

# Postmodernist Fragmentation and Non-Linearity

*An Experience of Time within the Capitalist  
Framework*

Kristine Bendiksen



A Thesis Presented to  
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and  
European Languages

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the MA Degree

Spring 2017



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2017

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Kristine Bendiksen

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

IV

# Abstract

This thesis sets out to examine the unstable postmodern narrative as a reflection of the drastic changes in temporality under late capitalism. It examines the postmodern narrative's lack of a narrative center as a reflection of the de-linking of the US financial system from a solid monetary base. The structure of the discussion combines the study of postmodernist economic, social and cultural theory and the analysis of the postmodern narrative through the transformation in the experience of time represented in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. Through the combination of the study of temporality under the influence of late capitalism and an analysis of the postmodern narrative, we can understand its fragmentation, which is often met with critical ambivalence, as the individual's experience of living in a time in which a natural development of time is distorted. Through an understanding of how the temporal logic of late capitalism functions, we can understand that these novels comment on the troubling development of individual identity under late capitalism, and their subsequent violence as a brutal critique of such a temporality.



# Acknowledgments

Nothing has made me more aware of the complexities of time than writing about the experience of time. Writing this thesis took much longer than expected. At times it felt as if I had nothing but time, and at others, as if time was beyond my reach.

I want to thank my professor and supervisor Bruce Barnhart for introducing me to the study of temporality and for encouraging my project. His class “Time and Money in the American Novel” inspired the topic of this thesis.

As in all my endeavors, my mother deserves my deepest gratitude for her support. Thank you for always being there to keep me sane and for making sure I had everything I needed so that could focus entirely on this project.

I cannot thank Carina enough for taking on the task of proofreading my thesis. I could not have completed this degree without my partner in crime. From our first year of co-dependency at Blindern, to when I practically moved in with you in Bergen, our friendship has been invaluable both personally and academically.

Finally, a big thanks to all my other friends and family for always cheering for me throughout this process. Although your words of encouragement have not always been with a positive attitude, your support has been invaluable. A special thanks to Mildrid, for giving me a break from writing when you saw it was absolutely needed. Together I think we captured the essences of a balanced student life.





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# Introduction

*“The car was moving. Eric watched himself on the oval screen below the spycam, running his thumb along his chinline. The car stopped and moved and he realized queerly that he’d just placed his thumb on his chinline, a second or two after he’s seen it on-screen.”*

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*“Doubt. What is doubt? You don’t believe in doubt. You’ve told me this. Computer time 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,” she said. “We need a new theory of time.”*

- Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*

In the former scene from Don DeLillo’s novel *Cosmopolis*, the protagonist Eric Packer, a twenty-eight-year-old multi-billionaire asset manager, sees his own actions on the computer screen seconds before he actually performs them. The scene tells us something about what it means to live in a time and society driven by the potentiality of the future; the present becomes increasingly difficult to find. *Cosmopolis*, a novel that takes us through an eventful day in the life of billionaire Eric as he rides through Manhattan in his limousine, brilliantly illustrates the banal perversities of capitalism that we have come to know as a central theme in the postmodernist novel. Postmodernism’s fragmented prose reflects the effects of capitalism, it emphasizes the pure present in the time of finance capitalism where the present becomes harder to find as the present, in short, depends on the future; leaving no room for reflection on the present moment. *Cosmopolis*, written in 2003, takes us through the extreme volatile experiences of the full-blown global finance capitalism era. On the electronic market, money becomes intangible and abstract, and capital accumulation shifts from long-term projections into instant realization. In finance capital, there is an emphasis on speculation, trading derivatives and currencies over the actual production and delivery of goods. Finance capital makes it possible to make money from something that is not yet a reality, and this does something to the experience of time. Jean-Francois Lyotard explains “...the future conditions

the present. Exchange requires that what is future be as if it were present” (*The Inhuman* 66). Eric Packer’s momentary glimpses of his preceding actions illustrate the experience of living in the era of financial capitalism where the present moment becomes perpetual.

The latter quotation, “...the past is disappearing. We used to know the past but not the future. This is changing”, reflects not only the idea that the future conditions the present, but also the loss of historical consciousness, a great concern in postmodern theory. Literature that reflects late-capitalist temporality, which through its ability to make the future present becomes an intensified present, seals its narrative to the present like the present is all that exists. The reading experience of such a narrative becomes quite different from that of more traditional narrative forms, which tends to follow a more linear narrative development that reflects on the past, present and the future. In an interview, Fredric Jameson explains the discontinuous and fragmented temporal aspect of postmodernism as “emblematic of the disappearance of certain relationship to history and the past” (Stephanson 31). In a time where the present is already the future, it seems to be no room or need for a consciousness of the past. In the opening of his book, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson explains that “it is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten to think historically in the first place” (ix). What Jameson illuminates here is a useful way to consider the temporal logic of postmodernism; in a society driven by the future, the future conditions the present yet the present is already in the past hence leaving the present perpetual and never ending. This is a consequence of the acceleration of the speed of capital accumulation, the shift from the standardized production process to finance capital’s logic of spending money to make money. The experience of a perpetual present in postmodernism demonstrates the end of process and reflects finance capital’s accumulative measures of the instant; it makes what lies in the future possible in the present which splits temporality into instances of the present rather than a linear movement of time.

An ongoing concern in American fiction and literary criticism is the “objectification” or “thingification” of human lives, how capitalist consumer culture abolishes social relations by making people into commodities and commodities into subjects. Marxist theory on the production of goods and value, exchange value, alienation, modes of production and consumption, all link to the experience of time. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács reflects on what capitalist reification does to time: “Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled

with quantifiable “things” ... in short, it becomes space” (90). The result of this is the reification of what has come to be known as the postmodernist present (Pavlov, 130). What happens to time is the same that happens to objects, it loses a sense of an organic process or a linear movement, and it becomes fragmented; caught in a sort of time warp. In *Temporalities*, Russel West-Pavlov explains that “...the reified, discrete commodities enjoyed by consumers in the capitalist economy have the same fragmented form as the temporality of their enjoyment, without any connection to a past or a future except in the ever-renewed lust after the newest model on the market” (130). What happens to the sense of time during postmodernism or late capitalism is what we see in the prose of the postmodernist novel.

The experience of time as non-linear, fragmented or short-lived profoundly changed the structure of the novel. I would argue that in order to understand many postmodernist novels, you have to have an understanding of the significant changes in time imposed by capitalist development. Some postmodernist novels can be seemingly one-dimensional and can easily be diminished as flawed if we do not consider what capitalist reification does to time. Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*, a novel that was generally dismissed by critics as merely boring, is a good example of this. The novel is by no means revolutionary in terms of playing around with narrative form. Yet the novel is so tediously straightforward and static that it becomes a fascinating piece of literature, because within its tediousness we experience the “postmodern present”. Trapped within the consciousness of materially obsessed Wall Street psychopath Patrick Bateman, there is absolutely no organic process of time (past, present or future) that takes us through a story, there is no reflection, nothing but Bateman’s everyday superficial encounters with colleagues and his obsession with material objects. Reading this novel puts us in this time-wrap of capitalist reification where we feel like there is no escape; there is no temporal horizon. The novel’s last words even states, in capitalized letters, “This is not an exit” (Ellis 399). *American Psycho* is a great example of why it is significant to understand capitalism’s influence on time in order to appreciate some postmodern literary narratives, and what they can tell us. If we possess knowledge of capitalist development and its transformation in the experience of time, we can understand what these novels reflect, namely the effect of living in an era where perceptions of time become violently distorted by drastic progression in capital accumulation.

Before I continue with the discussion of postmodernism, I think it is important to draw attention to the ambiguousness of the term. Postmodernism is perhaps one of literature’s most disputed terms. There is a great deal of disagreement among critics about what exactly

constitutes postmodernism, which makes the term highly problematic. Therefore, we have to proceed with caution in order not to make any universal claims about a term that means many different things to different people. I think it is important to draw attention to what several critics mention about using the term postmodernism; namely, that it should not be used as a term of all contemporary literature (McHale, Hutcheon, Jameson). In this sense, we can think of postmodernism more as a genre than a time period. A work written during postmodernism is not necessarily a postmodern text. With this in mind, what I am interested in exploring is not the term postmodernism itself, but rather the particular narrative style that happens to be associated with postmodernism, and why and how this particular narrative emerged. Not only is there disagreement about the term postmodernism, but there is also ambivalence among critics about the literary quality of many of these postmodernist narratives, which is largely due to their lack of a narrative center. These narratives do not follow an organic temporal logic, often by the use of narrative devices such as prolepsis and analepsis, which leaves them fragmented, non-linear, unstable and often endlessly repetitive. Because time is one of the most important parameters for how narrative is organized and understood (Heise 47), I suggest that the study of temporality, and understanding the dramatic changes in temporality that occurred under the influence of late-capitalism, is key for unlocking these complex narratives. Therefore, in this thesis I aim to combine the study of temporality under the influence of capitalism, focusing on the changes that occurred in US economy from around the 1970s and the analysis of the postmodern narrative through the transformation of the experience of time represented in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. I argue that understanding the drastic transformation in temporality is crucial for understanding the non-linear and fragmented postmodern narrative and that through an understanding of how the temporality imposed by late-capitalist development functions, these novels can broaden our understanding of what it means to live in a time where the linear movement of time is distorted.

In capitalist societies, capital accumulation has become the driving force behind the concept of time, and as the process of capital accumulation accelerates, our perception of time accelerates with it. Shorter turn-over times and credit loans drastically shortens the temporal horizon until there no longer is one. This is well explained in *Cosmopolis* by Eric Packer's chief of theory, Kinski: "The idea is time. Living in the future. Look at those numbers running. Money makes time. It used to be the other way around. Clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism. People stopped thinking about eternity. They began to concentrate on

hours, measurable hours, man-hours, using labor more efficiently” (DeLillo 78-79). I will look further into the economic and cultural changes that lead to the emergence of postmodernism further along in the thesis, but for the aid of the discussion of how I will examine these three novels as a reflection of late-capitalist temporality, I think it is important to provide an account of finance capital. The logic of finance capitalism is at the core of the “postmodern experience”. Finance capital is essentially the notion of spending money (investment) in the interest of making money. David Harvey explains, “capital is not a thing but a process in which money is perpetually in search of more money. . . . Finance capitalists look to make more money by lending to others in return of interest” (*Enigma of Capital* 40). The process of capital accumulation in finance capitalism then, distorts a linear process as it makes the future available in the present.

In finance capital, economic dominance is in the hands of financial institutions rather than industrial capitalists. In an article for *The Monthly Review*, “Contradictions of Finance Capitalism”, Richard Peet explains that “finance capitalist agents exercise power by controlling access to the markets through which capital accumulations become investments, directing flows of capital in various forms-as equity purchases, bond sales, direct investments, etc...”(5). Finance capitals’ control over investment capital gives it and its representatives tremendous power, which extends to all areas of social life: “production, consumption, economy, culture, and the use of environments are subject to a more removed, more abstract calculus of power, in which the ability to contribute to short term financial profit becomes the main concern” (Peet 5). He explains,

Finance capitalism intensifies old methods of exploitation or invents new methods of exploitation, and new modes of discipline, that pass mainly through the sphere of reproduction rather than the sphere of production: credit cards and bank loans; inflated house prices; high commodity prices due to commodity futures trading... This intensified exploitation which functions through the medium of debt peonage, price gouging, and other, similar devices, is the economic and cultural basis for the worst excesses of finance capitalism” (Peet 6).

The shift from industrial capitalism to finance capitalism in terms of temporality consequents in the move away from the linear experience of the production process towards a temporality which lives in the future. Capitalism is inherently concerned with the future as it seeks to generate profit, but finance capitalism intensifies this futurity by making the future available

in the present. It is through the credit economy as opposed to monetary economy where this futurity establishes itself. Credit economy makes future funds available in the present in the expectation of profits in the future. The shift from industrial capital to finance capital is essentially the shift from money in material form to an abstract form of money: stocks, bonds, funds etc.

Thus, capital growth in finance capital relies on something that is not yet a reality. Peet explains,

Whereas industrial capitalism primarily exploits productive workers through the wage system, finance capitalism adds the exploitation of consumptive individuals via indebtedness. The idea is to have everything bought not with dollar bills or pound notes, but with maxed out credit cards, so that purchases yield several years of interest at far higher rates than bank pay on deposits... The investment banks join in by speculating on this vast pool of debt, as with mortgage bundling and credit default swaps, where quick and easy money are made in large quantities (6).

Pavlov explains the temporal logic of contemporary credit capital's speculation on the future: "The investor needs tomorrow's money so that he can invest it today; he also needs tomorrow itself so that he can invest the returns on today's investments, in order to generate profits in the day after tomorrow" (134). Pavlov's explanation gives us an understanding of how it can be difficult to keep up with such a temporal logic. Time within this capitalist framework becomes imaginary time; it abandons human and natural rhythms and exists as an abstract entity that bases itself on the imaginary time of the credit (Pavlov 135-136). As explained by Kinski in *Cosmopolis*, "...time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present becomes harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent" (DeLillo 79). Time as a "corporate asset" rather than that of natural order, distorts the process of time, as its only concern is how to make the most profit and thus puts a price tag on time.

Part of the volatility of this form of capitalism is that in order to keep this cycle of accumulation to continue it depends on reinvestment whereupon speculation with a great amount of risk is required.

Any investment fund that does not generate quick and large returns suffers disinvestment in highly competitive markets, where money changes hands in computer-quicken moments. So there is a competitive compulsion to take



increasingly daring risks in search of higher returns that temporarily attract investments. Financial managers overseeing capital accumulations compete for control over assets by promising these returns (Peet 6-7).

When these investments fail to generate profit for reinvestment, these speculations ultimately lead to a financial crisis. Through the currency speculator Eric Packer, *Cosmopolis* reflects the worst consequences of such a form of capital accumulation. Packer loses all his and his company's vast assets speculating on the Japanese Yen, which has tremendous impact on both national and global economy. The novel's narrative style reflects the logic of speculation capitalism, of always being in the future for the reinvestment of profit. By reflecting this temporality, the realization of the future within the present, *Cosmopolis*' narrative demonstrates the postmodern present of a feeling of unmoving time. It is interesting to note that while *Cosmopolis* was not well received when first published; it was met with new eyes after the financial collapse in 2008, as it could now be seen as, to a degree, a foreshadowing of this event. Before this event, critics claimed that the narrative was too static. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the postmodern narrative as a reflection of contemporary economic development.

What makes the postmodern literary narrative so complex is the fact that it is dealing with a form of capitalism that essentially cannot be represented. In order to understand the postmodern literary narrative as a reflection of the volatile experience of contemporary capitalism, we need to look closer at the major changes that occurred in the US economy after the 1970s which made this extreme form of capitalism possible. The form of capitalism that postmodernism reflects began with the US dollar's removal from the gold standard, part of the Bretton Woods Agreement, in 1971. The Bretton Woods Agreement was an agreement for restructuring the economy after WW2, where the participating countries tied their currency to a fixed exchange rate to the US dollar, backed up in gold (Vogl 59). Joseph Vogl explains that "with the dollar mediating, the gold standard thus assumed a kind of anchoring function, neutralizing any potential disturbances in the system by means of a mechanism for adjusting money supply to prices" (Vogl 60). Vogl explains the revocation of the Bretton Woods currency agreement as the economy arriving at what we now consider the postmodern, "a regime of free-floating signifiers-anchorless and immeasurable-that lacked backing from any transcendental signified" (61). The cancellation of the agreement signaled a rise of a system in "which currencies referred only to other currencies and were based, directly or indirectly, on a standard of unbacked fiat money . . . a global financial system that proved exemplary in

dispensing altogether with any reference to value” (Vogl 61). The consequences of this event are crucial for understanding the fragmentation of the postmodern narrative, as its fragmentation is a reflection of the temporality of a capitalist system that has become self-referential. The perhaps most common or agreed upon definition of postmodernism is the absence of a center. Therefore, if we examine postmodernism as a consequence of the economy, it is precisely this event of money’s removal from any form of materiality that results in its lack of a center. *Cosmopolis* references this event by explaining, “money has lost its narrative quality the way the painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself” (DeLillo 77). That money has lost its narrative quality is precisely what we see in the fragmented postmodernist narrative; how does one narrate something that has lost its narrative quality, something that cannot be represented?

This idea of self-referential money and its lack of a center need further examination. After the 1980s, there is a shift towards virtual finance (Pavlov 135). The rapid development of electronic communications moved financial markets “into the realm of speculation on electronic currencies, assets and investments” (Pavlov 135). Vogl explains that after the 1980s, “forward transactions or futures took on a central, structuring function” (64). Vogl explains this system as “dealing in futures”, and that “futures trading is only carried out on condition that the very goods on which the value of the transaction depends are manifest absent...” (65). Futures trading, or derivatives, is a form of money that exists independently of the commodities market and the circulation of cash (Vogl 68). Vogl describes the logic of futures trading as circumventing “both the physical condition of production and the material condition of transfer and transportation. In futures trading, the link between commodities and prices, payment and real values is either relaxed out completely severed” (Vogl 66). The dynamic of futures trading, he explains, has become self-referential:

Prices refer not to goods and products but to prices themselves; prices for things that are not currently to hand are calculated on the basis of price forecast for things that will not be to hand in the future. Prices are paid with prices. Prices are thus themselves commodities, freed from the burdens and inconveniences that encumber material possession... this kind of trade performs an economic and semiotic act that culminates, not in a representation of the world but in its de-presentation, its voiding of presence; it deals with the things of this world only on condition of their manifest absence or obliteration (66-67).

Vogl's description of the logic of futures trading is helpful for understanding how postmodernist temporality, as a consequence of this form of capital, has lost its center. Money has lost its signifier and thus become abstract and free floating, as it has no material form in which it is measured by. As the dominant social power, from which we organize our experience, capitalism's abstract existence results in a temporal logic that becomes difficult to organize and structure. Without a connection to any form of materiality, capital takes a spectral form and becomes an alien force whose presence is omnipresent yet out of reach. We can read the "depthlessness" of the postmodern narrative as a reflection of a dominant social power that is in a sense absent; it has no point of reference beyond itself. So the question becomes then, how do we read a narrative that has no center? A narrative, which, like capitalist temporality, abandons all linearity and stability? Capitalism as an intangible, free floating all pervasive driving force is what this thesis aims to explore in terms of the postmodern narrative as a reflection of capitalist temporality.

Historically, a literary narrative functions a mode through which we can understand and organize certain events. A narrative gives the reader a sense of time, it moves the reader through its structure to open up to new ways of thinking about certain things, and broadens the readers understanding of what it meant to live in the time in which the narrative was written. The way a narrative is organized tells us something about the perception of time, in a certain time. Now, the postmodern narrative deals with a mode of time that we have yet to come to terms with, and thus the experience of these narratives can be difficult to organize and understand. I think it is important to draw attention to the function of a narrative because, although the postmodern narrative abandons linearity and coherent organization, by recognizing drastic changes in capital development, we can understand the postmodern narrative as an experience of time, in a time where this experience becomes violently distorted. Lyotard, author of *The Postmodern Condition*, is one of the key thinkers in postmodernist thought and theory, and deals extensively with ideas of time. Lyotard explains that there are many ways to tell a story, but the temporal organization (narrative) gives the story meaning. He explains the function of narrative as "a technical apparatus giving people the means to store, order and retrieve units of information, i.e. events. More precisely, narratives are like temporal filters whose function is to transform the emotive charge linked to the event into sequences of units of information capable of giving rise to something like meaning" (*The Inhuman* 63). Lyotard's theories on what happens to temporality or narrative in postmodernism is helpful for understanding the postmodern present. In "Time Today" (in

*The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*) Lyotard talks about different ways in which we can make the presenting present into a presented present, a system through which we can organize and understand past, present and future. He explains three systems for synthesizing time; myth, historical narratives and complexification. The third system, “complexification”, or what we might call capitalism, is the temporal technology of postmodern societies. While myth is concerned with temporal or narrative development through a relationship with the past and historical narratives with the possibilities of the future, complexification, the temporal organization in postmodern societies, is one where the present is conditioned by the future. As explained in one of my previous references to Lyotard: “exchange requires that what is future be as if it were present” (*The Inhuman* 66). Money is “time stocked in view of forestalling what comes about ... capital is grounded in the principal that money is nothing other than time placed in reserve” (*The Inhuman* 66). What this essentially means is that in postmodern, capitalist societies, economic exchange binds the future to the present and prevents anything unplanned or surprising from occurring, and thus prevents the occurrence of anything distinctly different from the present. Lyotard explains that “what is already known cannot, in principle, be experienced as an event” (*The Inhuman* 65). He explains that the human race is pulled forward by the process of complexification, which today is dominated by an exponential growth in science and technology and computerized production of time, “without the slightest capacity for mastering it. It has to adapt to the new conditions” (*The Inhuman* 64). What Lyotard explains is helpful for understanding the postmodern narrative. Technological advancement in capitalism makes it possible to synthesize numerous times at once and therefore the linear temporal structure of experience ruptures. In postmodern society, driven by economic exchange, there is no coherent system to reflect and organize time as past, present or future, as the individual constantly has to adapt to new conditions. This does something to the development of identity as it challenges the way we understand our experiences. We can understand the postmodern literary narrative as a reflection of the individual attempting to adapt to this new condition. Rather than presenting a past, present and future through which one can reflect on the meaning of experiences, the temporal logic of late-capitalism makes the future an extension of the present, and thus narrative experience is rendered into an intensified present. Lyotard’s ideas and theories are fruitful for understanding the complexities of postmodernist literature, which are essentially temporal, and how these narratives deal with a mode of time that we have not yet come to terms with.

Neither *American Psycho* nor *Cosmopolis* was well received when first published. *Cosmopolis* was claimed to be too static while *American Psycho* was criticized for not giving an explanation for Patrick Bateman's psychopathic behavior. *Fight Club* was better received, and some have done a Marxist reading of the novel and see "project mayhem" as the proletariat revolting. *Cosmopolis'* critical appraisal after the financial crisis tells us something about how we can read and understand literature as a reflection of tendencies in society. The sleeve of Vintage's 2005 edition of *Fight Club* features a comment about the novel by *American Psycho*'s author, Bret Easton Ellis, which says, "...*Fight Club* achieves something only terrifying books do – it tells us, this is how we live now..." (Palahniuk). "The way we live now" is a phrase that often comes up when reading reviews and criticism about postmodern fiction. In the afterword to *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk himself explains, "Really, what I was writing was just *The Great Gatsby*, updated a little. It was "apostolic" fiction..." (Palahniuk 216). I think this is important to draw attention to because it tells us something about the function of a literary narrative, to inform readers about the experience of a society in a certain time. A good work of literature not only tells but also shows the reader the state of society and touches upon uncomfortable issues. This is significant to keep in mind in terms of how some postmodernist texts are often thought to be hard to get at and uncomfortable to read, because both the prose and themes reflect contemporary anxieties.

The study of time in literature adds another dimension for understanding what literary narratives can tell us, and it is through the study of temporality that we can easier get at these complex novels. In his book *Time in Literature*, Hans Meyerhoff says "...if art holds a mirror up to human nature, and if man is more conscious than he was of the pervasive and precarious nature of time, then this consciousness will be reflected increasingly in literary works" (3). This is relevant for all three novels I have chosen to explore; the significant attention to perception and replication of the experience of time is what makes these much-debated narratives a genuine reflection of the state of society. Ellis alludes to the function of his narrative before the novel begins by including a quote from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*:

Both the author of these *Notes* and the *Notes* themselves are of course, fictional. Nevertheless, such persons as the composer of these *Notes* not only exists in our society, but indeed must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed. I have wished to bring before the public, somewhat more distinctly than usual, one of the characters of our recent past. He represents a

generation that is still living out its days among us. In the fragment entitled “Underground” this personage describes himself and his views and attempts, as it were, to clarify the reasons why he appeared and was bound to appear in our midst. The subsequent fragment will consist of the actual “notes,” concerning certain events in his life (Ellis).

Ellis’ brief allusion to Dostoyevsky informs the reader that this uncomfortable narrative is in fact a reflection of what is happening in society.

I have chosen these three novels because they all, in different ways, illustrate and illuminate capitalism’s effect on the individual’s perception of time, and by doing so demonstrate the temporality of the postmodern novel. All three novels comment on postmodernist temporality in terms of how they all portray characters that to some extent or other elicit alienation in the society they live in. The tempo of the society they inhabit does something to the characters’ sense of self, which triggers a reaction in all three protagonists. In *American Psycho*, Ellis describes Patrick Bateman’s violent acts with the same static apathy as everything else in the novel, and questions arise as to what drives Bateman to perform these gross actions. Because of the mundane repetitive experience of his everyday life, the unnamed protagonist in *Fight Club* suffers from insomnia, and as a result, he unknowingly creates his alter ego Tylor Durden who becomes the creator of underground fight clubs nationwide. In *Cosmopolis*, virtually nothing is tangible anymore, and as Eric Packer realizes that he is more or less responsible for the stock market meltdown, he begins toying with violence and death, and only through this experience does he realize that he is a physical being.

All three novels have been very successfully adapted to film, perhaps so successfully (*Fight Club* achieved cult status after David Fincher’s adaptation in 1999) that most people tend to associate these titles with the movies rather than the novels. It is interesting to consider these novels’ success onscreen in regards to their debated reception as novels, especially considering how the movie scripts do not differ drastically from their literary texts. This has something to do with the novels’ narrative; they do in fact read much like film scripts, i.e. descriptions and dialogue with no further reflection or deeper insight. When a novel is adapted to screen, it often requires a significant amount of artistic freedom on the directors’ behalf to be able to make it work. Adapting descriptions and information not given in dialogue or speech in the novel takes a lot of work in order to do the novel justice, but in the case of these novels, not much has been changed or cut out to make the movies. In an

interview, David Cronenberg, the director who adapted *Cosmopolis* to screen, explains that it only took him six days to write the script for the movie as the book “took a lot of the load”.

When asked how he was able to write the script in such a short time, he explains:

It’s the first time this has ever happened to me like that. I didn’t think I was writing a script. I translated all the dialogue and put it into screenplay form. So I just had the dialogue and the characters’ names. That took three days of typing on my computer. Then I filled in the scenes and the action. That took another three days. I looked at what I had. I read it and I thought “This is a movie. This is a good movie I’d like to make.” It’s very unusual (Erickson, *The Atlantic* 2012).

I think it is fruitful to draw a comparison between the script to a movie and postmodern literary narratives to illustrate the sparse style of these narratives. While in the visual form of a movie, these stories draw the audience in; their literary narratives alienate the reader, which is why many people struggle to see the same immediate quality in the novels. The novels’ stylistic devices reflect these characters’ alienation by effectively alienating the reader from the text, so that the reader takes part in this experience. Because what these novels reflect are contemporary anxieties, they demonstrate why postmodernist novels often can be uncomfortable to read.

It is a widely discussed notion that the concept of postmodernism links to the idea that Western society has entered a stage of “posthistory”. Ursula Heise begins her book *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative and Postmodernism* by stating that: “Time is obsolete. History is dead” (11). Heise explains that, in different theoretical fields, the term “posthistory” “has come to indicate the demise of historically important processes and phenomena” (11). She argues that such a view fails to see that the term “implies a considerably larger claim in that it refers not to specific historical developments, but to the process of history and the understanding of temporality itself” (11). Heise explains her claim to be of crucial concern to cultural and literary analysis because it has the “potential to shape the way we look at contemporary cultural currents and works of art” (11). Particularly as “some theories and practices of postmodernist art and literature specifically question the relevance of temporality and historicity for aesthetic production in the late twentieth century” (11). Heise’s ideas are particularly helpful and relevant as what she argues closely relates to my argument insofar as seeing the study of temporality as key for unlocking the complex postmodern narrative. In her book she sets out with the argument that “...postmodernist

novels are centrally concerned with the possibility and modalities of experiencing time in the age of posthistory and the nanosecond culture, and that their experiments with narrative structure can only be properly understood with this concern in mind” (Heise 2). Heise’s ideas support my claim that the often disputed postmodern narrative can be better understood and appreciated if we understand what these narratives reflect. In order to continue the discussion of these narratives as a reflection of postmodern temporality, we need to look further into some ideas and theories about the different ways in which postmodernist time works. I will do this by engaging with a few critics who also see postmodern time as a consequence of economic development. In addition to Heise, I will primarily look at some of Fredric Jameson’s theories, as his ideas also closely relates to my topic. To get a more thorough account of the economic developments that constituted the shift to what we can understand as postmodern temporality, I will begin by looking at some of David Harvey’s theories on the temporal experience in postmodernism, often referred to as the postmodern condition.

Harvey argues that we can understand the changes in the concept of time and space that lead to the emergence of the “postmodern condition” by looking at the changes that occurred in the means of production, from Fordism to flexible accumulation (*Condition of Postmodernity* 284). He explains postmodern temporality as an intense phase of what he calls “space-time compression”, and by this term he means to signal “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 240). He uses the term compression to signal the effect of capitalism, and he argues,

...the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world seems to collapse inward upon us ...as time horizons shortens to the point where the present is all there is, so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds (*Condition of Postmodernity* 240).

He characterizes space-time compression as stressful and deeply troubling, and for this reason, it has sparked social, political and cultural responses. He explains that by looking at the experience of space and time in social life, we can better understand postmodernism as a reflection of these changes.

Harvey argues that “neither time nor space can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes, and that it is only through investigations of the latter that



we can properly ground our concepts of the former” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 204). From this materialist perspective, he continues, “we can then argue that objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life ... Each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 204). If our understanding of space and time ultimately links to material processes, then the continuously changing, capitalist mode of production will continuously change the meaning and representation of space and time (204). What happens during the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation is an intense speed up in turnover times of capital, mainly through the combination of new technologies of production and shifts in organizational forms towards vertical disintegration as opposed to vertical integration, which applied during Fordism, leaving the production process more fragmented (*Condition of Postmodernity* 284). Flexible accumulation, as opposed to Fordism which was based on mass assembly line production, mass political organization and welfare state interventions, focuses on “niche markets, decentralization coupled with spatial dispersal of production and withdrawal of the nation-state from interventionist politics coupled with deregulation and privatization” (Harvey, *Spaces of Capital* 123). The shift to flexible accumulation in production was accomplished by vertical disintegration that fragments Fordism’s vertical integration with set labor time, wages, outsourcing and sub-contracting (*Condition of Postmodernity* 284). Vertical disintegration as well as other organizational shifts “such as the ‘just-in-time delivery system that reduces stock inventories – when coupled with the new technologies of electronic control, small-batch production, etc., all reduced turnover times in many sectors of production” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 284-285). In addition to accelerated turnover times, Harvey explains, improvements in communication and information technology accelerated the speed of commodity circulation through the market system, while electronic banking and plastic money and the computerization of financial services and markets, “were some of the innovations that improved the speed of the inverse flow of money” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 285). The fragmented temporal experience of postmodernism is a reflection of capitalist development and its increased fragmentation of production and the process of capital accumulation.

The acceleration of capital that flexible accumulation made possible extended capitalist growth and profit to all areas of social life. Naturally, the speed up in production was paralleled with a speed up in consumption of commodities, but it also generated a shift to

the consumption of lifestyle services such as sports and health clubs, as well as entertainment services such as museum visits, movies and music (Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* 285). Harvey explains that the lifetime of such services is much shorter than that of the physical commodity, and therefore it makes sense for the capitalist to make profit of the ephemerality of services in consumption as they do not have any limits to accumulation and turnover, such as the physical good might have (*Condition of Postmodernity* 285). This shift toward capital accumulation from all areas of social life led to the emergence of the postmodern condition. The consequences of the ephemerality of commodities and services that the reduction of turn over times created, is central to postmodern theory. The speed up in production made commodities and services available to everyone, not just to the elite, and this resulted in what Harvey refers to as “fashion in mass” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 285). Harvey notes that these are the consequences of the speed-up in turn over times that have had particular influence on the postmodern ways of thinking, feeling and doing (285). The increased availability of commodities lead to a change in perceptions of value, as neither the production nor the acquiring of commodities entails long term planning or process. The changes in production decreased the lifetime of products by continuously replacing them with new ones, and thus commodities became disposable. This speed up in production resulted in what Harvey refers to as a “throwaway society” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 286). Both *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* illustrate this society of ephemeral lifestyle services and disposability of commodities, as the constant bombarding of what society tells you to consume overwhelms the protagonists. The ephemerality of products in consumption, Harvey explains, marks a shift to short term planning as long-term planning becomes difficult because you have to be “highly adaptable and fast moving in response to market shifts” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 287). This does something to the experience of time, particularly for the financial worker, as it entails constant work. *Fight Club* depicts exactly the social consequences that Harvey illuminates here. The protagonist’s job takes him all around the country and he explains his daily life:

“The charm of travelling is everywhere I go, tiny life. I go to the hotel, tiny soap, tiny shampoos, single-serving butter, tiny mouthwash and a single-use toothbrush. ...Dinner arrives, a miniature do-it-yourself Chicken Cordon Bleu hobby kit, sort of a put-it-together project to keep you busy” (28). ... Hotel time, restaurant food. Everywhere I go, I make tiny friendships with the people sitting beside me from Logan to Kissy to Willow Run” (31). “What I am is a recall campaign coordinator, I

tell the single serving friend sitting next to me, but I'm working towards a career as a dishwasher" (Palahniuk 31).

All aspects of the protagonist life, even social relations, are disposable. This passage tells us something about the drastic changes in temporality brought on by the changes in the production process. The idea of "the single serving friend" tells us something about the volatility of such a lifestyle, and it tells us something about the postmodern present. Instances, rather than any sort of development that attachment would entail, make up the protagonist's life, and it is this "depthlessness" and fragmentation of the individual experience that marks the shift from modernism to postmodernism. I will look closer at this shortly when I look at Jameson, who argue that this experience consequences in a schizophrenic mentality.

Another significant consequence of the acceleration of turnover times, which is central to postmodern theory, is advertising and the production of images. Such high ephemerality of products and its communication through media has had significant impact on how we understand commodities. Harvey refers to Jean Baudrillard who argues that, as a consequence of media and advertisement, postmodernist culture is not so much concerned with commodity production as the production of signs (*Condition of Postmodernity* 287). The product has lost its initial purpose and has been reproduced into a sign for what owning this product will signal. This has significant impact on temporality as it removes the products' relationship to any past or future, and results in an experience of depthlessness; as object become sign it loses its purpose and instead becomes an image. This is central to postmodern theory, as it has resulted in the temporal experience of instances instead of process, and thus fragmentation of experience. Postmodern theory explains that postmodernism becomes the constant bombarding of images without any reference or depth, and this is often referred to the culture of simulacrum. Harvey explains simulacrum as "a state of such near perfect replication that the difference between the original and the copy becomes almost impossible to spot" (*Condition of Postmodernity* 289). He explains that, "as identity is increasingly dependent upon images, this means that the serial and recursive replications of identities (individual, corporate, institutional, and political) becomes a very real possibility and problem" (*Condition of Postmodernity* 289). What Harvey illuminates here is very significant for understanding the postmodern narrative. The idea of simulacrum is important for understanding how the postmodern narrative reflects the individual's experience in the late-capitalist era - how it has become a culture of "sameness". We can see this clearly in *American Psycho*, where everyone is so alike; they repeatedly mistake each other for other

people. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard explains, “today’s abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1). What Baudrillard draws attention to here is helpful for understanding what happens in the shift from modernism to postmodernism in terms of the reading experience. It tells us something about how the postmodern narrative, as a reflection of the changes in capitalist production, has lost any point of reference and substance, and instead becomes an intensified experience of individual instances or images.

As we can see, the change from Fordism to flexible accumulation lead to significant cultural changes. The speed up in production drastically changed the temporal experience by removing the sense of process and replacing it with the experience of the instant. Before I continue to examine how postmodern cultural productions reflect these changes in capital accumulation, I think it is helpful to look at how Harvey assess what I examined earlier about the de-linking of the financial system from any material form. Harvey argues, “none of these shifts in the experience of space and time would have the impact they do without a radical shift in the manner in which value gets represented as money” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 296). As the social dominant, money is central to how we understand and organize our experience. When money lose all forms of representation, this experience becomes difficult to organize and structure. Harvey explains that “the de-linking of the financial system from active production and from any material monetary base calls into question the reliability of the basic mechanism whereby value is supposed to be represented” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 298). He notes that the breakdown of money as a secure means of representing value has “created a crisis of representation in advanced capitalism” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 298). He explains that this crisis of representation has both reinforced and added considerable weight to the problems of time-space compression:

The rapidity with which currency market fluctuates across the world’s spaces, the extraordinary power of money capital flow in what is now global stock and financial market, and the volatility of what the purchasing power of money might represent, define, as it were, a high point of that highly problematic intersection of money, time, and space as interlocking elements of social power in the political economy of postmodernity. ... The central value system, to which capitalism has always appealed to validate and gauge its actions, is dematerializing and shifting, time horizons are

collapsing, and it is hard to tell exactly what space we are in when it comes to assessing causes and effects, meanings or values (*Condition of Postmodernity* 298).

By recognizing these shifts in the capitalist system, we are better equipped to understand the changes in the literary narrative. The de-centered postmodern narrative emerges from this breakdown in our value system - its ability to travel across world spaces and effectively blurring the ways we understand both time and space so that everything becomes available all at once. If we understand capitalist development as the central concern of the postmodern narrative, we can begin to understand its complexities.

Harvey's theories illuminate the social changes that moved society into the late capitalist era, and how these changes significantly altered perceptions of time from which postmodernism emerged. I now want to continue by examining what exactly constitute this shift to postmodernism in works of art, for which I will look at Jameson's theories. Jameson and Harvey's theories closely relates in terms of developing a framework for how to understand postmodernity. Jameson's theories on the emergence of postmodernism as a style reflect the social and cultural changes that Harvey's theories just illuminated. Jameson explains postmodernism as a

concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order – what is often euphemistically called modernization, postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism (“Consumer Society” 113).

Jameson develops his theories on postmodernism in relation to the emergence of “late, consumer, or multinational capitalism” (“Consumer Society” 125), and he argues that postmodernism's formal features “express the deeper logic of that particular system” (125). The disappearance of a sense of past or history is the most central idea in his theories, as he explains it as the main formal feature of postmodernism that expresses the logic of late capitalism. He explains that postmodernism reflects

the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have in one way or another to preserve (“Consumer Society” 125).

Jameson argues that the shift from modernism to postmodernism is clearly marked by the changes in commodity production, and that this new process of reproduction of images and simulacrum has resulted in the emergence of a new “flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (*Cultural Logic* 9). Where modernism “thought compulsively about the new and tried to watch its coming into being”, postmodernism “looks for events rather than new worlds... for shifts and irrevocable changes in the representation of things and the way they change” (*Cultural Logic* ix). The moderns, Jameson continues, “were interested in what was likely to come out of such changes and their general tendency” (*Cultural Logic* ix). While postmodernism “clocks the variations themselves, and knows only too well that the contents are just more images” (*Cultural Logic* ix). Jameson’s description of the shift from modernism to postmodernism tells us how postmodernism marks the end of a sense of process towards something new and unknown. What he illuminates is helpful for understanding the postmodern present. In postmodernism, there is no longer any reflection on what might be; there is simply expression of what is:

Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which “culture” has become a veritable “second nature”... “Culture” has become a product in its own right; the market has become a substitute for itself and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself: modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself. Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process” (*Cultural Logic* x).

Jameson explains that, while anxieties over what is to come was the dominant “feeling” in modernism, postmodernism replaces that feeling with a schizophrenic mentality (Stephanson 30). While the feeling of anxiety in modernism created temporal and narrative development, postmodernist feeling, if there is any, has turned into free-floating instances without logical organization. He argues that the symptoms that posed great concern in modernism have become “its own disease” in postmodernism (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* x). If modernism was centrally concerned with the possible outcomes of the commodification process, postmodernism is the expression of a completely commodified culture, removed from its historical contexts.

I think we can best understand postmodernist fragmentation in terms of what Jameson calls “the spatialization of time”. He explains that “time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial. Our relationship to the past is now a spatial one” (Stephanson 32). The postmodernist narrative therefore requires a different mode of interpretation, as there is no manifest content or “symptoms” to be discovered beyond the text. In the “culture of commodification”, the subject’s experience becomes like the reified commodity; it circulates in space with no connection to a past or a future. This results in a depthlessness or what many critics, including Jameson, refer to as the death of meaning. He argues that we can understand this depthlessness and fragmentation as an expression of “the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism” (Jameson, “Consumer Society” 113) through two main formal features, which he refers to as pastiche and schizophrenia.

Pastiche is the lack of a real relationship to the past or history. Pastiche, Jameson stresses, should not be confused with parody, as it does not set out to be humorous. Pastiche is the imitation of style without the intent to ridicule or comment on the style it imitates: it is blank parody. It is not parody because it contains no deeper logic or reference. In contrast to modernist literature, which hosts unique and personal styles, postmodernism has been “reduced to a neutral and reified media speech” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 17). Pastiche connects to the crisis of representation in late capitalism:

If the ideas of a ruling class were once the dominant (or hegemonic) ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflict the economic strategies which constrain our existence, but they no longer need to impose their speech (or henceforth are unable to); and the postliteracy of the late capitalist world reflects not only the absence of any great collective project but also the unavailability of the older national language itself (*Cultural Logic* 17).

Postmodernist literature’s lack of a historical consciousness is a result of the abstract power of late capitalism, which concerns itself only with itself and its potential gains. Contemporary capitalism does not set out to be a “norm” for society. With the removal of an elite and the dominant power in the hands of the individual capitalist, art does not have a center to reflect. It becomes a reflection of this omnipresent yet abstract capitalist power and thus art becomes a reflection of a society without any point of reference. DeLillo draws attention to this in *Cosmopolis* when Eric Packer explains to his assassin: “Your crime has no conscience. You

haven't been driven to do it by some oppressive social force" (196). This quotation from *Cosmopolis* illuminates Jameson's theory as it tells us something about how social power has turned into "faceless masters," whose thoughts or ideologies cannot be identified. His assassin's crime has no conscience as he attempts to attack something that he cannot identify, something that has no conscience.

Pastiche has to do with the production of art within contemporary or postmodernist art; that art or cultural production has itself become an object of reification. It is the "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 18) compatible "with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and "spectacles"" (*Cultural Logic* 18). Without any reference or new ideologies of style, producers of postmodernist art have to turn to a reified past of "images" of such a past. This is connected with what I mention earlier as simulacrum, in which the original has been reproduced to the point where we can no longer differentiate between the original and the copy. Through the process of reification, the original has lost all its initial purpose or history. Jameson examines pastiche mainly through nostalgia films. He explains that these films are not a real representation of historical content but rather a stylized imaged of that past (*Cultural Logic* 19). Through pastiche, we can better understand the "depthlessness" of the postmodern narrative as its language and narrative structure is a reflection of reified images of a past and therefore cannot offer any reflection.

Jameson explains that the crisis in historicity poses a question as to how we understand time and temporal organization in a culture dominated by a spatial logic:

If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but "heaps of fragments" (*Cultural Logic* 25).

He argues that we can understand the temporal experience in postmodernism through the mentality of the schizophrenic whose temporal experience is bound to the perpetual present, as the schizophrenic cannot unify the past present future coherently. The schizophrenic experience is an "experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous signifiers material signifiers which fails to link up into a coherent sequence" ("Consumer Society" 119). To explain this theory, Jameson use Lacan's description of schizophrenia, whose description is ultimately bound to language, as it has to do with the structuralist theory of the relationship



between the signifier and the signified. Jameson's explains that Lacan see the experience of time or the feeling of time, as an effect of language. It is because language, Jameson explains, "has a past and a future, because the sentence move in time, that we have what seem to us concrete or lived experience of time" ("Consumer Society" 119). We can understand the postmodernist narrative as to have a schizophrenic mentality because

the schizophrenic does not know language articulation in that way, he or she does not have our experience of temporal continuity either, but is condemned to live in a perpetual present with which the various moments of his or her past have little connection and for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon (Jameson, "Consumer Society" 119).

The schizophrenic's understanding of time is fruitful for understanding postmodernism peculiar way with time and it gives us a framework for understanding temporality in a seemingly atemporal society. The fragmented schizophrenic mentality of the postmodern narrative is a result of capitalist time, which like money becomes free floating in space with no reference to past or future. I will provide an in debt account of Jameson's theory of schizophrenic language and temporality in chapter two where I will examine *Fight Club* through this theory.

Jameson's theories on postmodernism are fruitful for understanding how late capitalist temporality manifests itself in postmodern art. The two formal features, pastiche and schizophrenia help us better understand the complexities and logic of these otherwise seemingly static narratives. His theories illuminates how postmodernist art reflects a society in which its dominant power have obliterated a real relationship to the past, and its feeling of time has become spatial.

As I mention earlier, I also want to examine how the characters in *American Psycho*, *Fight Club* and *Cosmopolis* seek an experience of time outside the capitalist framework through engaging with violence. Many critics on postmodern theory discusses the notion that the speed of which technology now allows information and capital to circulate, has surpassed the physicality of the human body, and that the body is only thing standing in the way of it accelerating even further. As capitalism seeks to push the limits of human physicality, its temporality naturally has tremendous consequences for the individual. An engagement with violence and death then can be a way to experience "natural time" in a time that tries to abandon anything natural. Jameson offers a good reflection on violence in relation to

temporality in postmodern narrative, what he explains as "...the intimate relationship between violence as content and the 'moment' as form" (*Singular Modernity* 195):

For there is a demonstrable slippage between the temporal violence with which the empty form of the moment is disengaged from the continuum of time and the awareness that is the very experience of empirical violence itself that offers a supremely privileged content for such a form (*Singular Modernity* 195).

What Jameson illuminates here is helpful for understanding how we can read violence as a way to escape the static time of capitalism, and that violence can offer content and meaning in what otherwise seem depthless. The fact that violence is a way to experience time adds another dimension to the critique of capitalism as portraying violence as the only way to experience anything "real". If we recognize this violence as the only escape from a continuous temporality, we can better understand the volatile experience of late capitalism in which these novels set out to critique.

The publications of *American Psycho*, *Fight Club* and *Cosmopolis* span from 1991-2003, which is a good timespan to explore the development of late-capitalism in terms of its increasing acceleration of the temporal experience. What happens during this period is the shift from industrial capital towards the formation of finance capital as the dominant social form. Harvey explains what happens during this time period as "going global". He explains the "the deregulation of finance that began in the late 1970s accelerated after 1986 and became unstoppable in the 1990s" (*Enigma of Capital* 16). Towards what Jameson refers to as the "cybernetic revolution": "the intensification of communications technology to the point at which capital transfers today abolishes space and time, virtually instantaneously effectuated across national spaces" (*Culture and Finance Capital* 252). Through these three novels, we can see the cultural changes that emerged with the fragmentation of the production process and its transformation to an ephemeral consumer culture towards technology's complete annihilation of space and time, where capital growth is so instantaneous that the moment is gone before it has even happened.

Considering this, I will divide this thesis into three chapters, and each chapter will focus on a different novel, in the order of publication. The novels offer some stark similarities as well as differences, which makes them a good combination to compare and contrast. All the novels present men in their late 20's with jobs, one way or another, related to finance. The novels present a hyperbolic and satiric representation of commodity fetishism and most

significantly, all three novels reflect the characters' attempt to experience a different mode of time than that imposed by capitalism; escape the continuous present. By this I mean, what I briefly mentioned before, the characters' engagement with violence and death. In my opinion, these novels add an extra dimension in relation to the study of temporality by further challenging a linear narrative timeline by playing with the organic process of life, and offer a brutal criticism of capitalism by bleakly portraying self-destruction as the only way to escape its hegemony. Some have argued that the engagement with violence in these novels present a need for the characters to re-establish their masculinity in a commodity-fetish culture, but I would argue that the characters' engagement with death is the only way they can break free from the continuous present and experience time.

Since the novels have a somewhat same thematic starting point, it is interesting to explore how capitalism's influence on temporality manifests itself through this 12-year period. The first chapter will examine *American Psycho*, which is set in the late eighties, when late-capitalism has already fully established its hegemony, and we are at the point where we can fully understand what Jameson means when he explains postmodernism as "what you have the modernization process is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which "culture" had become a veritable "second nature" ... Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* x). The novel reflects a society in which consumption has become the sole focus and what is on the surface is all that matters, which can be, as previously mentioned, tediously repetitive to the point of claustrophobia. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Ellis himself explains that it is "a very annoying book", but that was how he as a writer "took in those years". He explains he was "writing about a society in which the surface became the only thing. Everything was surface - - food, clothes - that is what defined people. So I wrote a book that is all surface action: no narrative, no characters to latch onto, flat, endlessly repetitive" (Cohen, *New York Times*). "I used comedy", he adds, "to get at the absolute banality of the violence of a perverse decade" (Cohen, *New York Times*). While this novel's repetitive narrative can be tedious, the sheer apathy to anything but material value, to the point where people never really recognize each other (Bateman gets away with murdering his colleague, Paul Allen, because people believe they saw Allen days after he had been murdered), also makes this novel genuinely disturbing to read. Bateman can never really escape the time warp of capitalist reification because literally no one around him recognizes him or what he is doing. Bateman has neither past nor future, but lives in a perpetual present

of claustrophobic materialism. Therefore, this chapter will explore the narrative of *American Psycho* as a reflection of reified time as a consequence of the capitalist reification process.

The second chapter will analyze the nightmarish experience that the narrative of *Fight Club* portrays as the unnamed protagonist subconsciously creates an alternative self who is, unlike his “real” self, capable of putting up a fight the against constraints of capitalist ideology. It is important to mention that Palahniuk initially wrote *Fight Club* as a short story, which became chapter 6 in the novel. This is significant in terms of how the postmodern narrative presents an “episodic” style. The narrative in *Fight Club* is less passive than the narrative presented in *American Psycho* and *Cosmopolis*, but *Fight Club*’s narrative is by no means straightforward. By the use of analepsis, Palahniuk narrates through multiple layers of timeframes, and the narrative is less passive in the sense that Palahniuk gives us more to “latch on to”. Yet the novel is highly comparable to both the other two narratives. Palahniuk narrates from the same consumer-obsessed society as Ellis where “the things you used to own, now they own you” (Palahniuk 41), but in contrast to *American Psycho* where we are trapped in Bateman’s consciousness, *Fight Club* narrates more from the “outside in”; the protagonist is aware that he lives in a society where people are less valued than things. The narrative of Bateman’s consciousness mirrors the way the protagonist in *Fight Club* describes his state of insomnia: “Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy. The insomnia distance of everything, you can’t touch anything and nothing can touch you” (Palahniuk 21). Both Bateman and *Fight Club*’s protagonist reflect an affectless society. Similar to Bateman’s violent act of aggression, the fighting that happens during fight club is a way to cope with the affectless everyday life. Yet it not only the violent acts of the arranged fights in *Fight Club* that are intriguing in terms of escaping time imposed by capitalism. The society that Palahniuk narrates from demonstrates some of the same human apathy as *American Psycho*. The only way the protagonist can escape his insomniatic state is by going to support groups for people with terminal illnesses. In these groups, the protagonist comes in contact with a natural movement of life, and these people, who are in close contact with death, allow him to experience human empathy: “This was freedom. Losing all hope was freedom. If I didn’t say anything, people in the group assumed the worst. They cried harder. I cried harder. Look up into the stars and you’re gone” (Palahniuk 22).

In critical writing most critics tends to focus on David Fincher’s movie *Fight Club* rather than the Palahniuk’s novel. Considering *Fight Club*’s tremendous popularity, there has been a surprising lack of critical work on the actual novel, which is unfortunate, as it is not

only the themes of *Fight Club* that makes it a controversial and gripping “story”. The way the narrative is constructed is essential for what makes *Fight Club* what it is. Through its narrative construction, Palahniuk effectively develops a narrative about “throwaway” society, *for* a throwaway society; Palahniuk creates a narrative that captures the reader in a time where we do not have time to read. In other words, Palahniuk’s narrative comments on the production of art under the temporal framework of late capitalism. In this chapter, I will explore *Fight Club*’s narrative through Jameson’s theory of postmodernist writing as schizophrenic. With the use of Jameson’s theory, I set out argue that it is *Fight Club*’s narrative structure that effectively narrates the experience of the individual in postmodern society. By understanding what the structure of the novel can tell us, we can understand how its engagement with violence, through which it have achieved a cult status, is a result of the psychological effect of postmodern society.

Deciding how to approach *Cosmopolis* in terms of how it reflects capitalist temporality seems like an almost impossible task; the possibilities seem infinite as DeLillo both narrates and theorizes the market. The postmodern traits and tendencies we have seen in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* seem to culminate in *Cosmopolis*. *Cosmopolis*, both structurally and thematically, narrates capitalism in its most perverse form. The novel essentially narrates the inseparability of the “interaction between technology and capital” (DeLillo 23), and its tremendous impact on perceptions time. DeLillo both narrates and theorizes a heightened sense of finance capitalism’s crisis of representation. The novel’s protagonist, Eric Packer, the asset manager of a vast financial company, is the embodiment of finance capitalism and thus takes on a spectral form. In the novel, DeLillo narrates a world in which the abstract power of capitalism takes over as a governing body. When Packer is told that his ride across town will be difficult because there has been a threat to the security of the president he responds: “So people still shoot at presidents? I thought there were more stimulating targets” (DeLillo 20). In the society that *Cosmopolis* depicts, dominated by finance capitalism, power is in the hands of the individual capitalist rather than that of politicians. As we can understand from Packer’s comment about the president, shooting him would have greater consequences for society, national and global, than shooting the president. The problem DeLillo approaches in this novel is the problem of narrating a society controlled and organized by a form of capital that cannot be represented. This chapter will examine how DeLillo, through Eric Packer, who takes on a spectral form, narrates a form of capital that has “lost its narrative quality”. I will examine Eric Packer as the embodiment of finance

capitalism in the cyber capital era, and its temporal logic of “living in the future”. I will attempt to demonstrate how *Cosmopolis*’ narrative, initially dismissed by critics as too static, is a reflection of the annihilation of time through the global stock market.

## Chapter 1. *THIS IS NOT AN EXIT*

### Reified Time and Spatial Temporality: Ephemeral commodities and Claustrophobia in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*

*...the problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist societies in all its aspects*

*Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness*

*The obscenity of the commodity derives from the fact that it is abstract, formal and light in comparison with the weight, opacity and substance of the object. The commodity is legible, as opposed to the object, which never quite reveals its secret, and it manifests its visible essence - its price. It is the lotus of transcription of all possible objects: through it, objects communicate – the merchant form is the first great medium of the modern world. But the message which the objects deliver is radically simplified and is always the same – their exchange value. And so, deep down the message has already ceased to exist, it is the medium which imposes itself in its pure circulation. Let us call this ecstasy: the market is an ecstatic form of the circulation of goods ...*

*Jean Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication*

Baudrillard's allusion in the latter quotation to Marx' analysis of the obscenity of the commodity, is a good starting point when it comes to explaining what is going on in *American Psycho*, and why its narrative style leaves us with the feeling that the novel will never end. In *American Psycho*, the commodity has become the only way to communicate and signify social belonging, and thus the only thing that matters:

Evelyn and I are by far the best dressed couple. I'm wearing a lamb's wool topcoat, a wool jacket with wool flannel trousers, a cotton shirt, a cashmere V-neck sweater and a silk tie, all from Armani. Evelyn is wearing a cotton blouse by Dolce and Gabbana, suede shoes by Yves Saint Laurent, a stenciled calf skirt by Adrienne Landau with a

sued belt from Jill Stuart, Calvin Klein tights, Venetian-glass earrings by Frances Patiky Stein, and clasped in her hand is a single white rose that I bought at the Korean Deli before Carruthers' limousine picked me up. Carruthers is wearing a lamb's wool sport coat, a cashmere/vicuna cardigan sweater, cavalry twill trousers, a cotton shirt and a silk tie, all from Hermès. "How tacky," Evelyn whispered to me; I silently agreed (Ellis 143).

The temporal experience in *American Psycho* reflects what Baudrillard explains, as objects become signs. Through the rapid circulation of goods, the commodity does no longer bear any meaning in its physical form. As we can see in the passage above, Bateman refers only to the name of the designer, not the object itself; the object has lost all other functions than its function to signal social belonging. Bateman's only concern is his need to "fit in", which means that everything he owns has to be the newest model on the market. In a society where fashions constantly change, this drive leaves aspects of time drastically shortened and fragmented. In this passage, Bateman picks up his fiancée and meets "friends". Yet this becomes insignificant in the narrative because the commodities are in focus, which consequently prevents any narrative development. The narrative of *American Psycho*, which continues in the same style as the passage above throughout, illustrates how the aspects of time is perceived as a series of individual, isolated instances rather than a progression in time.

There is no lack of critical work on commodity culture and commodity fetishism, but the cultural importance of the commodity never seems to lose its relevance. It is crucial to understand something about commodity culture in order to understand the temporal logic of *American Psycho*. In a commodity-fetishized society such as in *American Psycho*, the temporal organization is a product of the highly ephemeral life span of the commodity. Baudrillard argues that we are past a time of commodity alienation and have entered the stage of "ecstasy of communication" (*Ecstasy of Communication* 26). We have passed the point where commodity consumption triggered a feeling of alienation, to become the only thing that we know how to relate to, the means through which we communicate. Baudrillard explains alienation relies on the fact that others exists, that there needs to be something or someone to feel alienated from, and now we have moved passed the stage of a consumer society that knows of anything beyond consumerism itself:

...the consumer society was lived under the sign of alienation: it was a society of the spectacle-but at least there was spectacle, and the spectacle, even if alienated, is never



obscene. Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theater, no more illusion, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication... It is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more-visible-than-visible; it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication (*Ecstasy of Communication* 26-27).

The highly intensified experience of commodity culture Baudrillard illuminates here is helpful for understanding the society that *American Psycho* portrays. In fact, Baudrillard's theory here could sum up the narrative function of *American Psycho*, which is why the novel has been object for so much critique as everything is literally out in the open in this novel, no filters or allegories:

Jean, my secretary who is in love with me, walks into my office without buzzing, announcing that I have a very important meeting to attend at eleven. I'm sitting at the Palazzetti glass-top desk, staring into my monitor with my Ray-Bans on, chewing Nuprin, hung over from a coke binge that started innocently enough last night at Shout! with Charles Hamilton, Andrew Spencer and Chris Stafford and then moved on to the Princeton Club, progressed to Baracadia and ended at Nell's around three-thirty, and though earlier this morning, while soaking in a bath, sipping a Stoli Bloody Mary after maybe four hours of sweaty, dreamless sleep, I realized that there *was* a meeting, I seemed to have forgotten about it on the cab ride downtown. Jean is wearing a red stretch-silk jacket, a crocheted rayon-ribbon skirt, red suede pumps with satin bows by Susan Bennis Warren Edwards and gold-plated earrings by Robert Lee Morris (Ellis 106).

Ellis narrates from a society where social relations have been replaced by commodities or effectively have become commodities, which consequence in a temporality, and hence narrative, without any real development.

In a society made up by commodity relations rather than human relations, perceptions of time will follow the time imposed by commodity production. The ephemeral life span of fashion and trends in *American Psycho* works as an image for finance capital. In order to fit into society you have to know what to possess ahead of time, you have to make what lies in the future present, and once you bring this into the present, it is already in the past.

Consequently creating a constant present like in *American Psycho* where the chapters are a series of individual instances or “scenes”. Instead of a progression of time, time reproduces itself in instances where the only thing different is what is new on the market. In his article, ““Into the Void”: Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis’ “American Psycho””, Martin Weinreich examines *American Psycho* through Baudrillard’s concepts of the hyperreal and simulation, and he explains that the world created in *American Psycho* is not made out of tangible objects (67). Bateman refers not to the object itself but the brand name. The material objects Bateman incessantly list have been reified into signs, and are therefore not “real”. “In the logic of consumer capital”, Weinreich explains, “reference to a concrete or “real” entity is not only unnecessary, it simply does not exist” (67). What Weinreich draws attention to here is important for understanding Ellis’ reflection of a capitalist society completely devoid of any meaning beyond the process of capitalism. Therefore, we can see *American Psycho* as an allegory of the temporal logic of capitalism and its immense effect on the individual. Of all the three novels that I will discuss in this thesis, *American Psycho* is perhaps the novel that paints the most disturbing image of this. In light of this, this chapter will examine how the narrative style of *American Psycho* creates a claustrophobic effect by reflecting the capitalist commodity reification process.

The reification processes is essentially a consequence of the fragmentation of the production process and its decreased lifetime of commodities. The speed up in the production process lead to the reproduction of commodities to the point in which they lose all connection to a past and original purpose, and it is the social consequences of this process which is at the core of *American Psycho*’s narrative in terms of temporality. With this in mind, I think it is fruitful to look a little further at how the temporal aspect of the reification process functions. As we can see in the opening quotation of this chapter, Georg Lukács argues that the commodity is the central, structural problem of capitalism in all its aspects (83). He explains that the development of the commodity “to the point where it becomes the dominant form in society did not take place until the advent of modern capitalism” (86). He explains that it was still present at the beginning of capitalist development, but “as the process advanced and forms became more complex and less direct, it became increasingly difficult and rare to find anyone penetrating the veil of reification” (86). In the introduction, I mentioned Lukács’ reflection on how time, through capitalist reification, loses its “flowing nature”, freezes and effectively becomes space (Lukács 90). As commodities becomes reified, they lose their original purpose and their connection to a past or future, and the same thing happens to the

perspective of time in capitalist societies; time ends up reproducing itself. Lukács continues to explain that “in this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialized production of the object of labour, the subject of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented” (90). Instead of a process that moves forward in time, time has become a series of homogenous instances. This is important to consider in terms of what we see in *American Psycho*. The novel is narrated from this point in capitalist development when it is no longer possible to penetrate the veil of reification. Lukács explains that through capitalist development, man has become estranged and isolated from his own activities:

subjectively – where the market economy has been fully developed – a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article (87).

The fragmented capital process becomes a separate entity that operates independently from the worker, and as a result, work becomes like a reified commodity to the worker because he no longer partakes in the capital process.

We can understand the idea of work turning into a commodity in *American Psycho* when Bateman never seems to actually do any work in his office. When asked why he works he replies, “because I want to fit in”. Labor has effectively turned into a commodity that Bateman “consumes”, like all other objects, to “fit in”. That Bateman does not work becomes evident in the chapter called “Office”:

... just staring across the office at the George Stubbs painting that hangs on the wall, wondering if I should move it, thinking maybe it is too close to the Aiwa AM/FM stereo receiver and the dual cassette recorder and the semiautomatic belt-drive turntable, the graphic equalizer, the matching bookshelf speakers, all in twilight blue to match the color scheme of the office... I get up and move the all these sporting magazines from the forties-they cost me thirty bucks *apiece*... then I lift the Stubbs painting off the wall and balance it on the table then I sit back at my desk and fiddle with the pencils I keep in a vintage German beer stein I got from Man-tiques... I put a

Paul Butterfield tape in the cassette player, sit back at the desk and flip through last week's sports illustrated...(65-66).

Bateman's job is to consume, to own all the latest objects on the market and frequent the hippest restaurants and clubs, with people who have the same "jobs". Work has become a thing he does, but has no real purpose or understanding as to why he does it. This results in a temporal experience that has no temporal or narrative development, as Bateman does not work for or towards anything. The novel's narrative reflects the reification process by playing Bateman's actions in a loop and effectively creates what Lukács explains as time becoming space.

Lukács argument of time becoming space is grounded in the fragmentation of the work process. Isolating the worker by only having him perform one task of the production process destroys the organic process towards the finished product. "This fragmentation of the object of production", Lukács explains, "necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject" (89); within this process, man becomes only a less significant part of a mechanical system. Lukács explains further that man is not the authentic master of the capital process, "on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system" (89), and thus "...finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not" (89). It is through this control of man's time, through the production process where quantity of production determines everything, which turn time into space:

Thus time sheds its variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space. ...On one hand, the objectification of their labour power into something opposed to their total personality (a process already accomplished with the sale of that labour power as commodity) is now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life. ...the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle fed to an alien system. On the other hand, the mechanical disintegration of the process of production into its components also destroys those bonds that had bound individuals to a community in the days when production was still 'organic'. ...mechanization makes of them isolated abstract atoms whose work no longer brings them together directly

and organically; it becomes mediated to an increasing extent exclusively by the abstract laws of the mechanism which imprisons them (Lukács 90).

Commodity production and consumption freezes time and this cause for a temporal experience of a continuous present, a temporal experience where time exists only in space, with no temporal horizon. Postmodern narratives such as *American Psycho* comment on this state of society. It is because of the effect of this reification process that the extensive focus on commodities and consumption in *American Psycho* becomes so significant in terms of temporality. In order to understand *American Psycho* as a social critique, we have to acknowledge the effect the novel has on us as readers. The incessant listing of commodities, which quickly becomes tedious, puts us in the reification process, and the tediousness effectively demonstrates to the reader how this process is experienced.

In her article, “The Men Who Make the Killings: *American Psycho*, Financial Masculinity, and 1980s Financial Print Culture”, Leigh Claire La Berge makes an excellent observation about the branded language in the novel, namely that, “for all of its engagement with the discourse of consumption, *American Psycho* has nothing to do with consumer desire. Indeed, the simultaneous presentation of sheer quantity and quick exhaustion of branded language creates a world apart, a world that can be represented but is not available for temporal development” (290). Although Bateman is obsessed with commodities, *American Psycho* is not about the drive to purchase “objects”. This is crucial for the understanding of the novel as a critique of capitalist temporality. The narrative depicts a society that knows nothing but their relation to commodities. It represents what Lukács illuminates in the quotation above about personality becomes reduced to an isolated particle fed to an alien system. Bateman even draws our attention to this when he explains that

There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense out lifestyles are probably comparable: *I simply am not there*. It is hard for me to make sense on any given level. Myself is fabricated, an aberration. I am a noncontingent human being (Ellis 376-77).

This quotation from the novel, as well as what La Berge mentions, is fruitful for understanding the troubling postmodern narrative. The quote first of all reflects the

consequence of the reification process. Bateman is a product of a capitalist society; he is a reified product with no connection to a past or future. The novel's quick and fragmented prose, filled with "branded" language, illustrates as La Berge says a world that can be represented but not available for temporal development. In other words, through this representation the novel effectively demonstrates capitalist temporality by not allowing temporal development. It holds both Bateman and the reader in loop of a perpetual present. The constant stressing of commodity products results in an intensely stalled reading experience that effectively reflects the idea of spatialized time.

In order to understand more of the claustrophobic effect that *American Psycho* sparks, we need to look a bit further into how the novel turns time into space. In terms of narrative structure, the most effective illustration of time becoming space is how the chapters in the novel are organized. The chapters are, as mentioned, a series of instances, which only refers to places or events such as "office" or "concert", rather than a progression that drives the novel forward throughout. Nor is there any real or logical connection between the chapters. The chapters mainly consist of Bateman's detailed description of various commodities, various places, and what designer clothes the people there are wearing. In the chapter named "Morning", we get a four-page description of Bateman's morning routine where all he does is list products he uses to get ready:

I pour some Plax antiplaque formula into a stainless-steel tumbler and swish it around my mouth for thirty seconds. Then I squeeze Rembrandt onto a faux-tortoise-shell toothbrush and start brushing my teeth (too hungover to floss properly – but maybe I flossed before bed last night?) and rinse with Listerine ... In the shower I use first a water-activated gel cleanser, then a honey-almond body scrub, and on the face an exfoliating gel scrub. Vidal Sassoon shampoo is especially good at getting rid of the coating of dried perspiration, salts, oils, airborne pollutants and dirt that can weight down hair and flatten it to the scalp which can make you look older (Ellis 26).

The narration makes the products he uses the focus of the description. It is not what he does that is important to the "story," it is what he uses to do it. The whole passage comes off quite like an advertisement, which is essentially what Bateman's life is. He is a walking advertisement for the latest commodities, a reflection of a reified product. In this passage, the focus of the narration is on the products rather than Bateman's actions - these products *are* Patrick Bateman. Although the difference in narration is not drastic, the effect on the temporal

experience changes entirely. Combined with the very general name of the chapter, “Morning”, this gives us a sense that this is what he does every day; his life goes in a loop. This is signaled further by his question of whether he might have flossed last night. His actions are not a result of his own resonance, but from social dictation in a completely reified society.

Weinreich, following Baudrillard, argues that through Bateman’s obsession with commodities, the novel’s narrative strategy creates a memetic effect that simulates reality. He explains, “Ellis uses Patrick’s fixation on the commodity and his perception of objects as “objects-become-signs” to create a form of hyperrealist aesthetics. The “detailed deconstruction of the real, the pragmatic close ‘reading’ of the object: flattening out, linearity and seriality of part-objects” results in “both the aesthetic and epistemological form of simulation” (Weinreich 67). Although Weinreich has a slightly different focus than mine, I think it is helpful to consider his argument because it links to how Ellis effectively reflects the reification process. By constructing a hyperrealist narrative, Ellis simulates reality and leaves it entirely on the surface; there is nothing beyond the words on the page. The effect of this is that the narrative becomes very real to us as readers but at the same time alienates us from the text as there is nothing to read into, and because of this, the reading of the novel can become very frustrating. It genuinely creates the feeling of being stuck in time. Instead of the reader, engaging in the alienation of the subject, the readers themselves become the subjects of alienation.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative is repetitive and fast paced, yet at the same time, unmoving. Weinreich makes an interesting argument about Ellis’ use of repetition. When explaining the function of repetition in a narrative, Weinreich refers to Peter Brooks, who argues that narrative “must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events. To achieve this narrative function, repetition must be both recall of an earlier moment and a variation of it” (Weinreich 75). Only in this way, Weinreich explains, “can repetition be conceived as a progressive act” (75). Weinreich argues that in *American Psycho*, the narrative function of repetition creates the opposite effect: “...in *American Psycho* one does not encounter such a form of meaningful repetition but blatant

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<sup>1</sup> Although I approach *American Psycho* mainly through Lukács’ theories on the reification process as I find that this provides an effective framework for analyzing the novel in terms of temporality, I do not think the novel’s intimate link, that Weinreich draws attention to, with Baudrillard’s theories on hyperrealism, simulation and simulacrum should go unnoticed. I have briefly touched upon Baudrillard’s theories to start with in terms of object becomes sign, and I find Weinreich’s argument that *American Psycho* is a drastic fictionalization of radical semiurgy, the production of new sign systems, fruitful for the discussion of what is happening in the novel. My own approach is grounded on the reification process’ spatialization of time and as Baudrillard’s theories is a reflection of the cultural consequences of the reification process as the reification process reproduces commodities into signs, the two approaches are intimately linked.

copies of past events. Ellis turns the function of repetition, which usually is a device for making sense, against itself in order to create a form of repetition that ultimately spirals into meaninglessness” (75). In addition to this effect, Ellis’ use of repetition also creates a claustrophobic effect by placing Bateman in the same scenes repeatedly, to the point where we feel like we want to escape. The novel simulates reality in a capitalist society incapable of penetrating the veil of reification. Like the products Bateman endlessly list, the narrative has no organic process. The reading experience is entirely special.

By organizing the chapters as “episodes”, Ellis reflects the narrative style that has come to be associated as the postmodern narrative. By looking at this through Lukács theories we can make sense of this and understand Ellis’ stylistic decision an attempt to reflect the claustrophobic temporal experience at this time, and understand the narrative beyond merely static. The fact that the chapters also have very general titles (Business Meeting, Dry Cleaners, Tuesday, Date...) further highlights the standstill of time. Jameson’s argument on postmodernist time as schizophrenic is worth briefly mentioning here as it is helpful for understanding the narrative structure of *American Psycho*:

if we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 27).

Bateman’s life is so tediously repetitive that even he struggles to remember what and when things have happened. The society depicted in *American Psycho*, so deeply engulfed in the capitalist reification process, bears no idea of a past or a future; trapped in a circle of “sameness”. Bateman’s temporal experience is, as Jameson explains, reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers. These signifiers have no connection to a past or future which keeps the narrative entirely within the present. Through this narrative, we experience the perpetual present imposed by capitalist development.

There is one chapter in the novel, titled “A Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon”, which I think is particularly interesting in terms of how the narrative creates an experience of a perpetual present. This four-page chapter both begins and ends mid-sentence, which functions, just as the title suggests, as a quick glimpse into Bateman’s never ending present. The chapter begins with “and it’s midafternoon and I find myself standing at a phone booth



on a corner somewhere downtown, I don't know where... I pop all three (pills) into my mouth and swallow them down with a Diet Pepsi and I couldn't tell you where it came from if my life depended on it. I've forgotten who I had lunch with earlier, and even more important, *where*" (Ellis 148). This chapter also functions as an effective illustration of how time has become a "quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things'" (Lukács 90). In this short chapter, Patrick seems to be having a mental breakdown. The chapter is quite disturbing and it intensifies the experience of a continuous present as Bateman is on the verge of collapse, overwhelmed by the "things" that fills his daily life: "Was it Robert Ailes at Beats? Or was it Todd Hendricks at Ursula's, the new Phillip Duncan Holmes bistro in Tribeca? Or was it Ricky Worrall and were we at December's? Or would it have been Kevin Weber at Contra in NoHo? Did I order the partridge sandwich on brioche with green tomatoes, or a big plate of endive with clam sauce? "Oh god, I can't remember" ..." (Ellis 149). He is disillusioned and panics over the fact that he cannot remember where he has been and what he has done. His days are so overwhelmingly alike that he cannot differentiate between them. When he tries to remember he has nothing to "latch on to" as all his days are effectively the same. The fact that the chapter refers to "a" Thursday afternoon rather than Thursday afternoon further signifies how this is not a day in particular, a day that keeps on replaying itself. Bateman never encounter anything that lets him experience a movement of time, and thus his temporal experience is entirely spatial.

The effect of the chapter, which ends mid-sentence, in combination with the proceeding chapter is quite chilling. The end of "A Glimpse of a Thursday Afternoon": "I run out of the delicatessen and onto the street where this" (152), runs directly into the next chapter, "Yale Club", which starts just as the rest, without any reflection on what just happened: "" What are the rules for sweater vests" Van Patten asks the table. "What do you mean? McDermott furrows his brow, takes a sip of Absolut. "Yes," I say. "Clarify."" (153). The atmosphere this narrative device creates is both disturbing and confusing. In the chapter before, Bateman is on the verge of a mental breakdown and on the next page, he is back on one of many restaurants and bars, having casual conversation. We have no idea how long after or even if it is before the preceding chapter. The effect of this is genuinely claustrophobic. Just as the reader feels as if something is about to happen, it loops back to the same "scene" we have read so many times already, and we are still none the wiser. The lack of transition between these two chapters illustrate the extreme fragmentation of this novel and

its subject, and it puts the reader in this claustrophobic environment of capitalist reification in which the novel sets out to critique.

I think it is important to draw attention to how the novel deals directly with finance as a theme, and how this influences the temporal structure of the novel. A direct reference to finance in the novel is the reoccurring presence of an automated teller machine. The numerous references, 12 in total, to the automated teller is interesting because it seems to both control and offer Bateman solace at the same time. In *American Psycho*, money in its physical form still has some significance or value. Like the commodities Bateman surrounds himself with, the tangible paper dollar still represents something to him:

Walking along Broadway I stop at an automated teller where just for the hell of it I take out another hundred dollars, feeling better having an even five hundred in my wallet” (128). . . . Stopping at an automated teller to take three hundred dollars out for no particular reason, all the bills crisp, freshly printed twenties, and I delicately place them in my gazelleskin wallet so as not to wrinkle them (163).

In a society driven by capitalism, which is becoming more and more abstract, “tangible” money seems to offer some sense of orientation for Bateman. Bateman, and other characters, often refer to the automated teller as “my automated teller,” and he remembers events and when he was at places by linking to when he “checked in” at his automated teller: “. . .and ended up at my automated teller sometime around five” (81). Bateman struggles to come up with an answer to when he last saw Paul Owen (whom he murdered) when the police question him. The only response he can muster up is “The . . .last time I *physically* saw him was . . . at an automated teller. I can’t remember which . . . just one that was near, um, Nell’s” (273). The automated teller seems to be the only solid point in Bateman’s life and this tells us something about how his entire existence is a product of capitalism. It is interesting to note Bateman’s words about seeing Paul Owen at an automated teller in the latter quotation, “*physically* saw him”. Like the commodity, everything, even the people, in *American Psycho* is abstract, free floating with no connection to past or future. The only thing solid Bateman can use to organize his experience is the literal dollars he gets from his automated teller.

We can link this to a section in DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, where Benno Levin, the man who finally assassinates the protagonist, mentions the automated teller: “I still have my bank that I visit systematically to look at the last literal dollars remaining in my account. I do this for the ongoing psychology of it, to know I have money in an institution. And because cash

machines have a charisma that still speaks to me” (DeLillo 60). In *Cosmopolis*, we are in the full-blown cyber capitalist era where, unlike in *American Psycho*, the automated teller has lost its purpose. I think it is helpful to include Levin’s reflections on the automated teller to further explain how, in a capitalist society that is becoming increasingly “free floating”, money in its physical form functions as a sort of reality check - to still be able to see money that is “real”. The automated teller functions as a way for Bateman to some degree organize his experiences. This tells us something about how money or capitalism, the main source from which society organize their experience, is becoming increasingly abstract. In a society constructed by a system of signs for money and commodities, the automated teller still functions to some degree as its original purpose.

La Berge argues that the automated teller is “crucial to the novel’s development of violence” (287). She explains that Bateman’s visits to the ATM precedes the violence in the novel, and that this way we can see the Automated Teller as foreshadowing the violence. She links this idea to how Ellis satirizes the financial transaction by linking it to violence. She argues that the use of the ATM destabilizes the temporal structure of the novel by questioning whether we can rely on the information given by the ATM or Bateman’s interaction with the ATM:

In the foregoing list of financial devices, the temporal structure is evacuated, and in rearranging the structure of temporality, here realized as narration, the text provides both an understanding and a critique of finance as a temporal form. . . . If realism transforms indexically accurate content over time into narrative, much as a successful financial transaction transforms good information over time into profit, Ellis satirizes finance formally by using quotidian financial devices to disrupt temporal structure and render suspect whether the information is reliable, indeed whether this content should be understood as information at all (285-286).

She argues that the automated teller is an alternative narrative structure: “An intimately personal financial device, the ATM seems not to participate in a temporal dynamic of suspension and recuperation, and that perception is an important part of Ellis’s critique. Yet, simultaneously, the automated teller machine in its very name makes a claim to narration: it is a teller” (La Berge 286). She argues that what is particularly interesting in terms of Bateman’s visits to the ATM preceding incidents of violence is that in the instances when this occur, Bateman does not explain his reasons for violence, but rather his reasons for banking (La

Berge 288). The first quotation from Bateman's visits to the ATM where he takes money out, "feeling better having an even five hundred in my wallet", is preceded by a four-page description of his interaction with a homeless man whom he stabs to death without giving the reader a reason or explanation. I agree with La Berge that is in fact very significant point, and one that makes this novel a very complex narrative that can be confusing, disturbing and creates a feeling of bottomless meaninglessness. By only having Bateman explain his reason for banking and not for murder, Ellis is able to illustrate the extreme perversity of capitalism in this era.

The presence of the automated teller as a narrator is interesting and helpful in terms of finance as a temporal form. It becomes even more interesting if we connect the presence of the automated teller in *American Psycho* to *Cosmopolis*' reference to advanced capitalism, "money has lost its narrative quality... Money is talking to itself" (DeLillo 77). Unlike Benno Levin, Eric Packer, the novel's protagonist, find the automated teller useless:

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

What Packer feels about the automated teller says something about how people are becoming less and less important within the rising technological capitalist system. Capital has become a thing of its own. Although we can argue that the automated teller "grounds" Bateman, in *American Psycho* it also illustrates a society where such a thing is increasingly more difficult to find. As we get towards the end of the novel, Bateman becomes more frantic and he struggles to know what is real. Here we get at the core of the postmodernist theme: how to inhabit a world that is losing its center. In *American Psycho* money still have some value in its physical form. Yet as the novel progress, the automated teller takes on a controlling, all-consuming role over Bateman. The automated teller stops functioning as a way for him to orientate himself (narrative quality) and rather disorientate him (money is talking to itself):

I'm having sort of a hard time paying attention because my automated teller has started *speaking* to me, sometimes actually leaving weird messages on the screen, in green lettering, like "Cause a Terrible Scene at Sotheby's" or "Kill the President" or

“Feed Me a Stray Cat,” and I was freaked out by the park bench that followed me for six blocks last Monday evening and it too spoke to me. Disintegration – I’m taking it in stride. Yet the only question I can muster up at first and add to the conversation is a worried “I’m not going anywhere if we don’t have a reservation someplace, so do we have a reservation someplace or not?” ... I’m also wearing mocktortoiseshell glasses that are nonprescription (395-396).

Bateman knows he is slowly deteriorating, but he does not know how to change. He is only a piece in a disintegrated system, and the only thing he can do is to play his part. The progression from the automated teller being a signifier for something tangible to its role as an element of disillusionment says something about the larger message in the novel, and about problematics of the postmodernist narrative. The reoccurring presence of the automated teller in *American Psycho* functions as an image for what the quote from *Cosmopolis* mentions about money losing its narrative quality and has started talking to itself. The automated teller’s increasing control of Bateman portrays the shift into more technological forms of finance. Bateman’s consciousness depicts the psychological effect of an increasingly abstract capitalist temporality. As money is losing all its ties to something solid and tangible it becomes abstract yet omnipresent, and thus it becomes an increasingly unstable instrument for organizing one’s experience. Ellis’ form highlights the complexity of the postmodern narrative, namely the problem of narrating a society where money, its central theme, is becoming increasingly difficult to narrate. The first line of the novel: “ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTERS HERE is scrawled in blood red lettering on the side of the Chemical Bank near the corner of Eleventh and First...” (3), tells us something about the brutality of finance that the postmodern narrative reflects, and its dominance over the individual’s experience.

I will proceed by having a closer look at the violence in the novel and its intimate link to capitalist temporality. The question then becomes, can Bateman experience time through violence? The brutal violence described in the novel without any form of reflection is the main reason for the novel’s much disputed initial reception. I argue that the violence in the novel is Bateman’s attempt to escape the atemporal framework imposed by capitalism. Bateman’s contact with death allows him to experience a natural movement of time. I also argue that, towards the end of the novel, Bateman wants to be caught, he wants there to be consequences for his actions. In a society where everything that ever happens is essentially the same, Bateman acts violently in order to experience something different. “Cabin fever”, a

state of anxiety and restlessness brought on by a prolonged stay in a confining place, would be a good way to explain Bateman's experience. Capitalist reification results in a feeling of isolation by fragmenting time. Bateman's experience is continuously the same - the same places, the same people - and this does something to his mental state. He murders in order to experience something different - through death he feels alive, and eventually he hopes to get caught so that he can feel that there can be a different life, a life where what you do has consequences which alters the path life is taking; an organic temporal experience of cause and effect.

In contrast to the socially prescribed tasks Bateman performs, death becomes something he can control; "...I place the gun, which is a symbol of order to me, back in the locker, to be used at another time. I have videotapes to return, money to be taken out of an automated teller, a dinner reservation at 150 Wooster that was difficult to get" (Ellis 346). Violence is essentially a "break" from the mundane experience of his everyday life. Martin Weinreich argues, similarly to me, that "It appears that Patrick Bateman murders in order to discover something authentic, something remotely meaningful, which might be hidden beyond the surface composed entirely of images and signs – as if killing could introduce a feeling of profundity into his otherwise shallow existence (Weinreich 72). What Weinreich points out is helpful for further understanding the novel as a brutal critique of the depthlessness of a reified society. Violence might be the only way to experience a sense of time; a sense that life has an end, an escape from capitalist reification. After murdering a homeless man, Bateman explains his sensation: I" feel heady, ravenous, pumped up, as if I'd just worked out and endorphins are flooding my nervous system, or just embraced that first line of cocaine, inhaled the first puff of a fine cigar, sipped that first glass of Cristal" (Ellis 132). That Bateman turns to murdering in order to experience a feeling of something real and authentic demonstrate the extreme perversity of this era.

La Berge argues that "while the manifest content of that destabilizing material is violence, the violence is rendered, through a financial frame and it is the finance, not the violence, towards which Ellis's satirical and postmodern form is oriented" (La Berge 284). The novel offers an extreme critique of capitalism by narrating the violent acts with the same apathy as everything else in the novel:

...I pull out a long, thin knife and with a serrated edge and, being very careful not to kill him, push maybe half an inch of the blade into his right eye, flicking the handle

up, instantly popping the retina. ...I keep stabbing at the bum now between his fingers, stabbing the backs of his hands. His eye, burst open, hangs out of its socket and runs down his face and he keeps blinking which causes what's left of it inside the wound to pour out like red, veiny egg yolk (131).

If we compare Bateman's description of killing the homeless man with his description of his office or morning routine, we see that its narration is exactly in the same tone and style. This creates the novel's truly disturbing atmosphere, but through closer examination, we can understand that it not the violence alone that makes this narrative disturbing - it is the temporal experience, a standstill in time, inflicted on the reader through the process of reading.

In terms of the temporal experience, what is most effective about the violence in the novel when it comes to creating this disturbing and claustrophobic atmosphere is the fact it never results in any consequences for Bateman. As we get to the end of the novel, Bateman also experience a sense of claustrophobia because of this. He tries to escape the temporal loop he is in by confessing murder, but find that there is no way to escape. What we are getting to here is at the core of the postmodern experience, which essentially comes down to the fragmentation of experience, and this notion of a loss of history, so widely discussed in postmodern theory. In this chapter, I have focused on how the capitalist reification process disrupts the organic process of time by isolating the subject and how this results in an experience of time trapped in space. Time caught in space has no past, a history, nor a future; it is an experience of a continuous present of, eventually, tedious "sameness". In *American Psycho*, the characters, like reified commodities, circulate in space but have lost their connection to a past. The characters continuously mistaking each other for someone else illuminate this. If no one has a connection to a past or history, how can you differentiate between different people? Ellis has not created any identities, only types. In the end of the novel, Bateman is sure he is going to get caught for the murder of Paul Owen, and eventually he even attempts to confess: "'No!' I shout. 'Now, Carnes. Listen to me. Listen very, very carefully. I-killed-Paul-Owen-and-I-liked it. I can't make myself any clearer.' ...'Why isn't it possible?' ... 'Because...I had...dinner...with Paul Owen...twice...in London... just ten days ago'" (Ellis 388). Because no one can really *know* who either Owen or Bateman is, there can never be any consequences to Bateman's actions and therefore he can never experience an organic process of time; he cannot escape the present. Without a connection to a past there cannot be a conceivably different future, because without history there can be no

cause and effect, resulting in a narrative experience of a closed space. The narrative structure has no past or future development of character, and thus the reader becomes subject to Bateman's experience of a reified society; the reader becomes trapped in the perpetual present of the postmodern condition.

In the end of the novel both Bateman and the reader wants to escape the novel's claustrophobic bounds. The novel ends with Bateman having a sort of out of body experience where he finally realizes that there is no escape - this is his reality. Distanced, he hears someone ask "why" and out of the blue he replies:

Well, though I know I should have done *that* instead of not doing it, I'm twenty-seven for Christ sakes and this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the turn of the century and how people, you know, *me*, behave, and this is what being *Patrick* means to me, I guess, so, well, yup, uh..." and this is followed by a sigh, then a slight shrug and another sigh, and above one of the doors covered by red velvet drapes in Harry's is a sign and on the sign in letters that match the drapes' color are the words THIS IS NOT AN EXIT (399).

The ending of the novel tells us something about the individual's place in postmodern society, and it problematizes the development of an individual identity in a reified society as he himself can do nothing but be a product of such a society. The novels ending also tells us something about how this experience is going to continue to reproduce itself regardless of the individual's action, and it further intensifies the disturbing claustrophobic narrative by concluding that there is no way to escape.

By following Lukács theories on the reification process, I have attempted to illuminate how Ellis, through a much debated, static narrative form, has created the experience of the capitalist reification process by trapping the reader in a claustrophobic space with no temporal horizon. Ellis narrates a society whose financial system, from which the individual organizes its experience, is becoming increasingly abstract. Through a narrative structure reflecting the commodity reification process, Ellis manages to impose its static temporality on the reader and simulate this claustrophobic experience by making it impossible for the reader to organize the reading experience. As a product of a reified society, neither Bateman himself nor the reader knows who his character is. Ellis does this by creating a narrative structure that is entirely in the present, which offer no reflection on past or future. This way he is able to reflect the postmodern condition; society that is losing its relationship with any sort of process



and by extension, history, and simultaneously reflect the problematic aspect of the development of individuality under this condition. If we recognize that the purpose of the novel is to reflect this experience, we can also understand the affectless brutal violence, for which the novel received much criticism, as a brutal criticism of an affectless society.

## Chapter 2. *A COPY OF A COPY OF A COPY*

### Schizophrenia: Constructing postmodern temporality in Chuck

#### Palahniuk's *Fight Club*

*The fighting wasn't the important part of the story. What I needed were the rules. Those bland landmarks that would allow me to describe this club from the past, the present, up close and far away, the beginning and evolution, to cram together a lot of details and moments – all within seven pages – and NOT lose the reader*

- Chuck Palahniuk  
on writing the short story 'Fight Club'

*If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, we are similarly unable to unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life.*

- Fredric Jameson

Jameson's theory about "schizophrenic writing" is ultimately bound to language and the structure of the sentence in postmodern art. Jameson uses the term schizophrenic writing to describe the temporal organization of postmodern writing, which otherwise could not be deemed anything but "heaps of fragments" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 25). His theory is applicable to all the novels examined in this thesis, but it is particularly interesting to examine *Fight Club* through this theory, as the main character turns out to be schizophrenic.<sup>2</sup> Jameson bases his theory on the idea that schizophrenic writing emerges as a pathology of late capitalism. Jameson's theories are particularly helpful for understanding the novel's play with narrative form, and further how Palahniuk constructs a narrative form fit to examine and critique contemporary society.

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship between the cultural logic of schizophrenia and schizophrenia as an individual mental disorder tells us something about the problematic development of individuality or personal identity in postmodern culture. Personal identity has to do with cause and effect; you are who you are because of what you did. Identity is therefore being able to connect your past and future to the present. Living in a culture which logic is schizophrenic, that has no such unification of a past of future, complicates the development of a personal identity.

Critical writing on *Fight Club* tend to deal with its political implications or the subject of masculinity, often referred to as “a crisis of masculinity” in a commodity-fetishized culture. While there is no lack of critical work done on *Fight Club*, most critics tend to focus on *Fight Club* the movie rather than *Fight Club* the novel. Therefore, there is a shameful lack of examination of *Fight Club* as a literary narrative. How Palahniuk narrates the story of fight club is just as significant for its popularity as the bloody fights that take place within the narration; how it is written becomes more significant in terms of reflecting late capitalism than what it actually says. In this chapter, I will analyze how Palahniuk’s use of a schizophrenic narrator effectively reflects late capitalism’s schizophrenic temporality, and examine how he, through this stylistic device, creates a narrative that engages the reader in contemporary society. I will begin by looking at how the novel’s structure reflects postmodern temporality and continue by connecting this structure to the narrator’s schizophrenia by engaging with Jameson’s theories on schizophrenic writing. I will then proceed to reflect on how the narrative structure illuminates the novel’s larger themes as a reflection of the effects of capitalist temporality.

Jameson emphasizes that the emergence of the postmodern narrative calls for new ways of interpretation in order to understand and appreciate what these texts are communicating. He explains that postmodernism moves away from high modernism’s concern with the paradox of the individual’s “mindless solitude of the monad” through the attempt to “constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and realm” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 15) and replaces it with a new dilemma. When discussing postmodernist texts, Jameson often refers to what he calls “the waning of affect” - the end of the insight into the individual’s psyche. The new dilemma that postmodernism poses has to do with reflecting identity where expression of individuality is fading. This results in the end of unique or personal style, which Jameson explains is “symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction” (*Cultural Logic* 15), as well as, not only the centered subject’s liberation from anxiety, but “a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no self present to do the feeling” (*Cultural Logic* 15). By this, Jameson explains that he does not mean that postmodernist texts are completely devoid of feeling, “but rather that such feelings... are now free floating and impersonal” (*Cultural Logic* 15). We see this in *Fight Club* by the narrator’s emotionless way of describing himself and how he is feeling by means of something he read in *Readers Digest*: “I am Joe’s Raging Bile Duct. I am Joe’s Grinding Teeth. I am Joe’s Inflamed Flaring Nostrils” (Palahniuk 59). In terms of literary criticism, the

waning of affect is essentially temporal as it has to do with the individual's inner development. The individual's inner development drives a narrative forward; the waning of affect therefore, stalls narrative temporal development. Jameson notes that, in contrast to modernism, we are now living in a synchronic rather than a diachronic age, and therefore how we categorize our experiences are dominated by space rather than time.

In order to decipher the meaning of these spatial or synchronic texts we have to approach them on these terms and not attempt to read them as we would read a diachronic text that follows a temporally linear logic of development. We have to consider the waning of affect and understand that these texts does not have the same temporal or narrative development as a modernist text, which concerns itself with the inner reflections of an individual. The idea of the postmodernist text as spatial refers to Jameson's theory of pastiche that I mentioned in the introduction. Postmodernist texts are spatial insofar as they do not have a real relationship to the past. They are a result of a society "where exchange value has been generalized to the point which the very memory of use value is effaced" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 18). What this means for literary narratives is that there is no hidden meaning to be discovered beyond its manifest content. They narrate a society whose past is reified and thus its representation of the past is essentially just the reflection of the present. The culture that these texts reflect no longer holds a reference to the past and therefore they cannot offer a linear temporal narrative form. Jameson calls postmodernist culture a culture of simulacrum in which culture has lost its origin. The experience of this culture leads to *Fight Club's* protagonist's insomnia, which he explains as an experience of everything being "a copy of a copy" (Palahniuk 21). This is a helpful reflection for understanding postmodernist culture and pastiche; how we now live in a culture where everything is a reproduction without reference to the original. What we then have is the postmodernist present - an intensified present repeating itself rather than a progression in time. Pastiche has to do with the waning of affect, as it does not reflect the concern of the individual; in a culture of simulacrum, individuality is subject to the same reproduction. To clarify, what this means in terms of literary interpretation is that, without insight into the individuals psyche, in order to decipher what these texts are communicating we have to be centrally concerned with what the structure of the narrative can tell us.

Jameson theories about pastiche are important for understanding how we should approach *Fight Club*. Both the novel's themes and narrative style reflect the late capitalist era. Palahniuk's play with narrative time in the novel is nothing short of impressive - he narrates

what feels like an instantaneous and intensified present within retrospective narration. Palahniuk narrates through analepsis but use present tense within the analepsis; effectively putting the past in the present. Therefore, the past he reflects becomes, to use Jameson, a spatial past from which we can draw no references to the present moment. So in order for us to understand this novel's themes as a reflection of late capitalism we have to look towards its narrative structure, and how Palahniuk use this postmodern narrative structure to effectively communicate the experience of the individual in postmodern society. It is through this kind of writing that late capitalist culture is communicated, and Palahniuk effectively turns the postmodernist narrative into a gripping reflection of postmodernist temporality.

Palahniuk comments not only on how contemporary society affects the individual subject but also on how it affects the production of art and narrative. Nine years after the first publication of *Fight Club*, Palahniuk added an afterword to his novel where he explains, after its huge popularity, his thoughts on the novel as well as reasons for writing about what many would call startling themes. In the afterword he explains that what he was writing "was just *The Great Gatsby*, updated a little. It was "apostolic" fiction – where a surviving apostle tells the story of his hero. There are two men and a woman. And one man, the hero, is shot to death. It was a classical, ancient romance but updated to compete with the espresso machine and ESPN" (Palahniuk 216). Reading Palahniuk's afterword leads us to believe that it is not the masochistic violence that is central to the novel, but rather how we read art in the twenty-first century. How do we have time for art in a culture of instant coffee and instant sports highlights? In a culture of ephemerality or instantaneousness, where everything is always available, art has to be adapted to reach the audience in a time without time.

I want to look at *Fight Club* with this idea of writing an updated modernist novel in mind, how Palahniuk, by means of schizophrenic writing as Jameson describes postmodernist texts, creates a text fit for its time. Palahniuk is writing in a late capitalist era where our lives are "distorted" and always interrupted by capitalist inventions. Palahniuk explains that in the workshop where he started writing fiction, you had to read your work to the public and you had to compete with all the modern day's distraction in order for your story to get heard, and he explains that "against all this noise and distraction, only the most shocking, most physical stories got heard" (Palahniuk 215-216). How does one write a narrative in contemporary society that will engage readers enough to turn away from "ESPN"? And how does Palahniuk capture the reader in the 21st century and effectively create a temporality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where there arguably is none?

In her article “The American Dream Unhinged: Romance and Reality in *The Great Gatsby* and *Fight Club*”, Suzanne Del Giozzo compares the similarities of *The Great Gatsby* and *Fight Club*. Her article is very illuminating, and she makes a very convincing argument about Palahniuk’s seemingly intentional intertextuality in the text. She also mentions what a startling image the progression of American culture takes when these two novels are read together. By Palahniuk’s literalization of the schizophrenic tendencies we saw in *The Great Gatsby*, the American Dream of self-invention has “turned into a schizoid nightmare” (Del Giozzo 81). I will not spend any time on *The Great Gatsby*, but I think this is helpful to have in mind in terms of how Palahniuk creates a narrative, with the same merits as the tremendously influential *The Great Gatsby*, which is suited to speak to an audience in the late capitalist era.

Unlike *American Psycho* and *Cosmopolis*, which were met with lukewarm reception, *Fight Club* has been met with primarily critical appraisal. The most common critique of postmodern narratives is their lack of temporal or narrative development. The narrator’s schizophrenia allows for a more sympathetic view of *Fight Club*’s complex narrative temporality as it explains its “schizophrenic structure”. We can view the postmodern narrative more generally in these terms; it is not the narrative style we should critique or question, but rather the society this narrative style reflects, as it is a consequence of the pathologies of society. Before I offer a more thorough examination of what Jameson define as schizophrenic writing, it is helpful to briefly outline *Fight Club*’s narrative structure. As mentioned, *Fight Club* is narrated by the use of analepsis; it is structured by an anachrony/flashback going back to the past to explain the present moment. In the opening frame of the novel, we find the nameless narrator with a gun pressed into his mouth by Tyler Durden, who we later find out to be the same person (the narrators alter ego), on the top floor of the one hundred and ninety-one floor “Packer-Morris Building,” which is about to be blown up by their homemade bombs in an attempt to erase history. With the gun in his mouth, the narrator explains how he met Tyler, started and later resisted flight club, which developed into the anarchist group project Mayhem, and now finds himself on top of this building. The novel ends with the narrator waking up in a mental institution after pulling the trigger in an attempt to kill “Tyler”.

Palahniuk’s use of analepsis is central for how the novel reflects postmodern “schizophrenic temporality”. Palahniuk uses analepsis to create a postmodern present, which means that the entire reading of the novel becomes a series of presents rather than temporal development providing or building logical insight to the beginning of the narrative. Instead of

using analepsis for narrative development, he uses it to stall it. He does this by narrating every chapter as a single isolated “story”, narrated in the present tense, within the analepsis. Each “story” contains a reference to the past and future, but the reference is not to a past or future point in the narrative, and therefore we cannot use it to tie events together. Palahniuk’s use of analepsis results in an experience of continuous presents that are isolated from a real relationship to the past or future.

In addition to the play with the narrative temporality by the use of analepsis, the narrative is even further complicated by the narrator’s schizophrenia. The narrator suffers from insomnia and it is in his state of insomnia he lives as Tyler, but it is not until we figure this out that we can string together the pieces or the temporal frame of the narrative. We learn that Tyler is a personality the narrator created while he believed he was asleep, as a way to escape the tediousness of his everyday life, but is now slowly taking over his life. We only learn about the consequences of Tyler’s actions, never what and when he does it, and as Tyler and the narrator are the same person, the consequences of Tyler’s actions affect the narrator, but we cannot reach the source that has resulted in these consequences for the narrator. The phrase “I know this because Tyler knows this”, which the narrator use frequently, further complicates the narrative’s temporality. We understand that these are things or skills he has acquired, but not when and why, and considering that the phrase is often followed by quite disturbing statements, the reader gets the feeling that the “story” behind it should be pretty significant. Thus Palahniuk creates layers of timeframes or temporalities, and by not letting the reader in on when or what order events have occurred, he manufactures a sense of a past or history, but it is not within the reader’s reach. By creating a schizophrenic narrator, Palahniuk reflects the idea that Jameson mentions as postmodernism’s “waning of affect”, and how without insight into the individual’s psyche we are unable to connect what is told to any point in time but the present.

I will now turn to how Jameson theorizes the cultural logic of schizophrenia. With the end of the monad, how do these texts create identity in a contemporary society that does not seem to be concerned with the individual’s experience? In other words: how do we read these seemingly “spatially” organized postmodernist texts without it becoming only “heaps of fragments”? Schizophrenia emerges as a psychological effect of late capitalism where the individual is no longer able to coherently organize its temporal experience. Thus the temporal framework of these narratives, which sets out to reflect contemporary society, can be said to have a schizophrenic temporality.

Jameson uses Lacan's account to describe schizophrenia. He emphasizes that he does not refer to schizophrenia in terms of a clinically accurate diagnosis but rather as a description that can offer an aesthetic model. According to Jameson, Lacan describes schizophrenia as "a breakdown of the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or meaning" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 26). Lacan's conception of the signifying chain, he elaborates, is based on "the proposition that meaning is not one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, between the materiality of language, between a word or a name, and its referent or concept. Meaning on the new view is generated by the movement from signifier to signifier" (26). Rather than the stable notion of the signified as the meaning or concept of an utterance, the signified is now seen as, what Jameson explains as linguistic malfunction,

...meaning effect, as the objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 26).

If the signified no longer holds a stable meaning or connection to a set idea, the sentence will lose its fluidity and instead become free floating and isolated. Jameson explains that the connection between this and the psyche of the schizophrenic can be understood by two considerations:

first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present; and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present and future our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words a series of pure and unrelated presents in time (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 26-27).

The temporal experience of "schizophrenic writing" is what I have been referring to as the postmodernist present imposed by capitalist development. If we no longer can connect the



signified to something “solid”, the text will release itself from any other context and present an intensified present.

In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk demonstrates this by creating both a past and a future within the present narrative, but we cannot reach the content of the associations to either. The way we are unable to reach the content of certain utterances can be compared to Tyler’s “cigarette burns”, the short clips he screens in the changeover between two rolls of film on his job as a movie projectionist. Tyler inserts “one sixth of a second” single frame flashes of vulgar images, “a lunging red penis or a yawning wet vagina close up” (30), into movies at the cinema. The flashes are so short that the audience is not sure what they just experienced - if it was real or not. In the narrative, we are often left with the feeling of reading something that we feel we should know yet we cannot connect it to any past ideas or information. The narrator’s schizophrenia in *Fight Club* leaves much of the “story” untold, because the narrator cannot remember what he does as Tyler, but through the narrator’s recollection of events we have the same experience as the narrator of a feeling that something has happened but we cannot reach its content. Jameson comments on how such writing can result in a peculiar sense of déjà vu, and he links this reading experience to Freud’s idea of the Uncanny, the return of the repressed (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 24). I think this is a very helpful way of understanding what makes *Fight Club* such a disturbing read.

Palahniuk achieves this both by the use of analepsis and through the schizophrenic narrator. Because of the narrator’s schizophrenia, we cannot connect the meaning or timeframe of many of the narrator’s statements beyond the present, and thus we are forced to read all references to the past with nothing but reference within the present. This essentially creates a reading entirely within the present. This is also a consequence of the use of both present tense and past tense within analepsis, without chronologic order. Because Palahniuk narrates through analepsis, we know that the story within it is in the past but it is narrated in the present tense, which means that there is also reference to the future. The analepsis also makes this future in the past, and as a result making everything in the present. Every chapter begins in the same style as the first, as a flashback, and thus the way we receive information is “backwards”, such as: “One morning there’s a dead jellyfish of a used condom floating in the toilet. This is how Tyler meets Marla” (Palahniuk 56). Reading the narrative through a series of flashbacks reflects what Jameson talked about as free-floating signifiers; we know that the condom has something to do with how Tyler met Marla but not how and when. Throughout the novel, we are unable to connect what we learn to any specific time within the narrative.

How we learn that fight club has turned into Project Mayhem is good section to examine in regards to this because the further along in the narrative we get the less information we receive, as Tyler has become more dominant within the narrator:

It was in the front paper of the news today how somebody broke into offices between the tenth and fifteenth floors of Hein Tower...and sets fires so the window at the center of each huge eye blazed huge and alive and inescapable over the city at dawn...This stuff is in the newspapers more and more... Of course you read this, and you want to know right away if it was part of Project Mayhem... Was it the Mischief Committee or the Arson Committee? ...Tyler would know, but the first rule of Project Mayhem is that you don't ask questions about Project Mayhem (Palahniuk 118-119).

In this first introduction to Project Mayhem, besides the brief mention in the narrative frame, we understand that the narrator is now in some way connected to this escalating infamous anarchist group. In the next few pages, we learn that it is fight club that has developed into this group, but because this information is received after the first mentioning of Project Mayhem we are initially left with the feeling of having missed several pages. We never receive any proper explanation either, only sentences containing information with the presumption that we should already know. This is of course a consequence of the narrator's schizophrenia. When the narrator explains the emergence of Project Mayhem, the line between the narrator and Tyler is difficult to draw. This is a consequence of the re-emergence of the narrator's insomnia, but the narrator cannot draw the connection between his "own" actions and Tyler consequently inventing Project Mayhem. The narrator explains how he nearly beat a guy to death one night at fight club because his insomnia had started to re-emerge and he "wanted to destroy something beautiful":

It was at fight club that Tyler invented Project Mayhem. ...That Saturday night, a young guy with an angel's face came to his first fight club, and I tagged him for a fight". ... Later that night Tyler told me he never seen me destroy something so completely. That night, Tyler knew he had to take fight club up a notch or shut it down. Tyler said, sitting at breakfast the next morning, "You looked like a maniac, Psycho-Boy. Where did you go?" I said I felt crap and not relaxed at all. I didn't get any kind of a buzz. Maybe I developed a jones. You can build up tolerance to fighting, and maybe I needed to move on to something bigger. It was that morning, Tyler

invented Project Mayhem. ... What Tyler said about being the crap and the slaves of history, that's how I felt. ... I wanted the world to hit rock bottom. ... It was at breakfast that morning that Tyler invented Project Mayhem (Palahniuk 123-124).

The information is given to the reader through the narrator's schizophrenic psyche, which consequently turns into a reading, as Jameson explains, where we are unable to unify the past, present and future of the sentence. As the reader is unable to unify the "cause and effect" of the story, the reading experience of the narrative effectively reflects postmodern temporality of "a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 27).

The whole idea of postmodernist schizophrenic writing is essentially tied to the idea of history and how we relate to the world in terms of what we know. The central theme in postmodernist writing is the sense of a loss of history, which we know as the postmodern experience. As an extension of this comes the theme of an individual identity, because if you are not connected to a past how can your identity be qualitatively different from others? The sense of a loss of history, and personal identity, is perhaps what is most central to Palahniuk's novel. Tyler claims that they are "God's middle children", part of a generation with "no special place in history and no special attention" (141). Tyler's description of their generation is a helpful reflection of the reified time of late capitalism. As "middle children" these men reside in space rather than time, because they cannot be connected to anything but the present moment. They are in other words unable to unify a past, present and future. The sense of impersonal reification is emphasized by the fact that the narrator has no name. In his article, "A Generation of Men Without History: *Fight Club*, Masculinity and the Historical Symptom", Krister Friday argues that *Fight Club* narrates the search for masculine identity in contemporary consumer society by attempting to construct identity through historical consciousness. He argues that the loss of this identity, the novel tells us, is not just due to consumer consumption but also a result of the "postmodern present," "bereft of historical distinctiveness or identity" (Friday, para 21). In addition to its relentless masochism, he argues, "what remains as *Fight Club*'s most consistent condition is the "perpetual present" described by theorists of postmodern consumer culture" (Friday, para 23). Friday's theory further illuminates the problematic construction of personal identity in the novel and in postmodernism. The narrator fails to develop a coherent personal identity as he attempt to construct his identity through a historical consciousness within the postmodern present, which has lost its relationship with the past. Thus, the narrator's schizophrenia is consequence of the

search for identity within the postmodern present, removed from a historical consciousness. The narrator develops schizophrenia as he tries to locate an identity in a time without identity.

In terms of the narrative structure, the narrator's schizophrenia allows Palahniuk to create a narrative that captures the reader while simultaneously comments on the troubling development of individual identity within the postmodern present. Jameson characterizes the postmodern experience of form with the paradoxical slogan, "difference relates" (31). He explains that postmodernist art moves away from the unified and organic, and presents a collection of "random raw materials and impulses of all kind", and thus the reading of these texts "proceeds by differentiation rather than unification" (31). This idea of history and differentiation is very significant for understanding Tyler's purpose in *Fight Club*. In this sense, Tyler serves a dual purpose in the narrative construction. Tyler can be read as a reflection of the postmodernist idea of history as he wants "to blast the world free of history", but he also functions as a way of constructing a sense of history in the narrative as the narrator's "other", a way to locate an identity. Friday notes that

the narrator's flashbacks is a history of sorts, and as such it offers an example of the traditional logic of cause and effect that underwrites historical knowledge, especially biography: *I am what I am because of what I was, what I did, and what happened to me*. Told in retrospect, histories offer accounts of the past, and these accounts are inherently (but sometimes only implicitly) teleological, explaining, as they do, the present. That is why it is a commonplace to say that all (narrative) histories, including *Fight Club*, are primarily expressions of the present and for the present, and its condition, and its identity (Friday, para 8).

Although there is no cause and effect in terms of unification in *Fight Club*, through the narrator's schizophrenia Palahniuk is able to create a story within the spatial bounds of postmodern temporality. Although the content "floats about the sentence" and cannot be connected to any other point in the narrative, the narrator's "empty" references manufactures a sense of something we want and need to know. In this way, Palahniuk creates a narrative fit for contemporary society about contemporary society. He comments on postmodernist schizophrenic writing or the construction of postmodern art, while he simultaneously reflects the schizophrenic temporal experience of contemporary society and its distortion of a coherent development of personal identity.

Now I will shift the focus from the narrative structure and look at how we can connect the novel's larger themes of postmodern consumer society to the narrator developing schizophrenia. The narrator is driven to create an alternate self by the tedious sameness of his everyday life. The narrator is well aware that the society he lives in has taken control over his and everyone else's life:

And I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue. ... We all have the same Johanneshov armchair in the Strinne green stripe pattern. ... We all have the same Rislampa/Har paper lamps made from wire and environmentally friendly unbleached paper. All that sitting in the bathroom. ... The Vild hall clock made of galvanized steel, oh, I had to have that. The Klipsk shelving unit, oh, yeah (43).

This passage resembles the all-consuming, life defining commodity descriptions in *American Psycho*. There are quite a few points of comparison between these two novels. Both narrators are slaves to consumer society and both turn to interaction with death in order to feel something real. *Fight Club*'s narrator goes to illness support groups to help his insomnia, because to him "losing all hope was freedom" (22). In contrast to Patrick Bateman, the narrator in *Fight Club* is aware that he is consumed by his consumption, yet the narrator is not "strong" enough to free himself from these bonds so he is subconsciously driven to create an alter ego that can take control of his life in a way he cannot himself:

You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you got the sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then your trapped in your lovely nest, and the thing you used to own, now they own you (44). ... Oh, Tyler, please rescue me. ... Deliver me from Swedish furniture. Deliver me from clever art. ... May I never be complete. May I never be content. May I never be perfect. Deliver me Tyler, from being perfect and complete (45).

These passages are delivered when the narrator comes home from a business trip and finds that his apartment has been blown up, which we later find out to be the work of Tyler. What makes this novel disturbing is the fact that we never get to read about the life he lives as

Tyler. As Tyler becomes a bigger part of his life, he causes trouble that the narrator cannot control, and when he ultimately rids himself of Tyler, Tyler has already made sure that his persona will continue to haunt and control the narrator. The novel consequently ends in the same cyclical never-ending fashion as *American Psycho*, where time is going to end up reproducing itself independently of the actions taken to change the course of life. The anarchy of Project Mayhem has simply replaced the commodities that used to control the narrator.

Friday offers a helpful insight on how the novel's narrative frame demonstrates the effect of late capitalist consumer society: "As a flashback "leading" to the present, *Fight Club* betrays the linearity of the narrative form and instead displays the most intense preoccupation with arrested movement as its notion of identity becomes in effect, the wait for identity" (Friday, para 17). This is reflected in both *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*, where both characters consume in the wait for a better life in the future. The intensified present then, reflects the logic of consumer society as well as finance capital where the future conditions the present. Living by the system of future gains effectively stalls the present. *Fight Club* uses retrospective narration (analepsis) as a way to reflect the present at all points in the narrative. More traditional novels use retrospective narration to reflect the past from the present, and how the past shaped the present moment. The purpose of the more traditional use of analepsis is as a structural device that allows for further elaboration of motivations that are helpful for the reader's understanding of the text. It is also more traditionally used as a way of providing characterization. *Fight Club's* retrospective narration does not reflect the past, it makes the past a present; it becomes a series of present moments towards to a present. This is a result of the narrator not knowing what happened to lead him to the present in the first place. This again reflects back the waning of affect and the schizophrenic psyche. We cannot have linear temporal development without a sense of cause and effect, which the narrator here cannot provide. Considering this, we can see that Palahniuk uses analepsis for quite a different effect than the more traditional use of the structural device. Rather than providing explanation and development, Palahniuk use analepsis as a way to, as Friday explains, stall temporal movement. How this results in the "wait for identity" rather than creating identity, reflect the "depthlessness" of postmodern consumer society and how its temporal logic stalls the development of individuality or personal identity.

Tyler rises out of the narrator's extreme exhaustion, and the narrator's first encounter with his alter ego brilliantly reflects late capitalist temporality. In his book, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Jonathan Crary offers helpful insight into the connection

between late capitalist temporality and sleeplessness. He explains the terrorizing strain of sleeplessness and that late capitalist temporality, “a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning ... a time that no longer passes beyond clock time” (8), effectively develops into sleeplessness or insomnia. As a recall campaign coordinator, the narrator travels all over the country to evaluate whether or not the car company he works for should initiate a recall if a car made by their company crashes. His job is essentially calculating the cost value of human lives. In this job, which comments on the brutality of capitalism, the narrator has to constantly travel through different time zones, where he finally “meets” Tyler:

You wake up at Air Harbor International. Every takeoff and landing, when the plane banked too much to one side, I prayed for a crash. That moment cures my insomnia with narcolepsy when we might die helplessly and packed human tobacco in the fuselage. ... You wake up at LaGuardia. You wake up at Logan. You wake up at Dulles. ... Tyler could only work night jobs. ... Some people are night people. Some people are day people. I could only work a day job. ... You wake up at LAX. ... I set my watch two hours earlier or three hours later, Pacific, Mountain, Central, or Eastern time; lose an hour, gain an hour. This is your life and it's ending one minute at a time. ... It was time for a vacation. You wake up at LAX. Again. How I met Tyler was at a nude beach. This was the very end of summer, and I was asleep. ... Tyler had been around a long time before we met. ... You wake up at the beach. We were the only two people on the beach. Tyler called over, “Do you know what time it is?” I asked, where? “Right here,” Tyler said. “Right now.” ... I had to know what Tyler was doing when I was asleep. If you wake up in a different place, at a different time, could you wake up as a different person? ... You wake up and you are nowhere. ... You wake up and that is enough. ... And this was how we met (25-33).

Besides what I mentioned previously about free floating signifiers, how we read something but cannot connect it to anything at the time we read it, such as “Tyler could only work night jobs”, this passage illustrates just this fragmented condition of late capitalism and its distortion of time. Crary explains that a “24/7 environment has a semblance of a social world, but it is actually a non-social model of machinic performance and a suspension of living that does not disclose the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness” (9). He explains that one's personal and social identity has to be reorganized in order to conform to the

“uninterrupted operations of markets, information networks, and other systems” (9). The novel reflects the trouble and consequences of what Crary illuminates here about having to adapt to a machinic social system that does not consider the individual and its physical limits. Through his job, the narrator has no way of experiencing an organic movement of time, and while he is always waking up in different places at different times, he ultimately wakes up as a different person.

This distortion of time is what results in the narrator’s insomnia, which later develops into schizophrenia. The narrator explains the state of insomnia like “everything becomes an out-of-body experience” (18). This is a fruitful way of thinking about the influence of capitalist temporality - as if your experiences are controlled by something out of your power. The passage reflecting the protagonist’s experience of travelling through time zones is similar to the drastically distorted time presented in *Cosmopolis*, where the protagonist also has trouble sleeping:

Sleep failed him more that often now, not once or twice a week but four times, five. What did he do when this happened? ... There was no answer to the question. He tried sedatives and hypnotics but they made him dependent, sending him inward in tight spirals. Every act he performed was self-haunted and synthetic. ... There was only the noise in his head, the mind in time (DeLillo 5-6).

The drastic distortion of temporality that renders the experience into unrelated presents in time leaves these characters to have a lacking sense of reality. Both characters seek death in order to get in touch with the physicality of the body and its natural process which late capitalist temporality disregards. The narrator in *Fight Club* seeks advice from his doctor who explains, “Insomnia, is just the symptom for something larger. Find out what’s actually wrong. Listen to your body”, and he advises him, if he wants to see real pain, to go to support groups for terminal illnesses. The narrator becomes addicted when he realizes that being in close contact with death, he can sleep again. The theme of being close to death in order to experience life is very significant in the novel. Tyler is always pushing the narrator to hit rock bottom if he is going to have a chance to feel anything. A near death experience in the novel is even referred to as a “near life experience” (148). There is an incident in the novel where the narrator, on a homework assignment from Project Mayhem, threatens to kill a man with the intention to teach him a lesson about appreciating life. After he lets him go, he tells him, “your dinner is going to taste better than any meal you’ve eaten, and tomorrow will be the



most beautiful day of your life” (155). The narrator’s relation to violence or death as the only means of freeing oneself from structures imposed by contemporary society tells us something about late capitalist complete disregard for the individual subject.

I will leave how the novel unifies the narrator’s schizophrenia with the novel’s larger themes on late capitalism, and again turn to how Palahniuk constructs a narrative that both allows him to reflect these themes and are fit for contemporary readers. It is not without reason that the majority of critics focus on the aspect of masculinity in *Fight Club*, as the predominant theme in the novel is violence as a coping mechanism – a way of escaping static life. Yet the way Palahniuk narrates the story becomes just as important as its themes for reflecting postmodernist temporality. In the afterword to the novel, Palahniuk comments on writing the short story *Fight Club* that later became chapter six of the novel. He explains, “The *fighting* wasn’t the important part of the story. What I needed were the *rules*. Those bland landmarks that would allow me to describe this club from the past, the present, up close and far away, the beginning and evolution, to cram together a lot of details and moments – all within seven pages – and NOT lose the reader” (Palahniuk 213-214). What Palahniuk illuminates here is very helpful for understanding how the novel both engages the reader while effectively reflecting capitalist temporality. In fact, we can recognize this short story style in all chapters. Every chapter contains some temporal difference, which makes each individual chapter into a short story of its own. While each chapter can function as its own separate narrative, the unification of the novel as a whole result in an experience unrelated presents in time. The novel’s lack of narrative coherence is replaced by these rules that engage the reader while simultaneously reflecting postmodernist temporality. These rules of fight club written in chapter six goes as follows:

The first rule of fight club is you don’t talk about fight club.

The second rule of fight club is you don’t talk about fight club.

That’s the third rule of fight club, when someone says stop, goes limo, even if he’s just faking it, the fight is over.

Only two guys in a fight. One fight at a time. They fight without shirts or shoes. The fight go on as long as they have to. Those are the other rules of fight club (49).

These rules work as a way for Palahniuk to narrate information in-between and still captivate the reader. Palahniuk experiments with the idea of cutting, and these rules allow him to say the least with the most possible effect. The rules and other repetitive statements from the narrator throughout the novel function just as Palahniuk says, as landmarks, and they keep the reader's focus throughout by evoking a feeling of something you should already know and holds within them something you want to find out about. The rules intensify the uncanny feeling of something you have experienced or read before but you cannot place or tie it to any point in the narrative.

The language in the novel is also very interesting itself in terms of what Jameson explains about the "waning of affect". Like in the rules of fight club, the narrative consistently uses "you" for explaining things and events. The repetitive use of "you" functions as a way of both distancing the reader from the story and simultaneously draws the reader in as it appeals to everyone. It does not reflect a story of an individual's journey as much as it functions as a description of the way an individual *might* think and feel. The "you" also gives us a sense of a sort of "unreality"; the distancing effect of the sentence gives us the feeling that the story might not have happened and this way the narrative functions as a kind of rule or guidebook. This way Palahniuk effectively turns postmodernism's "waning of affect" into a narrative that engages the reader. The rules enable him to reflect postmodernist temporality by creating isolated presents, and at the same time create a sense of a process that capture the contemporary reader.

While the novel critiques late capitalism's lack of concern for the individual, it never advocates for individual identity. The narrative also frequently uses "we" when it comes to speaking about these men's generation. While the "we" appeals to the idea of unity it also emphasizes the idea of a society of sameness. The alter ego the narrator creates is supposed to perform the tasks that the narrator cannot, namely freeing him and these men from the constraints of capitalist society. Yet, the projects Tyler sets in motion remove individual identity just as much as the society they are trying to escape. The narrator's attempt to escape capitalist temporality demonstrates a similar cyclical effect to that of *American Psycho*. The rules that allow Palahniuk to effectively narrate this story simultaneously comment on the repetitive experience of postmodern temporality, and how ultimately there is no escape. The narrator's means of escaping postmodernist temporality changes, but it just reproduces itself into something else. He begins by going to support groups, and when he creates Tyler, fight club, which later escalates into Project Mayhem, replaces these groups. The narrator's mantra

early in the novel, “You are not your sad little wallet”, quickly turns into project Mayhem’s mantra, “You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile. ... Our culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or black or rich, anymore. We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing” (Palahniuk 134). In his attempt to free himself from the sameness of contemporary society, he has created a new framework that removes individuality.

This is at the core of how Palahniuk effectively narrates a novel that critiques contemporary society *for* contemporary society. Palahniuk engages the reader in the narrative by creating a sense of process by making the narrator’s means of trying to escape contemporary society somewhat different, from support group to Project Mayhem. Moreover, by making these groups also advocate for essentially the same ideas, he simultaneously reflects the cyclical reified process of late capitalist temporality. At the same time as it catches the reader by creating a form of temporal movement, the rules also create a similar sense of claustrophobia as *American Psycho*. In the final chapter, after having shot himself, the narrator is in hospital speaking to a psychiatrist (whom he refers to as God) who wants to know why he did what he did:

Why did I cause so much pain?

Can’t I see that we’re all manifestations of love?

I look at God behind his desk, taking notes on a pad, but God’s got this all wrong.

We are not special.

We are not crap or trash, either.

We just are.

We just are, and what happens just happens (207).

The realization that life in contemporary society is just existing, without the power for change, mirrors Bateman’s final realization: “Well, though I know I should have done *that* instead of not doing it, I’m twenty-seven for Christ sakes and this is, uh, how life presents itself in a bar in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the turn of the century and how people, you know, *me*, behave...” (Ellis 399). The hopeless temporal horizon in *American Psycho* appears

in *Fight Club* when the narrator ultimately cannot free himself from Tyler because everyone around him recognizes him as Tyler Durden, eager to continue project Mayhem. Thus, Palahniuk leaves us with the feeling that the framework where the individual is nothing will continue to reproduce itself.

David Fincher's movie *Fight Club* achieved the status of a legend and sparked the creation of fight clubs all over the world, and even turned fighting and violence into a runway look. Before all that Palahniuk reflects, "there was just a short story" (213). While the visual effects of the movie lead to this huge fascination of "fight clubs", the novel's impressive and complex narrative created this dark, gripping world, which disturbingly reflects contemporary society. Palahniuk uses the short story style in each chapter of his narrative to effectively narrate the temporal logic of postmodern society, an intensified present. By means of a schizophrenic narrator, Palahniuk is able to reflect the condition of living under the pathologies of late capitalist society. In a society that has become less concerned with the individual and its identity, the temporal organization of its cultural productions has changed in order to reflect this experience. In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned Jameson's description of the shift from modernism to postmodernism where in which he explains that the symptoms that caused great concern in modernism have become "its own disease" in postmodernism. Whereas modernism expressed an anxiety for the possible outcomes of consumer society and the communication process, postmodernism is the expression of a completely commodified society, removed from historical consciousness. Jameson stresses the fact that his theories on postmodernism are based on the cultural logic of late capitalism and thus "is inseparable from and unthinkable without the hypothesis of, some fundamental mutation of the sphere of culture in the world of late capitalism, which includes a momentous modification of its social function" (*Cultural Logic* 47-48). By examining *Fight Club* through the capitalist framework that Jameson provides, we can locate what causes the narrator's schizophrenia.

If we adopt Jameson's view, we can understand more about how postmodern texts reflect the pathologies of contemporary society, and thus the underlying cause for the narrator's illness, which is not just the struggle of finding personal identity in a time less concerned with the individual but also the temporal framework which late capitalism forces this individual to live in. It is crucial for understanding and appreciating postmodernist text that we keep in mind that they attempt to reflect the way we live now. If Palahniuk was, as he himself claims, writing an updated version of *The Great Gatsby*, it is important for us to

understand the changes in culture that has turned the alienated individual in *The Great Gatsby* to the fragmented individual experience in *Fight Club*. The waning of affect, the end of insight into the individual's psyche, means that we need to change focus to the narrative structure in order to understand that these texts are also a reflection of the individual's experience of time, but in a time where linear time is distorted. Through a close examination of Palahniuk's novel and Jameson's theories, we can understand that Palahniuk achieves what he sets out to do; he writes an updated version of the modernist novel that is fit to reach out to readers in postmodern society who lives in a time without time. He achieves this by playing with retrospective narrative that enables him to construct a short story style of each chapter. Through the short story style, he effectively keeps the reader's attention by creating a sense of temporal movement within each chapter while simultaneously reflecting the experience of the perpetual present in postmodern society by not letting this temporal movement reference to another point in the narrative. Since we cannot logically unify the chapters, the novel reads as a series of isolated instances, but as the narrator is schizophrenic, the temporal structure comes together as we understand that we are reading the logic of schizophrenia. This way Palahniuk constructs a narrative that reflects postmodern temporality while also unifying the novels larger themes of consumer society and violence as a consequence of this temporal experience.

## Chapter 3. *MONEY IS TALKING TO ITSELF*

### Speculating into the void: Cyber-capitalism and The Crisis of Representation in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

*He is dead inside the crystal of his watch, but still alive in original space, waiting for the shot to sound.*

In “The “Saturated Self”: Don DeLillo on the problem of Rogue Capitalism”, Jerry Varsava explores Eric Packer as an embodiment of rogue capitalism, driven purely by self-interest and gratification: “when he died he would not end. The world would end” (DeLillo 6). He points out this extreme form of capitalism when he begins his article by stating, “even laissez-faire capitalism has its rules” (78). Borrowing economist Joseph Schumpeter’s term for capitalism as a process of “creative destruction”, Varsava terms rouge capitalism, which “yields, quite simply, chaos” (79), “destructive destruction” (79). Eric Packer, the embodiment of finance capitalism on what several critics refers to as an Odyssey through Manhattan in his impenetrable shield of a limousine, functions as a way to understand the impenetrable framework the characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* are up against. In *The Specter of Capital*, Vogl points out that by combining stock market transactions with the fatality of brute force, “DeLillo is documenting a variation in a pattern of events that, a decade earlier, had been given the title *American Psycho*” (8). There are several events in the novel that mirror Ellis’ novel, but just like capitalism in *Cosmopolis*, they are hyperbolized into the extreme version of the other. As things are rapidly spiraling downwards for Eric, he enters a sort of frenzy for experience, much like Bateman, only Packer’s decisions impact millions of other people, not to mention, the global economy.

*Cosmopolis* is a very complex narrative. The reading experience of this novel is perhaps more complex than *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* in terms of how it not only reflects late-capitalist temporality structurally but also theorizes the problem of capital itself. The complexity of this novel has to do with the fact that it is narrating a form of capital that is “talking to itself”, which results in a highly reflexive language. Marx’ phrase “all that is solid

melts into air” is frequently quoted in postmodern theory, and I think this term is perhaps the best way to describe what is happening in *Cosmopolis*. In the introduction, I discussed how late-capitalism resulted in a crisis of representation and that this is at the core of the postmodern narrative. In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo not only creates a postmodern narrative with no center, he also thematically and theoretically narrates the crisis of representation. DeLillo attempts to narrate a form of capital that cannot be narrated; he is narrating the problem of capital itself.

In this (final) chapter, I set out to examine Eric Packer as the embodiment of advanced capitalism, embodying the logic of futures trading and speculation. I argue that DeLillo’s complex self-reflexive narrative is a reflection of his attempt to narrate a financial form that inherently cannot be represented, as it is manifest absent. I will do this by examining how Packer takes on the omnipresent spectral form of advanced capitalism and its logic of living in the future. Finally, I will examine the consequences of such a temporal framework and how, through currency speculator Packer, the novel comments both on how the temporality of advanced technological capitalism seeks to develop beyond the limits of human physicality, and the impact this has on the individual existing within this framework. The quotation above tells us something about how this financial form distorts our perception of time by reaching beyond bodily limits.

In *Cosmopolis* we have arrived at, as mentioned in the introduction, what Jameson refers to as the “cybernetic revolution,” “the intensification of communications technology to the point at which capital transfers today abolishes space and time, virtually instantaneously effectuated across national spaces” (*Culture and Finance Capital* 252). I want to examine how DeLillo, while theorizing capitalism, also creates a narrative framework that both reflects, critiques and gives us the experience of the cyber-capitalist temporal framework. In the two previous chapters, I have discussed how capitalism removes the individual from an organic movement of time by imposing a spatial temporality that results in the experience of a perpetual present. In *Cosmopolis*, when such an experience is heightened by the rise of advanced technology, not only is an organic movement of time removed from the subject, it simply does not exist as what happens is gone in an instance. Vogl describes this time as “out of joint, suspended and deflected from its original trajectory” (89). He explains that “a temporality governed by need is replaced by an open and linear time in which the power of the future is made manifest: an imperfect abstract, and exterior time of nonrecurring times” (Vogl 89). Time is linear in the sense of an “endless progression,” it has abandoned its

natural productive cycle and continues to reproduce endlessly into the future (Vogl 89). We can understand time in *Cosmopolis* as not only spatial but spatial in terms of existing in virtual space. By existing in virtual space, time exists out of time; beyond physical limits such as we can see from the quotation I opened with where Packer “is dead inside the crystal of his watch, but still alive in original space” (DeLillo 209). Packer seeing his action before they actually happen occurs several times in the novel. This tells us something about the drastic distortion of time under the logic of cyber-capital, and a narrative that reflects a temporality in which the future manifests in the present will naturally be difficult to grasp. For the temporal experience in *Cosmopolis* is also that of the perpetual present, but a present that is drastically intensified from that we have seen in the two previous novels. DeLillo is narrating a form of capital that has no reference beyond itself. This combined with the speed of capital circulation that technology allows for, results in a highly ephemeral narrative structure with no point of reference within it. Once it has manifested in the future, it has already happened and will move on to the next future realization without any reflection of the previous manifestation. Lyotard explains that capital “cannot exist as an ‘organic’ unity, its unity is extrinsic” (Libidinal economy 134), and that we must accept that capital is not organic and understand that “the (in) organic body is a representation of the stage of the theatre of capital itself” (Libidinal economy 136). What Lyotard illuminates here is helpful for understanding the function of DeLillo’s self-reflexive narrative. If we recognize that DeLillo’s narrative not only reflects problems of late capitalism thematically but also through its structure and language, we can understand that DeLillo’s self-reflexive prose functions as a way to represent a form of capital that essentially cannot be represented. As a reading experience, *Cosmopolis* allows us to witness and experience the volatility of finance capital in a technologically advanced society.

*Cosmopolis*’ linear logic, as an endless process of future manifestations, is well reflected through Packer and how certain objects and terms have become useless to him: “He took out his hand organizer and poked a note to himself about the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper...The hand device itself was an object whose original culture had just about disappeared. He knew he had to junk it” (DeLillo 9). Packer’s relation to objects such as the hand device and the ATM, which has become, “aged and burned by its own historical memory...so anti-futuristic that even the acronym seemed dated” (54), reflects the speed that technology now allows capital to circulate. The same thing happens to language; not only does the object itself become aged, but also the term used to describe it. The language in the



novel can then be understood as an extreme version of the schizophrenic logic of signs and signifiers that I explored in the previous chapter. It is an extreme version in the sense that not only has the signified lost a stable meaning; its meaning was not there in the first place. Just as capital in a technologically advanced society, the language in the novel has become self-referential or self-contained, so its meaning disappears as it is uttered.

In her article, “Don DeLillo’s Financial Sublime”, Alison Shonkwiler discusses *Cosmopolis* through the problem of abstraction in our understanding of capitalism and the unstable dynamics through which finance is now realized. She examines the language in the novel in these terms, and explains that language has become financialized and thus “becomes another symptom of money’s new historical unrepresentability, a way of tracing the formal process of abstraction over various cultural economies.” (273). She explains that with “technology changing so much faster than the word, language becomes a real-time archive of technological obsolescence” (273). Shonkwiler’s theories are helpful for understanding the connection between the unstable notion of financial value and the postmodern narrative; as the language in the novel becomes financialized it becomes highly unstable and subject to the same crisis of representation as value under late capitalism. The several dialogues that take place in Packer’s limousine are highly reflexive - they move so rapidly that it is easy to lose track of who is saying what. This results in a severely unstable narrative, and its instability reflects the unstable volatile logic of capital accumulation through speculation, where gains and losses happen instantaneously. DeLillo draws attention to the connection between language and the logic of this financial form, “a man rises on a word and falls on a syllable” (12). We can understand this further by Packer’s reflection: “Nobody’s against the rich. Everybody is ten seconds away from being rich” (196). DeLillo constructs a narrative language that allows him to both comment on the volatile logic of trading and speculation while simultaneously allowing the reader to experience this logic where money is talking to itself. Through the narrative structure and language, DeLillo effectively narrates the problem of representation in technologically advanced capitalism.

Before I continue by examining the novel’s narrative structure and Packer as the embodiment of an “absent” form of capital, I think it is useful to briefly look back to some ideas on finance capital that I explored in the introduction. Most significant for both understanding Packer as embodying the logic of finance capital as a currency speculator and the narrative structure is the concept of futures trading. Futures trading is the idea of self-reflexive capital as it has no reference to any material form or reference to anything beyond

itself; it manifests before it is a reality. The concept of futures trading emerged after the US dollar was removed from the gold standard and through rapid development of electronic communications, the financial market shifted towards virtual finance; “speculation on electronic currencies, assets and investments” (Pavlov 135). Futures trading, “...a form of money that exists independently of the commodity market and the circulation of cash” (Vogl 68), ...is only carried out on the condition that the very goods on which the value of the transaction depends are manifest absent” (Vogl 65). It operates on the dynamic that prices do not refer to a product but to prices themselves; “prices are paid with prices” (Vogl 66). This form of capital then is freed from the “inconvenience” of a material form or basis for capital accumulation, and because it does not rely on anything to physically manifest, it makes the potential for accumulation infinite. As Vogl explains, “this kind of trade preforms an economic and semiotic act that culminates, not in the representation of the world but in its de-representation, its voiding of presence; it deals with the things of this world only on condition of their manifest absence or obliteration” (67). It is precisely this de-representation and voiding of presence that DeLillo narrates in his novel.

Freed from any material form, “money is talking to itself” (DeLillo 77), capital growth is not dependent on a manifestation in physical space and can therefore circulate freely by its own self-reflexive logic. This logic becomes too abstract for the physicality of the human body to follow, as it has no reference to the “real” world. Packer’s description of bank towers in the novel reflects money’s de-representation:

They were covert structures for all their size, hard to see, so common and monotonic, tall, sheer, abstract, with standard setbacks, and block-long, and interchangeable, and he had to concentrate to see them. They looked empty from here. He liked that idea. They were made to be the last tall things, made empty, designed to hasten the future. They were the end of the outside world. They weren’t here, exactly. They were in the future, a time beyond the geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it (DeLillo 36).

In this passage, DeLillo elegantly describes the shift towards virtual finance. His description is very interesting for understanding the absent form and force of advanced capitalism. It tells us something about how late-capitalism has changed our temporal experience, as they are the last material things, made to hasten the future in which no material institutions for finance is required, because futures trading exists entirely in virtual space. The fact that Packer has to

concentrate to see them illuminates how ideas about money are disappearing. This abstract form of capital has not only freed itself from material manifestation, but it also no longer requires the performance of people. This tells us something about the individual's experience under such a framework - a time beyond physicality.

The shift to futures trading naturally had a significant impact on how we understand temporality, as capital growth no longer has any link to a space or process. In the introduction, I examined David Harvey's theory of space-time compression, and that he recognizes the de-linking of the financial system as most significant for understanding the shifts in time and space. I think it is worthwhile to mention this again here as DeLillo's narrative structure operates on the theory of space-compression. Harvey explains the space-time compression as an experience where temporal horizons collapse as a consequence of the "rapidity with which currency markets fluctuate across world spaces" (*Condition of Postmodernity* 298). In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo narrates the annihilation of time through space on the global stock market. As Eric Packer is a currency speculator and the story of the novel deals with a day in his life where he is speculating on the Japanese yen, the space-time compression is significant for understanding the novel's temporal logic: "This happened today? This happened tonight. In Tokyo" (DeLillo 40). Harvey explains the volatility of the global exchange market where "fortunes could be lost or made simply by holding the right currencies during the right phases" (*Condition of Postmodernity* 297). The trading and speculation of currencies on the global stock market is particularly volatile because it "bypasses actual economic power and performance, and then trigger self-fulfilling expectations" (*Condition of Postmodernity* 297). Speculation on the global stock market realizes itself independently of human performance, and as capital is the main social power, it tremendously affects society by imposing a temporal framework that operates in disregard of human limits.

The entire narrative structure reflects the idea of annihilation of time and space through the global stock market and the crisis of representation. The narrative takes us through the course of one day, and it illustrates how computerized trading on the global stock market, to quote Harvey, makes "twenty four hour a very long time" (*Conditions of Postmodernity* 285). Harvey explains that, as money, capitalism's central value system has become "dematerialized and shifting, time horizons are collapsing, and it is hard to tell exactly what space we are in when it comes to assessing cause and effects, meanings and values" (*Condition of Postmodernity* 298). We can read DeLillo's narrative precisely as a

reflection of how Harvey explains the crisis of representation here. The narrative of Eric Packer's assassin, Benno Levin, is fittingly narrated through the use of prolepsis, an interjected scene ahead of the narrative time. In Levin's first narrative, "Night", Eric Packer is already dead: "I am working on this journal while a man lies dead ten feet away" (60). The two narratives cross one another in narrative order. The novel is divided into two parts, and the two confessions of Benno Levin are inserted once into each of these parts. The first part of the novel narrates Packer's morning and afternoon while the Levin confession within it takes place at night. In the second part, Packer's narration is at night while Levin's narration in this part takes place in the morning. The insertion of Benno Levin's narrative functions as an allegory of the logic of global capitalism's temporality: what is in the future has already happened. Although it can be argued that Levin's narrative places Packer's narrative in the past, I would argue that the two narrative timeframes further emphasize the logic of cyber-capitalism of collapsing time horizons on the global market, and functions as a way to intensify Packer's recurrent experience of seeing things before they happen: "'You recoiled in shock.' 'On screen.' 'Then the blast. And then.' 'Recoiled for real', he said" (94). These instances reflect how time horizons collapse through the global stock market, and thus how we can never be sure what time we are occupying.

I think we can propose the narrative structure as a reflection of what is happening in the "story". If we see these two crossing narratives as the multiple temporalities in global capitalism, "'This happened today?' 'This happened tonight. In Tokyo'" (40), we can understand Levin as the yen which Packer is speculating on, but cannot figure out or foresee. The confessions of Levin take place in the same time as the yen. Packer is so bound to the technological world that he neglects to consider what exists outside the glowing numbers and charts; the same way he would not consider Levin to be his assassin, and just like the yen that Packer firmly believes cannot go any higher. Kinski, Packer's chief of theory, explains that the yen "'doesn't chart the way you chart technology stocks. You can find real patterns here. Locate predictable components. This is different'" (46). Packer, who lives in simulated space, neglects to consider the human aspect as an interference with his "sphere". The form of capitalism he embodies does not recognize human interference as part of its process. His doctor tells him that he has an asymmetrical prostate, and after he has lost all his money speculating on the yen, Levin tells him he should have "listened to your prostate" (199). He tells him he should have looked for the yen's quirks, the asymmetry of his own body, "That's where the answer was, in your body, in your prostate" (199). Thus, Levin becomes Packer's

assassin because Packer fails to account for anything outside simulated space. In her article, “Don DeLillo’s Fiction of Finance Capital”, Alessandra DeMarco notes that “... death in *Cosmopolis* represents that which the market cannot assimilate” (663). As an embodiment of the cyber market, Packer cannot comprehend the physical limits of the real world and thus death becomes the only thing he cannot figure out or foresee.

The function of the two different narratives serves a dual purpose in this regard. While on a structural level the two narratives illustrate the volatile experience of cyber-capitalism’s futurity, the two different narrative voices further emphasize capital’s crisis of representation through Packer as well as its consequences through Levin. Packer’s narrative is narrated through indirect speech, while Levin’s narrative is narrated through direct speech. Although Levin’s narrative, as Shonkwiler points out, is not developed enough to function as a viable counternarrative to Packer’s (259), I would argue that his first person narrative is effective for the “de-representation” of Packer; for further narrating Packer as the embodiment of an abstract form of capitalism. While we get to understand Levin, his background and purpose, Packer’s third person narrative reflects the central postmodernist ideas of instability, as we cannot “get” at Packer in the sense of Jameson’s explanation of free-floating signifiers that cannot be integrated into the sentence. Unlike in *Fight Club* where the “story” floats above the story but out of our reach, *Cosmopolis* reflects the effects of technology - there is no possible reference beyond the sentences. As a reflection of cyber-capitalism’s instantaneousness, the language in Packer’s narrative is highly ephemeral and thus results in the experience of being locked in a continuing present. Packer’s narrative contrasted with the brief confessions of Levin who claims to live outside capitalist time, “I don’t own a watch or a clock. I think of time in other totalities now. I think of my personal time-span set against the vast numerations, the time of the earth, the stars, the incoherent light years, the age of the universe etc” (59-60), results in an effective reflection of cyber-capitalism and its complete removal from any physical form.

The narrative structure allows us to experience the temporal logic of trading on the global stock market and it tells us something about how this temporality further intensifies the crisis of representation, as we can never be sure what space we are in in terms of unifying cause and effects. As I have mentioned, in terms of postmodern theory, the shift to money without any solid monetary base resulted in a crisis of representation in the sense of what we understand as value. Through the narrative logic of futures trading, DeLillo is narrating precisely the crisis of representation. I now want to continue by examining Eric Packer as the

embodiment of this financial form and how he, embodying the logic of finance capitalism, becomes subject to a crisis of representation. We can see both the volatility of speculation and the crisis of representation through Packer as he speculates on the Yen. To Packer, money exists only as numbers in virtual space and gains and losses on the global exchange market becomes a game he plays for self-gratification without concern of the consequences for the outside world. The sums Packer deals with are so large it is an “assault on the borders of perception”, and it tells us something about his relation to value. As his speculation on the yen rapidly falls out of his favor, he hacks into his wife’s bank account and invests her money in his own company:

How much was she worth? The number surprised him. The total in U.S dollars was seven hundred and thirty-five million. 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 the air that flows from the mouth when words are spoken. It was lines of code that interact in simulated space (DeLillo 124).

Packer’s description of his wife fortune tells something about what happens to the understanding of value when capital has become self-reflexive. As capital accumulation exists outside physical space, vast sums become abstract, as it does not have reference to any manifestation. Packer’s investment of his wife fortune after he lost all his own money, also tells us something about capitalism’s disregard for the people it affects. Packer illuminates the volatility of capital accumulation (and losses) of simply “holding the right currencies during the right phases” (Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* 297), and as his risky speculation fails to generate profit, his actions results in what can only be understood as a global financial crisis. This passage from the novel allows us to understand Packer as embodying the volatile logic of currency speculation or futures trading as an economic act that realizes itself “not in the representation of the world but in its de-representation” (Vogl 67).

I argue that through Packer, DeLillo is able to represent a financial form that inherently cannot be represented. As Richard Peet explains, in finance capitalism, power is in the hands of the individual capitalist, and because of this, all areas of social life are subject to a more “removed, more abstract calculus of power in which the ability of contribute to short term financial profit becomes the main concern” (Peet 5). By narrating this abstract power and its concern through his protagonist, DeLillo effectively gives us a framework through which

we can understand how self-reflexive capitalism “thinks” and acts. Through Packer, we can see finance capitalism’s disaffection for anything but financial profit, and better understand the troubling existence of the individual living within the framework of such a power. In the two previous chapters, I have examined how the novels’ narrative is a result of living under the temporal framework of capitalism. In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo narrates from “inside” capitalism itself. With this in mind, I will continue by first examining how we can understand Eric Packer as the embodiment of capitalism and its crisis of representation. Then I will examine how, through Packer, we can understand how finance capitalism’s logic affect the individual as he wishes to transcend the body’s physical limits. As DeLillo narrates from “inside” capitalism, it is interesting to reflect on how this novel can help us better understand the psyche of the characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* in terms of the tremendous impact capitalist temporality has on the individual.

We can connect how DeLillo narrates Packer as the crisis of representation to some of the ideas in postmodern literary theory that have examined through this thesis. These ideas are ultimately connected to the developments in the process of capitalism and capital accumulation, and how postmodernist society is subject to a more abstract social power. Packer can be understood as reflecting both Jameson’s theory of pastiche, parody without reference to its origin, and Baudrillard’s hyperreal, simulation “without origin or reality” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 1). Although all the characters I have examined in this thesis can be seen as hyperreal as they have no real relationship to a past, Eric Packer as a hyperreal is particularly interesting in terms of how the system of signs and signification is ultimately linked to developments in the process of capital accumulation. I want to draw attention to parts of the quotation I used earlier, “it was all air anyway... air that flows from the mouth when words are spoken ... lines of code that interacted in simulated space” (DeLillo 124). This passage tells us something about what has happened sign system that I have touched upon in the two previous chapters. As I have noted, there are some stark resemblances between *Cosmopolis* and *American Psycho*. The system of signs illustrated in *American Psycho* becomes even more extreme in *Cosmopolis*. The computer-quicken process of capital accumulation in *Cosmopolis* operates so quickly that a sign system becomes virtually non-existent, as a sign is gone before it has time to establish in physical space. Instead of a real world, the world in *Cosmopolis* has become lines of codes that interact independently of “reality” - in virtual space. As Packer is an embodiment of the financial form that exists in

virtual space, his relation to the outside world is elusive, and thus his presence in physical space takes the form of simulation.

Packer reflects not just an idea of “emptiness”, but rather the unreal. Packer becomes a hyperreal because, like the financial form he represents, his existence relies on him being manifest absent. Packer’s lack of relationship to the “real” creates a mimetic effect: “”This is good. We’re like real people talking. Isn’t it how they talk?” “How would I know?”” (119). With the speed of which virtual capitalism now allows capital to circulate, the problem is no longer about the lack of a real relationship to the past or not being able to unify the past to the present, in the future logic of virtual finance, the past was not there in the first place. Packer’s chief of theory explains:

“Doubt. What is doubt? You don’t believe in doubt. You’ve told me this. Computer time 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,” she said. “We need a new theory of time” (86)

Like virtual finance, Packer lives entirely in the future, and his relationship to the physical world is elusive. Unlike the characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*, who struggle to organize their experience by living under the framework of capitalism, Eric Packer embodies the abstract form of capital that removes the individual from being able to coherently organize its experience.

Through Packer, DeLillo narrates this abstract force from which the individual no longer can organize its experience. Baudrillard explains that,

...throughout its history it was capital that first fed on the deconstruction of every referential, of every human objective, that shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. Capital was the first to play at deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc. , and if it is the one that fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it by exterminating all use value, all real equivalence of production and wealth, in the very sense we have unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation (*Simulacra and Simulation* 22).



What Baudrillard explains here is helpful for understanding how capitalism has always sought to inflict its logic on our understanding of the world, and how advanced capitalism's reality has become an "unreality". We can understand this "omnipotence of manipulation" in *Cosmopolis* through Packer. The financial form that now is the dominant social power has no real connection to the physical world, and thus its existence in the physical world can only take the form of simulation, as mimicking its presence in the real world. Baudrillard explains,

...the hyperrealism of simulation is translated by the hallucinatory resemblance of the real itself. Power has for a long time produced nothing but the signs of its resemblance. And at the same time, another figure of power comes into play: that of collective demand for *signs* of power – a holy union that is reconstructed around its disappearance (*Simulacra and Simulation* 23).

Baudrillard's theory tells us something about how we can understand the function of Packer's presence in the novel. As the embodiment of a financial form that exists entirely in virtual space, Packer's presence in the world becomes like the bank towers he describes as "...made to be the last tall things, made empty...they weren't here, exactly" (36). Packer operates beyond the physical world, and thus his presence in the physical world becomes merely a figure for something that is not really there, he becomes the embodiment of an absent social power.

We can understand Packer as an alien force who dominates all areas of social life through his recurrent use of "we". As a capitalist force, he is only concerned with his own needs and thus his needs become everyone else's: "we don't care. We need a haircut. We need to go crosstown" (11). His reference to Levin as "the subject", "the subject looked hurt and betrayed" (196), "He could see the subject back down" (203), further removes Packer from a relationship to physical beings, and takes the shape of an abstract spectral force whose only concern is for itself. Packer even points out his own mimesis when his art dealer refuses to "give him a lessons in self-denial and social responsibility" when he does not see the problem in purchasing the Rothko Chapel, a chapel which she explains "belongs to the world" (28), but which he claims is his if he buys it:

"You'd believe it. You'd accept the way I think and act if I came from another culture. If I were a pygmy dictator," he said, "or a cocaine warlord. Someone from the fanatical tropics. You'd love it, wouldn't you? You'd cherish the excess, the

monomania. Such people cause a delicious stir in other people. People such as you. But there has to be a separation. If they look and smell like you, it gets confusing” (DeLillo 28).

In this passage, DeLillo illuminates the idea of finance capitalism as an absent force, and it tells us something about the experience of the crisis of representation in postmodernist society; how its lack of presence makes it difficult to organize how we understand the world. The dominant power in advanced capitalist society, is not an institution from which people can differentiate themselves from, and understand a sense of a value system. The capitalist power in virtual capitalism is removed from a central value system from which to validate its actions (Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* 298). This is illustrated by the fact that Packer does not understand that he cannot buy the Chapel. To Packer, the only thing that should have any sort of significance is money, ““the Rothko Chapel belongs to the world.” “Its mine if I buy it””. Through Packer, DeLillo comments on society’s loss of a central value system, and how all that matters now is capital profit. Vogl notes that DeLillo comments on how, “thanks to the allegiance of technology and capital...the movement of capital knows no bounds... it dictates its own dynamic standards of mobility, abandoning all local social and political constraints” (4). Packer’s relation to historical objects as something that can be bought for self-gratifying purposes illuminates the shift or loss of a present social power that organize social life beyond its own interests.

Packer’s understanding of value further illuminates the crisis of representation. When his art dealer asks what spending money, regardless of sums, means to him, he replies that he has “two private elevators now. One is programmed to play Satie’s piano pieces and to move at one quarter speed ...”, while the other plays the music of the Sufi rap star, Brutha Fez. He explains that it cost him major money and made him “an enemy of the people, requisitioning that second elevator” (29). As money itself has lost its narrative quality, Packer has to link it to some form of use value. Yet, just like the vast sums he speculates with, the use value Packer uses to describe money also becomes an “assault on the borders of perception”. What he mentions as becoming and enemy of the “people” further illuminates Packer as an absent force. His art dealer explains to him “Took me a while to think about money and actually look at it. I began to look at it. I learned how it felt to make money and spend it. It felt intensely satisfying. It helped me be a person. But I don’t know what money is anymore” (29). Packer replies that he is “losing money by the ton today. Many millions. Betting against the yen. Currency markets never close. And the Nikkei runs all day and night now. All the major

exchanges. Seven days a week” (29). This dialog is very fruitful for understanding how money has lost its narrative quality in terms of postmodern literary theory as we can link it to the waning of affect that I discussed in the previous chapter. What Packer explains here tells us something about how money has lost its link to the physical world, and capital accumulation no longer exists as a means for use-value - it exists entirely for accumulation without purpose in the physical world. Packer’s chief of theory explains that

property is no longer about power, personality and command. It’s no longer about vulgar display or tasteful display. Because it 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 payed the money for the number itself. One hundred and four million. This is what you bought (DeLillo 78).

What Kinski explains further illuminate self-reflexive capital and the crisis of representation. The fact that he pays money for the number of money itself explains how “money is talking to itself” and thus it is no longer a means through which people can organize their understanding of the world.

I want to proceed by looking further into how DeLillo, through Packer, narrates the temporal logic of futures trading and virtual finance. The problem DeLillo comments on in the novel, in regards to the temporal framework of digital capitalism, is that it wishes to develop beyond the physical limits of the human body. Through Eric Packer, who wishes to shed all ties to the material world and live entirely in future of simulated space, we can better understand how virtual finance develops beyond physicality:

He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, birdwing and chambered shell. It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial market. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole (DeLillo 24).

Packer's almost spiritual description reflects cyber-capital as a force that exists as an independent entity that contains everything that used to be reliant on human performance. Packer's idea that it is shallow thinking to maintain that human performance has anything to do with capital tells us something about how he embodies the crisis of representation as he dreams that material dimensions will die out.

We can understand that Packer wishes to transcend temporality and exist entirely in the future of simulated space by his dislike for everything that requires human interference. He firmly believes that the world should be purely technological, and that anything reliant on people is a thing of the past such as the "anti-furist" ATM that is "unable to escape its interference of fuddled human personnel" (54). Similarly, he likes the bank towers because they represent the future, "a time beyond geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it" (36). The accumulative means of capitalism in *Cosmopolis* is so far advanced that the only way to advance any further, is to completely remove itself from any physical aspect that can potentially interfere with its process:

Technology was imminent or not. It was semi-mythical. It was the natural next step. 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 the 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 (DeLillo 206-207).

Packer's reflection on the potential of cyber-capital tells us something about cyber-capitalism's volatile temporal logic of continuous expansion towards the future. Packer's wish that the world will transcend into the virtual dimension purely for accumulative purposes is helpful for understanding the logic of cyber-capital and the intensified present in the narrative. The present becomes a continuous and intensified present as capital accumulation exists in the future, beyond the body's physical limits. Living under a social power that wish to transcend time and exists entirely in virtual space, results in a fragmented experience, as the human body will not be able to follow into the dimension in which capital now exists.

As a figure for cyber-capitalism, Packer inflicts this temporal dimension on the world, and the novel comments how this temporality affects society as it struggles to keep up with Packer's time. The novel narrates a day in Eric Packer's life as he rides through Manhattan, isolated in his limousine while the people outside "protest against the future" (91) with the

wish to “normalize it, keep it from overwhelming the present” (91). Packer limousine, which he explains he has had “prousted” (70), is a noteworthy reference to Marcel Proust’s cork-lined bedroom where he wrote *In Search of Lost Time*. This way Packer’s limousine, as he rides through Manhattan, functions as an allegory for capitalism and how it isolates the individual by occupying a different time; completely disregarding a natural temporal rhythm. Vogl explains that “the conversion of time into the procreative force of the monetary form amounts to a subversion of natural temporality, giving rise to an autonomous and empty form of time, measurable and “mintable”, a time without characteristics and devoid of any particular quality” (89). The protesters in the novel protests with a slogan from Marx’ communist manifesto, “A specter is haunting the world – the specter of capitalism” (97). Packer’s limousine becomes this specter, which haunts every aspect of human lives in its absence. The “empty form of time” that Packer inflicts on society is essentially a time of “sameness”; it is a temporal framework of continuous futures that will never take shape in the present because it is realized beyond materiality. Kinski explains: Time “belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It’s being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent” (79). The insistent future prevents anything new from happening in the present, so it holds the individual in a temporal sameness because the world is taking shape in a time that exists outside of time - a virtual space beyond physical limits.

Jonathan Crary explains that, “24/7 is a time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate...” (9). Benno Levin illuminates the volatility of trying to keep up with cyber-capitalism future logic, and the space-time compression’s continuous 24-hour world. Virtual trading on the global stock market requires its worker to follow its continuous timeframe, “currency markets never close” (DeLillo 29). Packer’s chief of theory explains that “clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism” (79), but now, in cyber capitalism, it is money that accelerates time (DeLillo 79). In cyber-capitalism where money no longer has any link to materiality, time is rendered into measurements so small, nanoseconds – “One billionth of a second”, Zeptoseconds, Yoctoseconds – “One septillionth of a second” (DeLillo 79) - too fast for the human body to keep up with. Levin, who worked with the bath at Packer’s company, explains this volatility of keeping up with such a pace of time: “I loved the bath. But your system is so microtimed that I couldn’t keep up with it. I couldn’t find it. It’s so infinitesimal. I began to hate my work, and you, and all the numbers on the screen, and every minute of my life” (191). He explains to Packer that he

is “helpless in their system that makes no sense to me. You wanted me to be a helpless robot soldier but all I could be was helpless” (195). Levin’s experience with the temporal logic of futures trading illuminate how it operates in disregard of human limits and how the individual’s experience is reduced to a feeling of inadequacy and alienation from the social power that dominates its existence.

Cyber capitalism’s measurement of time, rendered into such small measurements that it is impossible for the human eye to follow, tells us something about the risks involved in speculation on currencies, and I think it is important to draw attention to this in terms of how DeLillo narrates the volatility of futures trading. I have previously drawn attention to the fact that *Cosmopolis* was not well received until after the financial crisis in 2008. It was not until after this event that its self-reflexive narrative was appreciated, as it could be understood as precisely narrating this event. Through Eric Packer, DeLillo is able to narrate the larger consequences of a financial form that inherently cannot be narrated. A financial crisis occurs when investments fail to generate profit for reinvestment. As the finance capital system is in the hands of individual capitalists, there is “a competitive compulsion to take increasingly daring risks in search of higher returns that temporality attracts investment” (Peet 7). Through Packer, we can understand the consequences of such trading as the result of one person’s drive to generate the largest profit, regardless of the people it affects. When Packer knows he has failed, betting on the yen, he becomes as invested in losing as he does winning. As Levin explains: “Even when you self-destruct, you want to fail more, lose more, sink more than others” (193). Packer’s drive to self-destruct illustrates finance capitalism’s total occupation with its own wants and its disregard for the people it affects. Packer as the figure of social power illustrates quite a disturbing image of the disaffection of capitalism.

In his article, “Blood on the Trading Floor”, Paul Crosthwaite examines the Freudian concept of the death drive in economic thought as a means for understanding the contemporary financial crisis. Crosthwaite, following Jameson’s position, explains that a critical and cultural approach to finance capital is uniquely qualified to fill the gap of what economic theorization fails to address. He suggests that literary narratives, such as *Cosmopolis*, removed from the ideological force field of the financial markets, is best fitted for narrating the “visions of chaos on the global markets” (8), as these narratives are given free rein to do so. He explains that this approach to finance can demonstrate what the “discipline of economics cannot so much as contemplate: That for its participants and spectators alike, the crash is not simply an object of fear or anxiety, or even more fascination,

but also of an inchoate but urgent desire” (4). Crosthwaite’s ideas are illuminating in terms of Packer’s wish to self-destruct as they illuminate how capitalism, regardless of winning or losing, is essentially concerned with fulfilling its own desires. Crosthwaite explains Packer’s “wilful extirpation of market value ultimately . . . proves to be indistinguishable from his pursuit of his own annihilation” (9), and thus his urge to self-destruct points to the direction “of the death drive” (9). I think what Crosthwaite illuminates is important in terms of how the postmodern literary narrative tells us something about the state of society. His theory is also helpful as it closely relates to my larger argument on violence and death as a way the only way to experience time within the capitalist framework.

Packer’s wish to transcend the referential dimension and exist entirely in the “soulful and glowing” virtual dimension intimately connects to how DeLillo comments on the connection between violence and temporality. It is through Packer’s engagement with violence and death that DeLillo illuminates the perversity of temporal dimension of futures trading and its impact on the individual. *Cosmopolis* comments on both how we can see violence as a way to experience time and how it becomes the final obstacle for the further expansion of cyber-capital. It tells us something about how the framework that operates nonstop around the clock pushes the limits of human physicality to the point of the schizophrenic psyche we saw in *Fight Club*. It shows how the body has no place in the further development of capitalism through Eric Packer’s own physical limits.

While in the two previous chapters, I have argued that the characters engage with violence and death in an attempt to experience an organic process of life, *Cosmopolis* engagement with violence and death comes from quite a different standpoint. Packer wishes to live entirely in the temporal dimension in which the characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* attempt to escape through engaging with violence. As the embodiment of the capitalism that removes an organic process of temporality from the individual, the organic process of the human body becomes the only thing standing in Packer’s way of his wish to transcend temporality: “He’d always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void” (206). Packer’s urge to annihilate time is halted by the realization that he is a physical being. Confronted with his assassin, he shoots himself in the hand and in his proceeding reflections he explains that, “his pain interfered with his immortality” (207). In his article, “The Untimely in Globalization’s Time: Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*”, Victor Li argues that in

globalization, the body becomes untimely because the body, “changeable, vulnerable, mortal – acts to disrupt capitalist globalization’s non-temporal regime” (266). Li comments that “Cyber-capitalism’s desire to transcend temporality by controlling the future, its global biopolitical dream of immortality is resisted, however, by the very materiality it seeks to transcend – the body” (Li 265). Li’s argument is interesting and helpful for understanding this extreme form of capitalism and its influence on temporality, and further illuminates the body as the only thing that can interfere with capitalist temporality. The last remaining obstacle for cyber-capitalism and its annihilation of time into the future is the physicality of the human body. The only thing that holds Packer to the present is the physicality of his own body, which cannot transcend into simulated space.

As Packer realizes he is past a point of return in his financial endeavors, he goes to seek out his treat, who turns out to be Benno Levin. It is not until he is confronted with pain that he is able to reflect on his place in physical space, as his pain prevents him from moving into the future:

The pain was the world. The mind could not find a place outside it. He could hear the pain, staticky, in his hand and wrist. ...He could feel himself contained in the dark but also just beyond it, on the lighted outer surface, the other side, belonged to both, feeling both, being himself and seeing himself (DeLillo 201).

Packer’s reflection on the feeling of pain illustrates how close contact with human mortality functions as the only way to take part in a process of time. His experience of both being himself and seeing himself tells us something about how his confrontation with pain has allowed him to also experience “being” in addition to seeing himself. In a sense it reverses the recurrent moments when Packer sees himself and his action before they actually happen, pain allows him to be present in the present.

Li explains, “the untimeliness of the body’s pain is that which allows time to free itself from the futurism of the instant, the accelerated yet atemporal framework imposed on the globe by cyber-capital” (268). What Li explains here is connected to Jameson’s reflection on “...the intimate relationship between violence as content and the ‘moment’ as form” (*Singular Modernity* 195) that I mentioned in the introduction. While we can understand the crisis of representation and its future logic through the novel’s self-reflexive narrative language, this experience is further intensified through Packer’s engagement with violence, as this is in fact the only thing that allows him to “feel” and experience the present moment. As Jameson



explains, “there is a demonstrable slippage between the temporal violence with which the empty form of the moment is disengaged from the continuum of time and the awareness that is the very experience of empirical violence itself that offers a supremely privileged content for such a form” (*Singular Modernity* 195). After he is shot, the physicality of Packer’s own body gives content to the present moment, and it is precisely this bodily pain that allows him to experience his physical existence:

The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted into data... He’d come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain. He felt so tired now. His hard gotten grip on the world, material things, great things, his memories true and false, the vague malaise of winter twilights, untransferable, the pale nights when his identity flattens for the lack of sleep, the small wart he feels every time he showers, all him... untransferable, and his strangely achy knee and the click in his knee when he bends it, all him, and so much else that’s not convertible to some high sublime, the technology of mind-without-end (DeLillo 207-208).

This passage mirrors the passage I quoted earlier where Packer spiritually describes the glow of cyber-capital. Only now, in the moment of pain, he reverts his descriptions of data as embodying “all aspects of the life process” (24), and the idea of cyber-capital as “the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planets living billions” (24). By feeling all the things that makes him human, he realizes that the body is “untransferable” into data. It is in this moment that Packer understands the natural process of the human body and that his temporal understanding will cease to go endlessly into the future. Through Packer’s experience with pain, DeLillo’s narrative further emphasizes the idea of violence and death as the only means through which a natural process of time is experienced under the framework of capitalism. Only through confrontation with bodily pain, can the empty continuous future moments be disrupted.

In contrast to the characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*, who use the physicality of the body in an attempt to escape the perpetual present of capitalism’s temporality, the body in *Cosmopolis* becomes the only thing that holds Packer within the present. Yet, the recurrent focus on the body and pain in these novels in relation to temporality emphasizes the volatile experience of late capitalist development reflected in these novels.

In terms of Packer as the embodiment of a financial form that cannot be represented, his experience with bodily pain further emphasizes the perversity of such a form, as the body is in fact the only material form in which it has not transcended. This volatile experience is intensified by the fact that, while Packer feels his physicality, he also sees himself as dead before he actually dies. This tells us something about how capitalism will attempt to continue to exist beyond human mortality. After Packer is shot, he sees himself “dead inside the crystal of his watch”, and he explains: “He saw the tag in tight close-up now and read the legend printed there. Male Z. . . . “He knew that Male Z was the designation for the bodies of unidentified men in hospital morgues. O shit I am dead” (206). We can connect this to the ending of *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*. In the two preceding chapters I have argued that the novels’ endings leave us with a feeling that capitalist temporality will continue to reproduce itself in disregard of the individual. In *Cosmopolis*, as the protagonist is himself the embodiment of capitalism, it is interesting to reflect how *Cosmopolis* reflects on the troubling experience of identity within the larger scheme of capitalism. Jonathan Crary notes that, “an illuminated 24/7 world without shadows is the final capitalist mirage of post-history, of an exorcism of the otherness that is the motor of historical change (9). What Crary explains here is precisely what we can recognize in these novels’ endings. As capitalism exists as an independent force that obliterates all sense of process, and concerns itself only with its own needs for profit, it disrupts the development of identity and individuality. *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* ends with both characters realizing that their actions have no significance for change, and life in contemporary society is merely “exciting”. Packer offers a similar reflection: “Maybe he didn’t want that life after all, starting over broke, hailing a cab in a busy intersection filled with jockeying junior executives. . . . What did he want that was not posthumous? He stared into space. He understood what was missing, the predatory impulse, the sense of large excitation that drove him through his days, the sheer reeling need to be” (209). Packer’s reflection comments on both the life of the individual under the logic of capitalism as well as his own embodiment of this logic. The fact that he does not want anything that is not posthumous and that he lacks the “reeling need to be”, reflects the logic of futures trading and how it disconcerns itself with the physical world. His comment also reflects a way to understand that such a life would be without purpose within the large scheme of the capitalist force. In these terms, Packer’s death drive can be understood as his attempt to escape the life he himself has inflicted on others; the life inflicted on the characters in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*.

In this chapter, I have attempted to illuminate how DeLillo sets out to narrate a financial form that inherently cannot be narrated because it has no referential. By constructing a narrative that both reflects and theorizes capitalism in its most perverse form, DeLillo's narrative becomes a complex narrative that allows us to explore how advanced finance capitalism functions from many different aspects. The novel's self-reflexive language functions as a way to reflect a financial form that escapes representation. Packer's comments on how objects and its terms become useless as he utters them reflect cyber-capital's endless process of future manifestations. Narrating capitalism through the protagonist gives DeLillo a position through which he can represent what cannot be represented. Through Packer, we can better grasp how the social power of virtual finance functions within its absent form. Packer himself takes on a spectral absent form by mimicking his presence in physical space. His wish to transcend both time and space and exist entirely in virtual space, effectively reflects and tells us something about the intense experience of living under a form of capitalism that attempts to extend beyond the limits of physicality. We can also understand this through the novel's narrative structure, which functions as a way for the reader to experience the annihilation of time and space through the global stock market. By inserting the confessions of Benno Levin, which operates on different timeframes than Packer's narration, DeLillo effectively creates the experience of never knowing what time or space we are in when it comes to cause and effect. Levin's narration functions both as an allegory for the space-time compression and at the same time a frame through which we can understand the intense experience of attempting to keep up with the temporal logic of futures trading. DeLillo further illuminates the banalities of this temporal logic through Packer's experience with pain. Pain becomes the only thing that keeps Packer in the present moment and halts his wish to transcend into the virtual future "for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous reinvestment" (DeLillo 207). Through Packer's reflections on experiencing pain, DeLillo is able to comment on the larger scheme of how capitalism operates in complete disregard of the individual. By constructing a narrative that narrates finance from all aspects, DeLillo effectively narrates a financial form that has lost its narrative quality and turns it into a reading experience that allows the reader to understand virtual finance's extreme distortion of time.

# Conclusion

What sparked the interest for this thesis was the introduction to a special issue of *Representations* titled “The Way We Read Now” written by Stephan Best and Sharon Marcus in which they deal with the mode of “surface reading” in literary criticism. In this article, they propose that perhaps what has driven literary criticism to the surface, or kept it to the surface, might be because “at the end of the first decade of the twenty first century, “so much seems to be on the surface” (2). Although I have not followed the ideas proposed in the article towards surface reading in my thesis, the article sparked an interest for as to why contemporary narratives urges readers to only see the surface. It was from this standpoint that I developed my thesis. If literature reflects tendencies in society, what changes occurred in order for society and culture to exist entirely on the surface? And if contemporary narratives are, as Best and Marcus proposes, in fact “on the surface”, what can their larger narrative structure tell us? I developed an argument on which the study of temporality can offer us a “symptomatic” approach to these texts, which seems to be entirely on the surface.

The aim of this thesis therefore, was to illuminate the connection between the postmodernist narrative and the economic changes that occurred in the US after the 1970, to find out what this could tell us about the drastic changes in temporality and by extension, narrative experience. My approach was set on the argument that by understanding the dramatic changes in temporality that occurred under the influence of late capitalism we are better equipped to understand what is happening in the postmodern literary narrative. I argued that through a combination of the study of temporality under the influence of capitalism and an analysis of the postmodern narrative, we can understand that these narratives’ non-linearity and fragmentation, which is often received with ambivalence, illuminate what it means to live in a time where an organic process and understanding of time is distorted. By examining *American Psycho*, *Fight Club* and *Cosmopolis* through an understanding of how time under late capitalism functions, we can recognize that these narrative deals with a mode of time that we have yet to come to terms with, and their subsequent violence as a brutal critique of the mental strain of late capitalism’s atemporal temporality.

There is no lack of critic work on postmodernism in various fields - literary, cultural, social, and economic - but I found it to be a significant separation between these theories and these theories applied for the study contemporary texts. By this I do not propose that there is lack of critical work done on these texts as postmodernist literature, but in the sense that the

theoretical basis from which we understand postmodernism are not so much present in the discussion of these texts. In this thesis, I have examined postmodern economic and cultural theory in order to explore how these theories can illuminate what the unstable postmodern narrative attempts to communicate. Applying postmodern theory directly to these texts can extend our understanding of both text and theory as we see these theories come to life through these narratives. My attempt has been to demonstrate how this approach allows us to see that these narratives not only reflect contemporary society thematically, but also structurally. Keeping this in mind can change the dynamic of our reading experience and extend social commentary into new parameters.

What seems to be the most central problem in terms of the postmodern narrative, and perhaps why it is arguable that they call for surface reading, is the lack of a narrative center. By recognizing the dramatic changes in the economy after the 1970s, we can link this lack of a narrative center to the delinking of the financial system from any solid monetary and the following crisis of representation for what we understand as value. In capitalist societies, money is the primary bearer of how we understand and organize our experience, and therefore after the 1970s, literature attempts to reflect a society that has lost its own narrative center. The temporal consequences of this event was significant because as money no longer operates on the condition of material referential value, capital accumulation is free to exist as its own independent entity, separated from a material process. The temporal experience of late capitalism is therefore one that removes an organic temporal process and exists independently from human physicality. I have approached *American Psycho*, *Fight Club* and *Cosmopolis* from the aspect of such a temporality. Through these narratives, we can understand the affectlessness of late capitalism by recognizing the existence of capitalist temporality as independent from human process. All three narratives comments on the experience of living in a society dominated by a form of capitalism in which process is removed and thus temporality becomes an endless series of “sameness”. What has become clear through this thesis is that these novels’ narrative style is the reflection of the troubled existence of the individual within a framework that disregards its existence. Capitalism now bases its realizations in the future, and as the individual cannot exist in the future, its temporal experience becomes a perpetual present of “sameness”, and these novels comment on how this present stalls the development of individual identity.

My aim was to demonstrate how, through the study of temporality, the postmodern narrative could broaden our understanding of what it means to live in a time that distorts a

natural temporal movement. Through a close examination of capitalist temporality in *American Psycho*, *Fight Club* and *Cosmopolis*, these novels illuminate how capitalist temporality fragments the individual's experience by focusing on the pure present. The insistent focus on the intensified present effectively stalls individual development by the lack of a relationship to a past or future. The study of temporality in these novels illuminates their brutal critique of capitalist temporality as the characters' only encounter with a natural temporal rhythm is through their encounter with violence and death. Their atemporal existence is so overpowering that they even seek violence in order to feel a sense of process. The study of temporality in the postmodern narrative illuminates how postmodern formal features reflect contemporary capitalism, and through this understanding, we can appreciate the narrative structure of these novels as an experience of time under late capitalism.

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