”. What changes is not an understanding of the flâneur, but the space in which the flâneur imagines himself to exist. When constructing the self within a space, Packer’s space is digital, or as put by Packer’s associate Kinski, people have begun to be “absorbed into streams of information” (104).

Packer’s constant monitoring and involvement with the digital finance world, and subsequent understanding of himself in the digital space, asks the question of whether he can be lost in the “bits of electronic information” in the same way that Auster’s flâneur loses himself in the streets of New York. Packer travels through New York in his limousine, with the same exploratory gaze as the flâneur, yet mediates this experience. This hesitancy expose himself to the city around him speaks to a flâneur figure who is similar to the figure put forth by Benjamin, yet different in the space in which he imagines his own existence. If Packer imagines himself as a digital entity, then subsequently, his flânerie may be imagined as exploring the various avenues of the digital world. There is a parallel between the way Auster discusses the “labyrinth” of New York and Packer’s understanding of the Japanese Yen. The narrator tells us that Packer “knew there was something no one had detected, a pattern latent in nature itself, a leap of

pictorial language that went beyond the standard models of technical analysis and out-predicted even the arcane charting of his own followers in the field. There had to be a way to explain the yen” (63). The idea that the Yen and its position in a system of digital finance, is unknowable, unpredictable and essentially a mystery, finds a parallel with the material New York being described by Auster. The search for a “pattern” and the search for an explanation mimics the city being put forth by Auster. Similarly, Packer’s obsession with this digital space, produces an iteration of the flâneur who does not go “botanizing on the asphalt”, but instead in the ones and zeroes of the digital realm. Packer, as an iteration of the flâneur is not so different to Benjamin’s original conception; what has changed is the space in which he moves through, rather than the way in which he moves through it.

Returning to Bijan Stephens article in *The Paris Review*, it is in the comments section that we might find our cue for future thought. The user Richard Grayson comments “You can’t be a flâneur with a screen in front of your face”, whereas user Candra Bryson states “the internet is one more metropolis, a warren of alleys and boulevards, unlimited shops and courtyards, and the never-ending surprises of humanity”. What we have in *Cosmopolis* is a flâneur figure who constructs the self within the digital space, specifically the digital space of cyberfinance. This has consequences for the way he operates and moves through the physical

space around him; Packer is the 21<sup>st</sup> century flâneur, who operates, first and foremost, within this digital space. That the act of flânerie may have changed is just one small repercussion of the change in how we imagine ourselves in a world increasingly populated by screens, and increasingly digital.

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