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Conclusion: Writing amid the ruins: 9/11 and *Cosmopolis*

The fall of the Towers

Many lives came to an abrupt end on the morning of September 11, 2001, among them those of a financial analyst with Cantor Fitzgerald in the World Trade Center who did not return to meet his wife at a suburban New Jersey commuter train station; a busboy in the Windows on the World restaurant with a second job lined up that evening in the Bronx; and a firefighter from Queens who had expected a day of camaraderie at the fire station. The 1990s had been marked by the technological acceleration and financial excesses of the information economy; but the freeze-frame shot of American Airlines Flight 11 penetrating the glass and steel carapace of the North Tower at 8:46 am brought this symbol of the United States's in preeminent place in multinational capitalism to ruins. Don DeLillo, who had nearly finished drafting his thirteenth novel, *Cosmopolis* (2003) at the time, shared in the collective seizure of the American mind. "Terror," he observes, "is now the world narrative, unquestionably. When those two buildings were struck, and when they collapsed, it was, in effect, an extraordinary blow to consciousness, and it changed everything."¹ After the terrorist attacks, DeLillo claims, "I took a long pause. I just didn't want to work for a while, although I wrote an essay on the attacks themselves. The attacks didn't affect the novel directly, but they certainly affected me."²

The action of *Cosmopolis* is confined to a single day in April 2000, as Eric Packer, a 28-year-old billionaire currency trader and fund manager attempts to make his way in a luxurious and technologically sophisticated stretch limousine through the gridlock of mid-town Manhattan to get a haircut. As Packer expends his vast personal fortune in order to leverage a dip in the Japanese yen, an unpredictable gyration of the market presages the "dotcom bubble" collapse. While some reviews of this post-9/11 novel have suggested that the novelist's imagination may have been overtaken by events, attention to the essay that DeLillo wrote during his pause in the completion of his

novel, “In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September,” published in December 2001, reveals that he has more presciently understood the character of this major phase-change in American culture than most of the “first responders” in newspapers, journals, and broadcast media.³

Although he declines to regard his fiction as prophetic, DeLillo’s novels are deeply seamed with moments of senseless violence and deliberate acts of terrorism – either emanating from the American psyche or calculated to disturb it with maximum effect. His 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* (1985) seems prelude to the release of methyl isocyanate gas from the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India, that same year.⁴ His magnum opus, *Underworld* (1997), is punctuated by the Texas highway killer whose random drive-away shootings prefigure the Washington, D.C. sniper attacks of 2002. *Mao II* (1991) notably features the “curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists” (*M* 41), the latter in the guise of the anti-Western militia chief Abu Rashid in civil war-torn Beirut. Appearing two years before the initial attack on the World Trade Center by the Islamist terrorist group al-Qa’eda in 1993, the novel regards the Towers through the reflex lens of photographer Brita Nilsson: “my big complaint is only partly size. The size is deadly. But having two of them is like a comment, it’s like a dialogue, only I don’t know what they’re saying” (*M* 40). Summarizing this theme of frightening prognostication, the critic Vince Passaro, in “Don DeLillo and the Towers,” calls our attention to the cover photograph of *Underworld*: “there it was, the two towers, dark and enshrouded (by fog, much as they had been by smoke early last Tuesday morning); before them the stark silhouette of the belfry of a nearby Church . . . and off to the side, a large bird, a gull or a large pigeon, making its way toward Tower One. It’s eerie and religious.”⁵ DeLillo would regard these episodes – the prevalence of terrorist acts in his fictions, the shadow cast by the Towers – not as premonitions of events as they have come to pass but as the gift of the novelist for expressing the latent crises in the culture before others have fully recognized them. Thus, confronted with the otherwise unspeakable loss of 9/11 – that is, not expressible in its enormity in any literary, artistic, or journalistic representation after the fact – the observant reader nevertheless experiences a kind of cognitive consonance when a writer such as DeLillo has already suggested that such an event might happen.

Eric Packer’s crosstown route on 47th Street in Manhattan takes him from his residence in the international district near the United Nations headquarters and the Japan Society on First Avenue, threading past Times Square and

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the Nasdaq Center to the south, and reaching the industrial lofts, tenements, and an underground garage past Eleventh Avenue; from dawn to nightfall; and from the bastions of wealth and global power to the squalid indigence of an abandoned warehouse. Of course, the World Trade Center on the lower West Side – still standing in April 2000 – is not to be seen on this route. But Packer’s conspicuously appointed 48-room penthouse triplex apartment, furnished with a lap pool, gymnasium, shark tank, and dog pen for his borzois, is situated in an 89-story building, at “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” (C 8–9). Packer’s building is thus 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. Although approving, Packer’s assessment of the gigantism of his building echoes Brita Nilsson’s view of the Towers. Packer’s building is symbolic of his brutal avariciousness, which is finally more disdainfully egotistical than it is mercantile; the collapse and destruction, however, is that of Packer’s fortune and his life, not the building’s. Alphonse Stompanato, chair of the department of American environments at the College-on-the-Hill in *White Noise*, advances a version of catastrophe theory that is mordantly humorous but instructive: “we’re suffering from brain fade. We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information” (WN 66). In millennial American culture, the catastrophe of the Towers seizes on consciousness, its terror breaking through the anomie of multinational capitalism and media saturation.

From the Cold War to the Age of Terror

One lesson of the 9/11 attacks is that we should no longer expect that changes in world culture will present themselves swathed in gradualism; rather, we should expect them to have the instantaneity of a paradigm shift in which suddenly none of the rules and explanations of the earlier regime applies. It may be that the dynamics of such a phase-change have been at work covertly before a new order is revealed, but the change, when it arrives, is not incremental but totalizing. DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* merits some comparison with James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), whose action follows the wandering of Leopold Bloom on June 16, 1904, as the modern epitome of what may be encapsulated in a single day. It is not a narrative gimmick that Eric Packer’s crosstown odyssey in *Cosmopolis* takes place on the day in April 2000, when the financial market suddenly lost its momentum and wobbled toward a collapse. DeLillo states that “I realized that the day on which this book takes

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place is the last day of an era.”⁶ Its narrative compression, the “sense of acceleration of time and of reality itself,”⁷ correlates with the assessment of his essay “In the Ruins of the Future,” which measures the acts of terror that in one day rewrote some three thousand life stories and changed the narrative of the American future.

DeLillo begins his essay by describing the world much as it was on that day in April 2000:

In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The 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.”⁸

Eric Packer is the lord of this domain, the very avatar of cyber-capital. As he brings his multibillion dollar investment fund to bear on the value of the Japanese yen, he asserts the preeminence of global capital over the power of even the Group of Eight national economies. By comparison, the President of the United States in his motorcade, which impedes Packer’s progress to the West Side, appears as a soft, “gynecoid” figure on the flat-panel monitors of Packer’s white, anonymous stretch limousine. The leader of the Free World appears as “the undead. He lived in a state of occult repose, waiting to be reanimated,” a corollary of the embalmed Lenin in his Red Square mausoleum (C 77). Packer no longer trades in or forecasts stocks that would have been associated with some sector of industrial or commercial production; now he concerns himself solely with charting and predicting the movement of money itself, seeking the “hidden rhythms in the fluctuation of a given currency” (C 76). The question of profit and loss is, in a sense, immaterial as he hedges the relative price of currencies in an electronically connected global market. It is a virtual economy, as Packer’s “chief of theory,” Vija Kinski – more a postmodernist than an economist – waxes: “I love the screens. The glow of cyber-capital. So radiant and seductive” (C 78). Echoing DeLillo’s assessment of the turn-of-the-millennium utopianism, she opines, “It’s cyber-capital that creates the future. What is the measurement called a nanosecond?” (C 79). The international currency markets the Nikkei and the Nasdaq never close. This is liquid-crystal globalism, virtual, instantaneous, and networked.

But all is changed utterly in a day. DeLillo apprehends that on September 11, “the world narrative belongs to terrorists” who target America’s technological modernity, its secularism, its imperialism, and the “power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind.”⁹ It is a counternarrative that

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repudiates US hegemony as the world's only future. Discussing *Cosmopolis* with interviewers, he states that the novel is poised liminally "between the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Age of Terror."¹⁰ Readers of *Underworld* will appreciate DeLillo's treatment of the Cold War, from the US discovery of Soviet nuclear testing in 1951 in the novel's prologue, "The Triumph of Death," to the post-Soviet entrepreneurialism in disposing of contaminated waste in Kazakhstan in the epilogue, "Das Kapital." The bilateral animus and the geographic spheres of influence of the NATO and Soviet blocs have dissipated. Yet, with a Cabinet staffed with Cold War warriors and a National Security Advisor in Condoleezza Rice who was a Soviet Union specialist, the Bush administration retained a dangerous "feeling of nostalgia for the Cold War"¹¹ through the very moment of shocked inaction by the President on the morning of September 11, 2001. DeLillo suggests in his essay that a counternarrative to the binary opposition of the United States and Russia needs to be articulated, one that describes the transnational politics of a new global order. In contrast to the thinking in the Oval Office, Packer deploys some of his cyber-capital to pick up a piece of Cold War kitsch, a decommissioned Soviet strategic bomber, "an old Tu-160. NATO calls it a Blackjack A," nuclear weapons and cruise missiles not included. Not purchased from the Russians, of course, but on the "black market and dirt cheap from a Belgian arms dealer in Kazakhstan" (C 103). It seems no more than a provocative anecdote meant to illustrate the transcendence of global capital over nation-states until one learns that after conceiving the episode, DeLillo read about a wealthy American in California who "owns a decommissioned MiG, a Soviet fighter plane."¹²

Just as the Cold War had its analysts, the Age of Terror must have its theorists. Jean Baudrillard's essay "The Spirit of Terrorism" offers a counternarrative by describing the singularity of globalization that has displaced the antithetical ideologies of the Cold War. He asks, "When the world has been so thoroughly monopolized, when power has been so formidably consolidated by the technocratic machine and the dogma of globalization, what means of turning the table remains besides terrorism?"¹³ As global capital has established a permeating hegemony over world culture, terrorism is a retrovirus that emerges as the dark agent, the counterforce, in this struggle for dominion. "Terrorism is the act that restores an irreducible singularity to the heart of a generalized system of exchange."¹⁴ In place of the ideological antithesis between capitalism and communism in the Cold War, globalization and terrorism each contend within a singular dynamic for a deterritorialized, transnational power. Fronted by multinational corporations and networked consumerism, globalization suffuses and appropriates world cultures. As DeLillo's minister of theory, Vija Kinski, states, there is nowhere

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one can “exist outside the market” (C 90). As we know, the terrorists occupy no strategic territory; they are not outside but inside the dominant system. Baudrillard concurs that

there is no longer a boundary that can hem terrorism in; it is at the heart of the very culture it’s fighting with, and the visible fracture (and the hatred) that pits the exploited and underdeveloped nations of the world against the West masks the dominant system’s internal fractures. It is as if every means of domination secreted its own antidote.¹⁵

He regards the ordeal of 9/11 as the first salvo in a fourth World War, after the end of European imperialism, Nazism, and Communism; but it is a war of “fractal complexity, waged worldwide against rebellious singularities that, in the manner of antibodies, mount a resistance in every cell.”¹⁶

DeLillo’s assessment of the Age of Terror, expressed in “In the Ruins of the Future,” is comparable in some respects to Baudrillard’s: “With the end of Communism, the ideas and principles of modern democracy were seen clearly to prevail, whatever the inequalities of the system itself. This is still the case. But now there is a global theocratic state, unboundaried and floating and so obsolete it must depend on suicidal fervor to gain its aims.”¹⁷ It is disconcerting to regard how representative democracy, or “freedom on the march,” has subsequently been employed as a shill for globalization in the war in Iraq; and likewise, the improvised explosive devices deployed in automobiles, backpacks, and roadside caches has become the weapon *du jour* in Baghdad, Bali, London, and Madrid by clandestine, border-crossing terrorists in support of a transnational Islamist theocracy. [CONTE QUERY ON THIS SENTENCE T/C] Yet Baudrillard cautions that the “phantom of America” should not be taken as the incarnation of globalization, any more than the “phantom of Islam” should be equated with terrorism. Global capitalism and the Islamist theocracy are narrative and counternarrative, the technological future and the fundamentalist past, in the fashioning of a new global order.

The episode that concludes Part One of *Cosmopolis*, as Packer’s limousine passes Times Square and crosses Broadway from the East Side to the West Side of Manhattan, involves a violent demonstration by red-and-black-clad anarchists at the Nasdaq Exchange, trading floor for technology stocks in the new economy. In their attack on the fortress of cyber-capital, the protesters are the new Luddites, setting off a bomb outside an investment bank and changing the electronic stock ticker to declare, “a specter is haunting the world – the specter of capitalism,” a variation of the first sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*, written as a response to the ills of industrial capitalism in 1848 (C 96).¹⁸ Although not advocates of a transnational Islamist

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theocracy, the anarchists who rock Packer's limousine behave as vectors of the counternarrative. Kinski, riding with Packer, sounds much like Baudrillard in her understanding that because "market culture is total," it "breeds these men and women. They are necessary to the system they despise" (C 90). Cyber-capital and terrorism contend within the singularity of global power. As presented through Packer's sensibility, the episode is a "market fantasy" that illustrates the interdependence of the system of domination and its antidote, the host and its vector: "The protest was a form of systemic hygiene, purging and lubricating. It attested again, for the ten thousandth time, to the market culture's innovative brilliance, its ability to shape itself to its own flexible ends, absorbing everything around it" (C 99). Packer's confidence that such antiglobalization protests serve only to confirm the totality of the system is shaken by the self-immolation of one of the protesters in the street. This act of ritual suicide, evoking the Buddhist monks in South Vietnam and the four Americans who in the mid-1960s immolated themselves protesting against the war in Vietnam, may be a "thing outside" the reach of globalization. Although Kinski declares the gesture unoriginal, self-immolation represents a pure form of protest against totalizing political systems and other forms of oppression; the extreme act works as a statement that counters the totality of the market's absorption with a body consumed by fire. Unlike the suicidal attacks of 9/11, however, ritual self-immolation involves no other victims and is intended as an appeal to nonviolence.

Technology and the lethal believer

The 9/11 attacks staged a morality play in which the proponents of a twenty-first century figured in virtual space, technological complexity, and globally networked information systems are confronted by the fanatical adherents of an anti-enlightenment religion, moral absolutism, and medieval retribution. Americans are inclined to believe that they have "invented the future."¹⁹ 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."²⁰ In *Cosmopolis* Packer possesses an almost preternatural ability to recognize the patterns in currency values that shift in nanoseconds and cyber-capital that is traded instantaneously on the Nikkei and Nasdaq markets. He assumes the hieratic role of the prophet. His fortune depends on his recognition that

speed is the point. Never mind the urgent and endless replenishment, the way data dissolves at one end of the series just as it takes shape at the other. This is

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the point, the thrust, the future. We are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle, or information made sacred, ritually unreadable. The small monitors of the office, home and car become a kind of idolatry here, where crowds might gather in astonishment" (C 80)

So attuned is Packer to the future that he repeatedly literalizes the rhetorical trope known as "hysteron proteron"; that is, as he scans the several digital monitors mounted in his limousine, he experiences an effect before its cause. Among Packer's premonitions is observing himself onscreen recoiling in shock from the Nasdaq bombing before the actual blast occurs. Kinski declares it a sign of his genius – how else could Packer anticipate fluctuations in world currency? – evidence of the "polymath, the true futurist" (C 95). Yet she warns that while technology "helps us make our fate ... it is also crouched and undecidable. It can go either way" – indeed, the Japanese yen defies Packer's hedged bet and rises (C 95).

Packer bears witness to the imminent coming of the technological sublime. In historical terms, he apprehends the shift from the postwar order of the military-industrial complex that directed both strategic arms and anticommunist incursions to a world order based on the "interaction between technology and capital. The inseparability" (C 23). Prophets are adept at reading the signs in nature of the advent of messianic power, and while Packer traverses the city in his limousine he tracks the flow of information on digital monitors. Although he has sex with his new wife and several mistresses during the course of his day, Packer disdains the body (what he calls "meat space" [C 64]), preferring instead to scan the spectacle of financial data with the deep acuity of an autistic savant for the "organic patterns" of "birdwing and chambered shell" (C 24) that might be found there. Reading the eloquence of the alphanumeric graphs of finance, he apprehends "in the zero-ness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions" (C 24). Seeking to reveal latent patterns in the otherwise irregular and unpredictable behavior of the market, Packer intuitively grasps the fractal complexity of financial data and believes he has "found beauty and precision here, hidden rhythms in the fluctuations of a given currency" as surely as there are repeating figures in nature (C 76).

In Packer's last experience of hysteron proteron – as he realizes that he is already dead, shot by his stalker, Benno Levin – he is granted a vision of the ultimate union of cognition and information technology. As the Abrahamic faiths promise the afterlife of the soul, so the technological sublime holds forth the transcendence of the disembodied mind

as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void. The technology was imminent or not. It was semi-mythical. It was the natural next step.

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It would never happen. It is happening now; an evolutionary advance that needed only the practical mapping of the nervous system onto digital memory. It would be the master thrust of cyber-capital, to extend the human experience toward infinity as a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous reinvestment. (C 206-7)

As his mind dissipates into the void, Packer espouses the doctrine and the financial prospectus of the world religion of cyber-capital.

This millennial tale of the mind's rapturous relationship with technology has its believers and its apostates. Among the "credible threats" (C 19) to the wellbeing of Eric Packer is a disgruntled former employee of the investment fund, Richard Sheets, a computer analyst whose perceived slights include being demoted to "lesser currencies" (C 151) such as the Thai baht. Under the alias Benno Levin, he writes his Confessions (C 58, 149) – to premeditated murder and to a darkly Augustinian conversion narrative in which he rejects faith in cyber-capital – presented as interludes to Packer's odyssey. Now offline and squatting in an abandoned tenement near Eleventh Avenue, Levin resembles those "men in small rooms" (L 181), whose ranks include for DeLillo all makers of plots, including novelists and terrorists, writing "ten thousand pages that will stop the world" (C 152). Although Levin is not to be regarded as a martyr in the cause of a global theocratic state, his murderous design puts him in loose alliance with those who refuse to be absorbed in the dominion of an information economy and a virtual future. Levin shares, however, the fanatical intent of the terrorist as described by George Haddad in *Mao II*:

Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated . . . Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him. It's confusing when they kill the innocent. But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the West understands. (M 157)

After 9/11, one regards this passage as an accurate profiling of radical Islamists, the "lethal believers" such as Mohamed Atta al-Sayed who infiltrated Western modernity while harboring a fundamentalist determination to see it destroyed. The technological sublime – the conviction that science and technology can emancipate and uplift humanity with their promise of a brightly burnished future that eradicates the past – is deemed a godless and indulgent infidel belief. Benno Levin the disaffected apostate can be more closely aligned with such assassins of influential men as Lee Harvey Oswald or Mehmet Ali Ağca (the Turkish radical who shot Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square in 1981), but the antipathy toward globalism and Western technocracy is a common trait.

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Blood sport

Cosmopolis is hardly the first American novel to critique the vain obsessions of an elite class of businessmen. The *nouveau riche* title character of William Dean Howells's cautionary tale *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) is ruined financially – but spiritually redeemed – when his business speculations fail. Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922) enters the lexicon as synonymous with narrow-minded commercial success that remains dismayingly ignorant of the complexities of modern life. In this lineage Eric Packer has no pretense to philanthropy or social largesse. His cruel diet is his competition. It is a blood sport, and he regards the assassination of his rival Arthur Rapp, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, “killed live on the Money Channel” (C 33), as “refreshing. The prospective dip in the yen was invigorating” (C 35). Making the point explicit with his female bodyguard, who is assigned to protect him from such assaults, Packer states, “The logical extension of business is murder” (C 113). One imagines that Packer regards assassination as the ultimate form of hostile takeover. He also finds “contentment” in the report of the death of Nikolai Kaganovich (C 81), the head of a Russian media conglomerate that is establishing a post-Soviet monopoly in telecommunications and online pornography. Packer recognizes a fraternal bond with Kaganovich, found “facedown in the mud in front of his dacha outside Moscow, shot numerous times just after returning from a trip to Albania Online” (C 82), in that this transnational entrepreneur exhibits the essential qualities of shrewdness and cruelty; he is a wolfhound, a borzoi in pants. There is a League of Rogues who compete for dominion in cyber-capital. Although vestiges of Cold War mutual deterrence remain, Packer and Kaganovich are rivals in a global market that is unfettered by the trade regulations of nation-states. Assassination – whether it be by antiglobalist protesters, organized crime, or local militias – is presented as the reciprocal tactic of international business practice.

It seems that it is a day “for influential men to come to sudden messy ends” (C 132). The concatenation of attacks in *Cosmopolis* is the natural extension of the business cycle, so they harbingers the stunning collapse of the dotcom bubble of which Packer Capital is a chief proponent. It is a system on the edge of chaos. The egregious assault on the Nasdaq Exchange that is meant to recall the bombing on Wall Street by anarchists on September 16, 1920 – which was then heralded as an act of war – includes a parachutist whose exposed member is logotyped in red and black. The asymmetry between the bastions of global capital and the protesters requires that their largely symbolic assaults must be spectacular. These are not strategic assaults in which the armored vehicles or ballistic missiles of opposing forces are arrayed in a

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contest over geographic territory; rather, the intent of terrorism is to deliver the most lurid impact possible on the public consciousness. Baudrillard regards the attacks on 9/11 in this vein: “the radical nature of the spectacle, its brutality, is the only thing about it that is original and irreducible. The spectacle of terrorism forces upon us the terrorism of the spectacle.” Invoking Antonin Artaud’s theory of drama as a shock to the audience’s complacency, he claims, “It is our very own theater of cruelty, the only one we have left – extraordinary because it represents both the high point of the spectacular and the high point of defiance.”²¹ One nonlethal assailant in *Cosmopolis* in the asymmetrical warfare against globalization is André Petrescu – presumably Romanian, though his nationality is not given – who bills himself as the “pastry assassin.” His “mission worldwide,” he claims after having “crèmed” Packer, is to “sabotage power and wealth” (C 142–3). The very spectacularity of these assaults is required by the cruel disparity of the global political system.

How, then, to explain Packer’s increasingly self-destructive behavior as he traverses Manhattan? Surely a baron of hypercapitalism can summon a legion of hairdressers to his apartment or limousine, yet he persists in this stubbornly counterproductive venture into geographic space and gridlock. Despite his chief of security’s remonstrance, he insists, “[W]e still want what we want,” which is the spirit of capitalism (C 101). He visits an old-fashioned Italian barber in the tenement-crowded neighborhood who, under his father’s supervision, first cut his hair. Such a destination appears dangerously nostalgic and against type. But perhaps like DeLillo’s Nick Shay in *Underworld*, Packer longs for “the days of disarray when I walked real streets and did things slap-bang and felt angry and ready all the time, a danger to others and a distant mystery to myself” (U 810). The desire to revisit this locale in real space that has emotional attachment – the only expression of attachment that Packer permits himself – acts as a parasite that infects his judgment in the simulated space of global finance. His leveraging of the yen has caused “storms of disorder” in the currency market (C 116), and as chaoticists will attest, perturbations in nonlinear dynamical systems can have disproportionate and unpredictable effects. Packer has brought his entire portfolio of tens of billions, and the lagniappe of his wife’s inheritance of a few hundred million, to bear on the yen in a test of his genius for discerning the latent patterns in nature; if incorrect, he becomes the vector of the system’s destabilization and he fatally compromises his intellectual esteem. The symptoms of a seemingly automated self-punishment include stunning himself with his bodyguard’s taser, killing Torval, his chief of security, with his own voice-activated gun, and shooting himself in the hand during his confrontation with his assassin, Levin, when he might have shot Levin instead.

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In “The Spirit of Terrorism,” Baudrillard again provides insight into how in a chaotic and asymmetrical warfare the dominant system can be induced to self-destruct. As an avatar of hypercapitalism, Packer has committed suicide rather than fallen victim to an assassination plot. Unlike conventional warfare fought on the battlefield of reality, Baudrillard explains, terrorism assumes the terrain of symbolism:

The tactic of the model terrorist is to provoke an excess of reality and to make the system collapse under its own weight; the terrorist hypothesis is that the system itself will commit suicide in response to multiple fatal suicide attacks, because neither the system nor power is free from symbolic obligations. In this vertiginous cycle of exchanging death, the death of a terrorist is an infinitesimal point, but one that provokes an enormous aspiration.²²

Just as the roadside bombings in Baghdad have greater symbolic force than the actual casualties they incur, and as these suicidal attacks precipitate self-inflicted wounds upon the domestic and international symbolic imaginary – at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, in Abu Ghraib prison, and in the village of Haditha – so for Packer and the system of hypercapitalism the various asymmetrical, suicidal assaults take their toll. “All around this minute point,” according to Baudrillard, “the entire system, the system of reality and power, fortifies itself, vaccinates itself, gathers itself together, and crumbles into ruin out of its own overefficiency.”²³ Packer is a financial Icarus in meltdown, too prideful to admit miscalculation. Levin instructs him in the principles of chaos theory – and the spirit of terrorism – when he points out that Packer’s search for symmetrical shapes in market cycles and natural rhythms is “horribly and sadistically precise,” in effect, an overefficiency. Instead of examining for harmonic balance, Packer should have recognized that patterns in currency values would be “lopsided,” misshapen, irregular, or – as in the contest between globalism and terrorism – asymmetrical (C 200).²⁴

The DeLillo’s fiction has been closely attuned to moments of cultural transformation in American history – the public announcement of a nuclearized Cold War in the *New York Times* on October 4, 1951, in *Underworld*; the “seven seconds that broke the back of the American century” on November 22, 1963, in *Libra* (1988); and the beginning of the Age of Terror on September 11, 2001. In his first novel published after that day on which the hellacious fury of fundamentalism impacted the gigantism of global capital, DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* depicts the collapse of an American future determined by the pure synergy of finance and technology. In the ruins of the future he finds a new syndrome of global ideological conflict. He issues a warning for democracy – in kind with Bill Gray’s advocacy in *Mao II* of the

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novel as a “democratic shout” (*M* 159) that in its contradictions contains multitudes, against absolutist beliefs – to reclaim the essence of individual freedom in the twenty-first century. This democratic shout must be heard above the imprecations of theocracy abroad or the impingement of personal liberties and speech at home.

Notes

1. David L. Ulin, “Finding Reason in an Age of Terror,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 15, 2003), p. E1.
2. John Barron, “DeLillo Bashful? Not This Time,” *Chicago Sun-Times* (March 23, 2003), p. 1.
3. “In the Ruins of the Future” not only offers a penetrating reading of the relationship of globalization and terrorism but also provides a personal reflection on the tragedy. DeLillo’s nephew’s family had nearly been killed in their financial-district apartment house as the Towers fell. As a lifelong New Yorker, DeLillo recounts that within days he went to the site, “looking directly into the strands of openwork façade. It is almost too close. It is almost Roman, I-beams for stonework, but not nearly so salvageable. Many here describe the scene to others on cell phones. ‘Oh my god I’m standing here,’ says the man next to me” Don DeLillo, “In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September,” *Harper’s Bazaar* [December 2001], p. 38.
 In his latest novel, *Falling Man* (2007), DeLillo examines the traumatic experience and personal restitution of one man, Keith Neudecker, a corporate lawyer working in the North Tower. Stunned and injured, Neudecker accepts a ride from a stranger, giving the address of his estranged wife and son in uptown Manhattan, initiating, unconsciously, a healing process that reunites the family. Yet when he returns to the site and to his nearby bachelor apartment, he can only remark, “I’m standing here” (*FM*.25), recapitulating the expression of awe before the disaster site recorded in DeLillo’s essay. It is the recognition of survivors that there is nothing virtuous—or evil—that distinguishes them from those who perished. It is the same recognition that comes to the survivors of every holocaust in history.
4. Mark Osteen, “Introduction,” in Osteen, ed., *White Noise: Text and Criticism* (New York: Viking, 1998), p. vii.
5. Vince Passaro, “Don DeLillo and the Towers,” *Mr Bellers Neighborhood*, October 10, 2001, <http://www.mrbellersneighborhood.com/story.php?storyid=403>. Passaro states that DeLillo independently selected the image for the cover of *Underworld*.
6. Barron, “DeLillo Bashful?” p. 1.
7. *Ibid.*
8. DeLillo, “In the Ruins,” p. 33.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Ulin, “Finding Reason,” p. E1. See also Barron, “DeLillo Bashful?”
11. DeLillo, “In the Ruins,” p. 34.
12. Barron, “DeLillo Bashful?” p. 1.

13. Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," trans. Donovan Hohn, *Harper's Bazaar* (February 2002), p. 14
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. DeLillo, "In the Ruins," p. 40.
18. The original text by Marx and Engels reads, "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism."
19. DeLillo, "In the Ruins," p. 39.
20. Ibid., p. 37.
21. Baudrillard, "Spirit of Terrorism," p. 18.
22. Ibid., p. 16.
23. Ibid.
24. In *Falling Man* DeLillo discusses the strategy of asymmetrical warfare practiced by terrorists through the character of Ernst Hechinger, aka Martin Ridnour, an international art dealer with a shady past that might lead to the Baader-Meinhof Gang of left-wing West German radicals of the 1970s. Ridnour's commentary on anti-American terrorism is comparable to Jean Baudrillard's theory: "They strike a blow to this country's dominance. They achieve this, to show how a great power can be vulnerable. A power that interferes, that occupies . . . One side has the capital, the labor, the technology, the armies, the agencies, the cities, the laws, the police and the prisons. The other side has a few men willing to die" (*FM* 46–7).