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LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | CRITICAL ESSAY

Paul Virilio's dromology and the postmodern city in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

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Abstract: Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) portrays, among other things, New York as a postmodern city. DeLillo's fiction above all probes how contemporary American consciousness is largely shaped by the incursion of technology into daily life. In DeLillo's novels, technology figures as largely determining the possibilities of action and influencing the very nature of perception. As such, we argue, *Cosmopolis* could be read rewardingly through Paul Virilio's theories. The objective is to examine the portrayal of New York as a postmodern city in the novel through Virilio's theorization of technology and its concomitant dromology.

Subjects: Literature & Culture; Literature & Philosophy; Critical Concepts

Keywords: Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*; dromology; New York; Paul Virilio; postmodern city; technology

1. Introduction

As Jerry A. Varsava shrewdly points out, DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, as a brilliant novel of ideas, portrays not just a day in the life of the 28-year-old Eric Packer, a Manhattan asset manager and multi-billionaire, but also a day in New York as a postmodern city (2005, p. 83). The novel's historiographical concerns are evident right at the beginning. In "In the Ruins of the Future," Don DeLillo writes about the characteristics of the time when *Cosmopolis*' story occurs: "In the past decade ... [t]he dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the Internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit" (2001, para. 1). The action of *Cosmopolis* is limited to a day in April 2000, as Eric, a currency trader and fund manager, tries to find his way in a luxurious and

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Ours is an era defined by speed. Paul Virilio, the contemporary French thinker, is one of the most important theorists of speed (dromology) and technology. He has amply discussed their role in human history, especially in the modern times. Among the contemporary writers, Don DeLillo is also centrally concerned with aspects of (post) modernity including speed, technology and virtuality (also elaborated by Virilio). Reading the American writer in conjunction with the French theorist could shed new light on the significance of the former and the relevance of the latter. Such a reading (focused on the novel *Cosmopolis*) can enhance our understanding of some seminal aspects of the contemporary scene.

technologically sophisticated stretch limousine—which seems to be the representative of a global communication and trading center—through the traffic jam of mid-town Manhattan to get a haircut in his childhood neighborhood, Hell’s Kitchen. Through his one-day journey, Eric goes through different events and places including multicultural traffic around the United Nation, the Diamond District, a presidential visit, a funeral ceremony for a Sufi rap star, an anti-globalization riot, a celebrity pie-attack, filming of a movie, and much more. Along the way, the hero meets his wife for several times by chance, seeing her in a taxi, a bookstore, and lying naked in the street while participating in a movie as an extra. Through the course of the day, the hero loses large amounts of money by betting against the rise of the yen, a loss that represents his own fall. However, Eric seems to be unbothered by the loss of so much money, even stopping to make sure he loses his wife’s fortune as well, to ensure his ruin is certain.

Reviews for *Cosmopolis* are generally mixed to negative, especially compared to many of DeLillo’s previous novels. While Peter Wolfe calls the book “eerily brilliant” and avers that it “confirms Don DeLillo’s place among [the best writers] elites” (2004, p. 183, 185), several high-profile critics and novelists—notably John Updike—express their objections to the novel’s style and tone (2003). When asked in a 2005 interview by Bou and Thoret how he felt about the novel’s mixed reception compared to the broader positive response to *Underworld*, DeLillo remarked: “I try to stay detached from that aspect of my work as a writer. I didn’t read any reviews or articles. Maybe it [the negative reception] was connected to September 11. I’d almost finished writing the book when the attacks took place, and so they couldn’t have had any influence on the book’s conception, nor on its writing. Perhaps for certain readers this upset their expectations” (2005, para. 8). However, subsequently critical opinions have been revised, and the novel has later been considered precious for its views on the flaws and weaknesses of the international financial system and cyber capital.

Joseph M. Conte explains that DeLillo’s many observant readers have commented on the premonitory quality of the catastrophes that occur in his works. The airborne toxic event that descends upon a small college town in *White Noise*, for example, seems a prelude to the release of methyl isocyanate gas from the union carbide plant in Bhopal, India, that same year (2008, p. 180). Although it is set in April 2000, *Cosmopolis* is Don DeLillo’s first post-9/11 novel. Don DeLillo is a New York-based author who has always been concerned with themes of terrorism and technology. As his novels usually involve the World Trade Center, DeLillo’s name has frequently been associated with 9/11, as if he had foreseen it. Of course, DeLillo’s next novel after *Cosmopolis*, *Falling Man*, begins and ends on the morning of September 11, 2001, focusing on the trauma of the planes. However, by comparison, according to Randy Laist, *Cosmopolis* seems intentionally to confine its concentration to matters of cutting-edge technology, high finance, and cyber capital (2010, p. 257).

In his fiction, Don DeLillo shows how contemporary American consciousness is shaped by the penetration of modern technologies into daily life. In DeLillo’s fictions, technological apparatuses such as television sets, filmic images, telephones, computers, and nuclear bombs are not simply objects in the world of characters functioning to designate a period. Rather in his novels, DeLillo depicts how modern technology can shape the possibilities of action, and influence the very nature of human perception. In fact, it seems that Don DeLillo is particularly intrigued with technology’s role in changing perceptions and values. In this regard, Conte, for instance, states: “Americans are inclined to believe that they have invented the future. Technology becomes our belief system, our fate, a miracle that we ourselves produce. Unmatched technological superiority is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet” (2008, p. 185). “Speed is God, and time is the devil,” says David Hancock, head of Hitachi Corporation (cited in Varsava, 2005, p. 90). This slogan shows the frenetic spirit at work today in high-tech product development as depicted by DeLillo in *Cosmopolis*.

Paul Virilio is a contemporary French theorist who has amply discussed the significance of speed and technology in the postmodern era. Through a close reading of *Cosmopolis* and Virilio’s theories, the present paper aims to contribute to current criticism on DeLillo’s postmodernist fiction. While

much of the criticism on *Cosmopolis* has focused on its premonitory quality concerning 9/11, and its relationship to American popular culture, there is no comprehensive discussion of the postmodern city in the light of Virilio's ideas concerning speed and technology. The current paper offers the discussion. An attempt is made to read DeLillo's representations of the postmodern city in terms of Virilio's views on technology and dromology as well as the related concepts of telepresence and disappearance.

Paul Virilio is one of the most significant and original thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century. His primary concern is with questions of perception and embodiment as well as those of social and political development. According to Ian James, he is preoccupied with a wide range of issues: with questions of war and military strategy, with the history of cinema, the nature of modern media and telecommunications as well as the state of contemporary cultural and artistic production (2007, p. 1). Within this broad range of concerns, technology and speed seem to be two central and determining themes in his work. Virilio's writings show us how and why technology and speed have been and will continue to be fundamental to the shaping of human experience and historical development. James continues to explain that we usually tend to see technological devices as tools to be used to certain ends. In doing so, we often assume that such tools are, in themselves, neutral and value-free. However, this view ignores the fact that our everyday activities, our movements, our forms of communications are structured very profoundly by the technologies that we use (2007, p. 2). Similarly, David Kaplan believes that "human life is thoroughly permeated by technology. Technological devices or systems shape our culture and environment and alter patterns of human activity and influence who we are and how we live" (2004, p. xiii).

Virilio is best known as a thinker of speed and of the way in which the increasing speeds of transmission have shaped not only individual perception but also social, political, and cultural life. Speed is a key idea in Virilio's writing. However, according to James, he is not solely concerned with the acceleration of movement and transmission brought about by modern technology. He is as much interested in slowing down or deceleration as he is in acceleration. Modern transport and communications technology not only allow us to move very fast or communicate immediately across long distances, but also it forces us, as bodies, to spend more time in inert and stationary positions (James, 2007, p. 2). It was Paul Virilio who for the first time introduced the term dromology, derived from the Greek *dromos* meaning race or racecourse. In defining the concept of dromology as the science of speed, Virilio in *Politics of the Very Worst* explains that

Speed enables us to see. It does not simply allow you to arrive at your destination more quickly, rather it enables you to see and foresee. To see, yesterday, with photography and cinema, and to foresee, today, with electronics, the calculator and computer. Speed changes the world vision. In the nineteenth century, with photography and cinema, world vision became objective ... It can be said that today, vision is becoming "teleobjective". That is to say that television and multimedia are collapsing the close shots of time and space as a photograph collapses the horizon in the telephotographic lens. Thus speed enables you to see differently, and it is beginning with the nineteenth century that this world vision changes and public space becomes a public image through photography, cinematography and television. (1999, p. 21)

With the emphasis put on movement and on speed of transmission as key forces which shape our life and perception, it is of no surprise that Virilio at times expresses some startling claims. For instance, in *Speed and Politics* he asserts that "there was no industrial revolution," but only a "dromocratic revolution; there is no democracy, only dromocracy" (1986, p. 46).

Speed, then, is the element which unifies all of Virilio's writings about the impact of modern technologies on perception and on social, political and military development. In *Negative Horizon*, Virilio claims that speed is "a destiny at the same time as being a destination" (2005b, p. 42). However, as James states, in order to understand the meaning of speed in Virilio's thinking we should put aside

our usual way of thinking, viewing, and understanding speed in order to grasp the meaning it has for him (2007, p. 32). Virilio, in *Open Sky*, tries to differentiate his understanding of speed from its everyday meaning: “In effect, speed does not solely permit us to move more easily, above all it permits us to see, to hear, to perceive, and thus to conceive more intensively the present world” (1997, p. 12).

2. Virtualization: Desertification of lived embodied experience

One of the major themes or concern with regard to dromology is virtualization or what Virilio, in *Negative Horizon*, calls “desertification” of lived embodied experience (2005b, p. 38). Virilio believes that the accelerated speeds of transmission and communication caused by modern technologies lead to a loss of immediate presence and a diminution of lived embodied experience. This is a theme which runs throughout his writings and which is often expressed in catastrophic terms. The ability to traverse the world at high speed, either via the accelerated rapidity of transports or in the instantaneity of telecommunication is viewed in terms of a negation of the space, volume, or extension of the world. This negative attitude is just like a constant refrain throughout Virilio’s works. For instance, Virilio says: “from now on all is extreme, the end of the world can be felt in this situation which results from the super-conductibility of milieus just as it does from the hyper-communicability of means” (cited in James, 2007, pp. 45–46); or in *City of Panic*, he insists that “the slow miniaturization of our terrestrial habit’s proportions, through the constant acceleration of all paths, is an insidious form of the desertification of the world” (2005a, p. 113). In fact, Virilio’s general contention in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* is that a world of accelerated speed is one in which there is “a decline in existence,” a “crisis of dimensions and of representation” (1991a, pp. 37, 50). Moreover, in *Negative Horizon*, he refers to some sort of loss of density, durability and thickness of physical bodies in his discussion of virtual and actual presence: “Speed now attacks the very density of masses, as if the objective had suddenly become the durability and thickness of the physical body as a whole” (2005b, pp. 125–126)

3. Disappearance and tele-presence

In speaking about cinema, Virilio makes a distinction between an “aesthetic of appearance” on the one hand and an ‘aesthetic of disappearance’ on the other. In *The Lost Dimension*, he describes this shift from esthetic of appearance to one of disappearance in the following terms: “From the aesthetic of appearance of a stable image, present by virtue of its static form, to the aesthetic of disappearance of an unstable image present by virtue of its (cinematic, cinematographic ...) flight, we have experienced a great transmutation of representations. The emergence of forms, of volumes destined to persist in the duration of their material support has been succeeded by images whose sole duration is that of retinal persistence” (1991b, pp. 25–26). Here, Virilio does not discuss merely a difference in the way we view different types of art but rather different ways of seeing which can shape our habit of perception in new modes. In fact, as James observes “media and visual space, in general, give us an image of the world of sensible appearances in which spatiality and temporality are transformed” (2007, p. 51). With the advent of cinema, as James adds, the intervals of time and space which might separate, for instance, an audience in the eastern part of the world from one in the western part are removed in favor of seeing at a distance which negates the need to travel in order to see. So the visible image arrives when no departure has really happened (2007, p. 52).

The general account of the virtualization of experience that is given in Virilio’s works such as *The Lost Dimension*, *The Vision Machine* and *Polar Inertia* relies on the idea of telepresence affected by the speed machines of modern communications and media. In fact, James asserts that one fails to apprehend that, within the teleimage, distance prevails over proximity, the time of transmission prevails over the spatial materiality of sensible presence, and, above all, what is present is so only in its absence. This Virilio calls “tele-presence” (2007, p. 55). What follows focuses on instances of disappearance and telepresence and their significance in DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*.

4. The concept of disappearance in *cosmopolis*

If recent American literature provides an example of the variety of compulsion toward self-negation, it is certainly DeLillo's Eric Packer, according to Randy Laist, "who pursues the techno-scientific concept of disappearance to the brink of self-destruction, and beyond" (2010, p. 259). In fact, Eric's enormous wealth is his most immediately conspicuous attribute, and many commentaries on *Cosmopolis* have read the novel as a parable about capitalism and ethics. Russell Scott Valentino (2007), for example, draws a moral about the decline of civic virtue, or Jerry A. Varsava comments that Eric's violation of the social contract is egregious enough to render him "an incarnation of evil" (2005, p. 80). Although these are certainly useful critical comments, it seems that DeLillo in *Cosmopolis* is much more concerned with Eric's technological environment rather than his interest in money., as Laist notes, "rather than using technology as a means of making money, Eric engages in money-making as a way of immersing himself into the electronic data stream of global informat-ics" (2010, p. 259).

Don DeLillo in "In the Ruins of the Future" posits that "technology is our fate, our truth [...] The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don't have to depend on God or prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment" (2001, para. 53). In the novel, Vija Kinski, Eric's Chief of Theory, seems to speak for DeLillo when she says: "Technology is crucial to civilization. Why? Because it helps us make our fate. We don't need God or miracles ..." (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 95). Kinski seems to see truth as a technologically mediated construction. However, it seems that there is a difference between DeLillo's and Virilio's ideas concerning technology in this respect. Although Virilio in *Politics of the Very Worst* overtly asserts that he is not against technological development, he believes that there is no utopia beyond this technological progress either: "The same idealism that caused the catastrophes and ravages of the twentieth century is resurfacing today. I am definitely not against progress, but after the ecological and ethical catastrophes we have seen, not only Auschwitz but also Hiroshima, it would be unforgivable to allow ourselves to be deceived by the kind of utopia which insinuates that technology will ultimately bring about happiness and a greater sense of humanity" (1999, p. 79).

Eric asserts that "Freud is finished, Einstein's next" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 6). It seems that, as Laist comments, Eric looks forward to a psychology that is corresponding to the physics of space and time (2010, p. 261). He lives in a post-human state. As N. Katherine Hayles explains, "in the post-human, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals" (1999, p. 3). This Einsteinian model of psychology is particularly applicable to the effect of digital technologies, so infused into the phenomenology of modern existence that non-mediated experience is described by expressions such as "meat space" and "real time" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, pp. 64, 52). "[M]eat space" or "original space" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 209) is a secondary or derivative sphere. Eric's real life takes place in the universe of electronic data: "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" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 24). The narration in this instance gives us the impression that Eric's world is one of complex data systems, and his capacity to predict the patterns of financial data indicates that he does his best to live successfully within his technological environment: he "paused in every room, absorbing what was there, deeply seeing, retaining every fleck of energy in rays and waves" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 8).

Paul Virilio, just like DeLillo, is obsessed with a technology saturated world. In "The Art of the Motor" he speculates: "Since the real environment—urban and rural space—could no longer escape the influence of electromagnetic networks, the possibility of reconditioning it by a virtual, fundamentally cybernetic environment became a reality. As a result, the incredible opportunity even arose of adding an extra, though simulated dimension to the normal dimensions of human activity: computer-generated cyberspace thereafter introducing a fractional dimension alongside the whole

dimension of our customary milieu” (1998a, p. 154). Vija’s statement (“The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make room for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential,” *Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 79) refers to a kind of temporality that accelerates toward the future at the expense of the present. The temporality *White Noise*’s Jack Gladney dreads when he says, “Let’s enjoy these aimless days while we can, I told myself, fearing some kind of deft acceleration” (*White Noise* 1985, p. 18) is precisely the time sense which is significant to Eric. The significance of rapid pace of technological progress is also a salient theme in Virilio’s writing. In “The Art of the Motor” he insists that the “... classic object of this twentieth century, now drawing to a close, is thus not, as ecologists have feared, the nuclear power station, but the particle accelerator. History is not the geopolitics of people that have succeeded each other over ages. It is also the implementation of the energy available in each particular period—formerly metabolic, then mechanical, relative speed, and absolute speed today with the boom in electromagnetic systems” (1998a, pp. 157–158).

According to Laist, Eric is so profoundly obsessed with novelty that in his view the most advanced piece of technology is already obsolete by the time it appears as a result of the high pace of technology. Eric always behaves in a manner in which the most recent technologies are outdated in comparison with their future models (2010, p. 263). Sometimes it is just the word for an object that has become obsolete. For example, the word “skyscraper” is too outdated for Eric: “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” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 9). It can be claimed that the culture to which Eric belongs is an example of accelerated culture for which Virilio is a theorist. According to Steve Redhead in *Paul Virilio: Theorist for an Accelerated Culture*, popular culture, which is characterized not by content but increasingly by the speed with which its products become outdated, and recycled, or by the speed with which the underground becomes overground (and vice versa), is one contemporary example of accelerated culture (2004, pp. 49–50).

As his assassin Richard Sheets, alias Benno Levin, will observe, Eric is always “thinking past what is new;” he “wants to be one civilization ahead of this one” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 152). Although like all human beings he is limited by the present, he always tries to surpass the present through seeking for futurity. Frequently over the course of the novel, he refers to antiquated technologies and their dated signifiers. For instance, he complains about the Automatic Teller Machine: “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” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 54). Reflecting on Torval’s ear buds, Eric critiques their antiquity to add another instance to his complaint of outdated technological devices: “He knew these devices were already vestigial. They were degenerate structures” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 19). His complaints in this regard are frequent: “He wanted to understand why cash registers were not confined to display cases in a museum of cash registers in Philadelphia and Zurich” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 71); “He wanted to ask the man why he was still using such a contraption, still calling it what he called it, carrying the nitwit rhyme out of the age of industrial glut into smart spaces built on beams of light” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 102).

As Laist observes, not only have the names of the things but also the things themselves become out of date by a future that is already here (2010, p. 263). For instance, it seems that DeLillo himself does not know what to call Eric’s “hand organizer”: “The hand device itself was an object whose original culture has just about disappeared. He knew he’d have to junk it” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 9). Moreover, Eric points out that “the word computer sounds backward and dumb” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 104) but Vija explains that computers themselves “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” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 104). In fact, for both Eric and Vija the past is disappearing into the future through technology. “Computer power,” says Vija, “eliminates 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” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 86).

It seems that Eric's limousine is the representative for a futurized micro-environment. In fact, it is a global communications center and a symbol for the process of globalization. As Eric passes through Manhattan's Diamond District, he encounters different scenes including Africans with sandwich boards, a woman with a baby in arms who is begging, the handshake and Yiddish blessing that confirm each exchange. In fact, the setting outside Eric's limousine reminds him of public places where business is done directly and with no technological mediation. As Laist maintains, that is why what is outside his car in the street seems very primitive to Eric (2010, p. 264): "the street was an offense to the truth of the future" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 65).

In *Negative Horizon*, Virilio's reflections seem to be very much along the same lines as those of DeLillo; there, Virilio refers to some sort of loss of density, durability, and thickness of physical bodies in his discussion about teletopology and actual and virtual presence: "speed now attacks the very density of masses, as if the objective had suddenly become the durability and thickness of the physical body as a whole" (2005b, pp. 125–126). For Virilio, "technology now aspires to occupy the body." The body itself is the "last remaining territory" (cited in Redhead, 2004, p. 42). New technologies for Virilio make human habitation possible without movement. In *Politics of the Very Worst* Virilio notes that

the question of domestics is related to both the questions of inhabited space or the habitation—"house", "dwelling"—and that of the relation to the body of the inhabitant ... The human body is the reference for its habitat. The ergonomic dimension of the body must be taken into consideration in the habitat. However, the new technologies make habitation possible without moving. With domestics, it's not television channels that are zapped but rather the lights, the heat and the opening of the shutters. You don't have to go to the window to open it, just zap it. So there is a kind of reference to a handicapped body and no longer to a locomotive body. The over-equipped able-body of domestics, the one that experiences home automation, is the equivalent of the equipped invalid. (1999, p. 66)

It seems that the primary function of Eric's limousine is to make him disengaged from the exterior world. However, this engagement is unique. Although Eric is apart from the world physically, he is in connection with it through the electronic technologies by which the limousine's interior is permeated: "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, handsome and airy, with protean potential" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 35). Eric's limousine seems to be a good example of Virilio's concept of negative and positive speed or deceleration and acceleration of movement. Virilio has frequently stated in his interviews that "what interests me is their totality, the two of them" (cited in Redhead, 2004, p. 53). In fact, Virilio points out to an era when the human body might "disappear." He speaks about new forms of sedentariness to which he refers as "polar inertia" (cited in Redhead, 2004, p. 41). For instance, Virilio in *Pure War* explains that when a businessman travels from Paris to New York,

... by Concorde, he begins to experience the situation of polar inertia. This new form of sedentariness is the active tendency in technology. Sedentariness in the instant of absolute speed. It's no longer a sedentariness of non-movement, it's the opposite ... The sedentaries of transportation are very simply travelers who buy a plane ticket at Roissy-en-France at Orly- for Roissy or Orly. They go around the world as fast as possible without going anywhere, barely making the necessary refueling stop, and nothing else ... I think it's a form of desire for inertia, desire for ubiquity, instantaneousness. (Virilio & Lotringer, 1997, p. 69)

Comparably, it seems that for Eric the ideal technological environment is his car in which technology is in "airy" forms with little or no spatial features: "He used to sit here in hand-held space but that was finished now. The context was nearly touchless. He could talk most systems into operation or wave a hand at a screen and make it go blank" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 13). At issue here is the way in which the old fashioned technology in Eric's limousine has disappeared and been replaced by the most advanced one. Eric seems to be so adapted to his highly technological environment that his

consciousness has turned to an informatics storage which does not need to read or study data but simply absorbs it: “He sat in the club chair at the rear of the cabin looking into the array of visual display units. There were medleys of data on every screen, all the flowing symbols and alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing. He absorbed this material in a couple of long still seconds ...” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 13). This tendency to disappear and being absorbed by technology is very well depicted by Kinski, Eric’s chief of theory, in the following sentences: “He 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 whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from the void” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 206). However, the relationship between man and technological data in this postmodern/post-human age is nowhere presented more clearly than in the scene where Eric sees the image of his own beating heart during his physical checkup: “[Eric] wasn’t sure whether he was watching a computerized mapping of his heart or a picture of the thing itself. It throbbed forcefully on-screen. The image was only a foot away but the heart assumed another context, one of distance and immensity, beating in the blood plum raptures of a galaxy formation[...] How dwarfed he felt by his own heart. There it was and it awed him, to see his life beneath his breastbone in image-forming units, hammering on outside him” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 44). Eric seems to be utterly surprised seeing his own digital image-self being reflected via the global information technology. Even Eric’s real being is transformed into a digitalized self as he is in the habit of having himself under the constant gaze of a webcam that transmits his image to a screen in his car. That is, Eric’s real self has no way to disappear into a virtual one in such a technological setting. Thus, confirmed here is Virilio’s theory about the duplication of reality. In an interview with Carlos Oliveira, Virilio theorizes that:

We face a duplication of reality. The virtual reality and the “real” reality double the relationship to the real, something that to the best of my knowledge, results in clear pathological consequences ... “To be” used to mean to be somewhere, to be situated, in the here and now, but the “situation” of the essence of being is undermined by the instantaneity, the immediacy and the ubiquity which are characteristic of our epoch. Our contemporaries will henceforth need two watches: one to watch the time, the other to watch the place where one actually is. This double-watch will be necessary for the duplication of reality that is occurring. Reality is becoming a stereo-reality. (1996, para. 48)

Moreover, Jaron Lanier reckons that, “when Virtual Reality becomes widely available around the turn of the century, it will not be seen as a medium used within physical reality, but rather as an additional reality. VR opens up a new continent of ideas and possibilities” (cited in Virilio, 1998a, p. 159).

Eric’s immersing into the world of electronic technologies makes him able of seeing his immediate future occurring in the digital screen within the cramped space of his car. He begins to see “things that haven’t happened yet” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 22). His actual self, thus, becomes derivative in relation to his virtual self. One of the characteristics of virtual presence is that it is free from the usual temporality in which the actual presence is entrapped. For example, when Eric sees Arthur Rapp assassinated “live on the Money Chanel,” he is able to watch it happen again and again: “Eric watched him sign a document on one screen and prepare to die on another” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 33). Indeed, Arthur Rapp’s mediated death has been liberated from time and space. The reason why Eric is so much fascinated with Arthur Rapp’s video of assassination might be because it represents the capacity of technology to change the nature of death through digital recording and broadcasting. Laist explains that technology gives human being a version of future in which there is no death. People die, technology advances. The identification of people with technology will lead into the disappearance of death (2010, p. 268). This is exemplified in the novel thus: “People will not die. Isn’t it the creed of the new culture? People will be absorbed in streams of information [...] Microchips so small and powerful. Humans and computers merge [...] and never-ending life begins” (*Cosmopolis*, pp. 104–105). The disappearance of the present into the future proceeds to the point where Eric notices that his actual presence is behind his virtual one. At first, Eric sees a minor gesture in his car screen moments before he makes it in real space. In the next instance, he observes something odd in the monitor. He sees his eyes closed in a mirror-image: “He knew the spycam operated in real time, or

was supposed to. How could he see himself if his eyes were closed? There wasn't time to analyze. He felt his body catching up to the independent image" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 52). The next time Eric foresees his own reaction to the dreadful sound of a bomb exploding outside in the street: "His own image caught his eye, live on the oval screen beneath the spycam. Some seconds passed. He saw himself recoil in shock. More time passed. He felt suspended, waiting. Then there was a detonation, loud and deep, near enough to consume all the information around him. He recoiled in shock" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 93). It can be said that as a consequence of the technological development, the representation or virtual presence become primary and the reality or actual presence takes a secondary or derivative form. This mediation of experience continues to the point where Eric foresees his death via the screen of his watch as the novel ends: "He is dead inside the crystal of his watch, but still alive in original space, waiting for the shot to sound" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 209). According to Conte, in Eric's last experience of the sense of déjà vu—as he realizes he is already dead, shot by his stalker, Benno Levin—he is granted a vision of the ultimate union of cognition and information technology (2008, p. 186). It seems that the telepresent media images in postmodern world precede reality. However, the final scene of the novel can alternatively be interpreted as DeLillo's mockery of postmodern man's belief in the capacity of technology to perpetuate human life.

5. Virilio's idea of telepresence in *cosmopolis*

As mentioned before, through the concept of telepresence, Virilio in *The Lost Dimension* explains that technology of speed leads to a decline of lived spatial existence. He focuses on the manner in which the images of cinema and television are telepresent, that is, present at a distance or in their absence. Through the concept of telepresence the virtual comes to dominate over the actual. Virilio suggests that modern "vision machines" have invented a new way of seeing, that is, vision as mediated through the transmission of radio or electronic waves and these waves have the potential to give us a new consciousness concerning the world (1991b, p. 84).

Eric's life is inseparable from such modern "vision machines." He spends a whole day in his limousine and does almost all of his tasks in there. In reply to Shiner, Eric's chief of technology, asking "Any special reason we're in the car instead of the office?" Eric says "How do you know we're in the car instead of the office?" (*Cosmopolis*, pp. 14–15). That is, thanks to the speed of modern technology, spatial and temporal distances have disappeared. It is as if Eric were restating Virilio in "Continental Drift": "Even though information processing has always been central to industrial management, it is clear that in the post-industrial era hyper-concentrated real-time computer systems are taking over from the traditional administration office. Today, when the office is made up of all the places you visit, in person, in thought, alone or with other people, the new corporate headquarters is no more than a node of networks set up to facilitate the transfer of information to dispersed commercial units, units which more often than not make their own decisions" (1998b, p. 188). Philipp Wolf observes that speed and its agents "dissolve the traditional coordinates of time and space ... the successivity and continuity of both personal and communal history is replaced by the illusion of simultaneity" (2002, p. 177). In fact, the word office, as Eric maintains, has lost its traditional meaning in a postmodern city. It has disappeared into every place where one can do his job even from a long distance with the help of technological advancement. Virilio elaborates on this thus:

Indeed, if the technologies of the electronic workplace free employees from the firm, the eight-hour day and the strictly geographic constraints of the factory will in turn become outdated social concepts. The actions and the places that tied employees and unions together and ultimately gave expression, a framework, to their different status in the hierarchy of industrial labor, will tomorrow look like outmoded rituals. But while the high level of mobility and ubiquity of telecommuting certainly have their advantages, they also have a number of major drawbacks, in particular the fact that we can no longer draw a clear line between work and play, paid work now threatening to swamp all the private space and time we each thought we could do with as we pleased. (1998b, p. 188)

That is, there is no actual difference between a car and an office in a postmodern world. Modern man is entrapped in a state of non-movement. He/she can do his/her job in a stationary position. Just like Eric who can find every data, chart, number, and symbol available on his limousine's screens as if they were not some far away data coming from a distance to his car, but some information accessible in his office. The following passage epitomizes this situation. "He sat in the club chair at the rear of the cabin looking into the array of visual display units. There were medleys of data on every screen, all the flowing symbols, alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing. He absorbed this material in a couple of long still seconds, ignoring the speech sounds that issued from lacquered heads. There was a microwave and a heart monitor. He looked at the spycam on a swivel and it looked back at him" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 13). The DeLilloian description is reminiscent of Virilio in his book *Polar Inertia*. It was clear for English readers that, as Redhead mentions, Virilio had in fact been arguing for a long time that speeded-up technological society had made inertia the overriding modern condition (2004, p. 65).

Eric sees a need for airports no longer in order to add more evidence to the deceleration of bodily movement through advanced telecommunications in a postmodern city. He asks, "Why do we still have airports?" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 22). The only movement that Eric does to order more yen is to take a web phone out of a slot: "He sat down long enough to take a web phone out of a slot and execute an order for more yen" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 97). This is another example of the deceleration of movement—related to the idea of dromology—brought about as a result of the modern technology. Eric Gullichsen and Randy Walser note that "in CYBERSPACE, there is no need to move about in a body like the one you possess in physical reality. You may feel more comfortable, at first, with a body like your own but as you conduct more of your life and affairs in cyberspace your conditioned notion of a unique and immutable body will give way to a far more liberated notion of body as something quite disposable and, generally, limiting" (cited in Virilio, 1998a, p. 159; emphasis in original).

As Eric takes his tour through Manhattan, various local and global incidents take place. However, Virilio through his notion of "event" explains that in a speeded up society local events have turned out to be global due to the rapidity of mediation and broadcasting of incidents. Bernard Tschumi in the foreword to Virilio's *A Landscape of Events* explains the point thus: "Each collision is an event relayed by media-political, social, technological. No value judgments here: after all, an event is a kind of accident, one that arises from the unlikely collision of generally uncoordinated vectors. Accidents will happen. Conveyed by media culture, P.V.'s events are less here than now. His definition of the event is less in space than in time. P. V.'s thesis may be simply that time has finally overcome space as our main mode of perception" (2000, p. ix). For instance, Eric learns that Arthur Rapp, managing director of the IMF, has been murdered in North Korea. The event is captured for a global audience live on the Money Channel: "He was killed live on the Money Channel. It was past midnight in Pyongyang and he was making final comments to an interviewer for the benefit of North American audiences after a historic day and night of ceremonies, receptions, dinners, speeches, and toasts. Eric watched him sign a document on one screen and prepare to die on another. A man in short-sleeve shirt came into camera range and began to stab Arthur Rapp in the face and neck" (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 33). Later, the Times Square news-ticker records the murder of Nikolai Kaganovich, a Russian businessman. Seeing Arthur Rapp, managing director of the international monetary fund, killed live on the Money Channel is a good example for both Virilian ideas of telepresence and accident. Although the televisual images give us a fully false impression, according to James, the viewing of these mediated images becomes a habit for us. Thus, we fail to conceive that what is present is only so in its absence (2007, pp. 54–55).

As discussed before, in the phenomenon of telepresence, the mediated images become so real that one forgets about the existing spatial and temporal distance. To Virilio, what he calls "critical space" has become ubiquitous because of the "acceleration of means of communication" (cited in Redhead, 2004, p. 53). Systems of telecommunication in the transmission of messages and images also eradicate duration or delay in a speeded-up world. Virilio constantly refers in his interviews to

“tele-topia where tele-marketing, tele-employment, fax-work ... email transmissions at home, in apartments, or in cabled high rises create a world that is telepresent, meaning to be here and elsewhere at the same time” (cited in Redhead, 2004, p. 53). In fact, in the postmodern age, people prefer to see everything mediated and as some second-hand information. As an instance in DeLillo’s novel, although in one of the scenes of the novel Eric is in the middle of a protest, he prefers to see it mediated through the TV in his limousine; for Eric “[I]t made more sense on TV” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 89). Thus, in a postmodern city, Christian Moraru points out, it is the copy that legitimates reality (2003, p. 97). Babette, Gladney’s wife in *White Noise*, for example, in a similar way becomes suddenly far more interesting for her family when they see her on TV, when her body turns into an image, “second-order information” (King, cited in Moraru, 2003, p. 97). As Leclair notes, Babette must make a “detour” through the media in order to become “visible” because her relatives and friends react to information “rather than to entities” (cited in Moraru, 2003, p. 97). On the whole, it can be concluded that technology is pushing toward the death of time and space. Eric’s chief of technology, Shiner, summarizes this hastened world well, even as he wonders about the inherent value of it: “All this optimism, all this booming and soaring. Things happen like bang. This and that simultaneous ... I know there’s a thousand things you analyze every ten minutes. Patterns, ratios, indexes, whole maps of information. I love information. This is our sweetness and light. It’s a fuckall wonder. And we have meaning in the world. People eat and sleep in the shadow of what we do. But at the same time, what?” (*Cosmopolis*, 2004, p. 14).

6. Conclusion

DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* brings to light the environmental implications of technology and its relation to speed and as such raises questions about how man can adapt and survive in this technological environment. It seems that its protagonist is completely fused with technology itself, particularly the technologies of cybernetics and micro-processing that represent the most advanced development of his particular historical era. Technological advances in the postmodern era demonstrate the Virilian concept of disappearance—the absorption of human beings into cybernetic instruments, and then the absorption of the instruments themselves into whatever kind of environment they leave behind. Virilio, in *Ground Zero*, confirms the idea by stating that “the techno-scientific imagination has structured itself for some six hundred years around the concept of disappearance—of the inexorable enactment of the stripping down of the World of the substance of the living world” (2002, pp. 12–13). Also well exemplified in DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* is the Virilian notion of instantaneousness in the present replacing space and territory. Reading DeLillo through Virilio does not just confirm that many of the latter’s ideas are uncannily exemplified in the former’s fiction. At issue here is the sense of urgency intimated in the work of two seminal figures reflecting on modern times.

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