



Research Paper

**Narrative Bridges: Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* as Fictional Historiography in Hayden White's Context**

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**Abstract**

This article delves into the intricate interplay of history and fiction, specifically focusing on how history is narrativised according to Hayden White views. The central argument posits that conventional historical texts, influenced by the constraints posed by thinkers like Marx and Lukacs, encounter limitations in their comprehensive exploration of the past, forecasting the future, and guiding the present. In contrast, Hayden White contends for the superiority of fictional texts, asserting their capacity to provide a more accurate portrayal of history. This superiority is derived from their unique ability to present multiple viewpoints, circumvent censorship, and depict historical events in a captivating manner. To substantiate this assertion, the paper conducts a detailed analysis of Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis*, set in the year 2000, which remarkably anticipates the economic upheavals experienced from 2008 to 2011. The novel serves as a lens into America's economic history, illustrating the protagonist's contemporary life amidst technology use and interactions with diverse individuals. Grounded in Hayden White's theoretical framework, the paper argues that fictional texts, exemplified by *Cosmopolis*, offer a more comprehensive and precise understanding of history by embracing a broader range of perspectives than traditional historical books. This approach contributes significantly to a more nuanced interpretation of historical events.



## مقاله پژوهشی

# پل‌های روایی: قصه به مثابه تاریخ‌نگاری در رمان جهان‌شهر دان دیلو از منظر هایدن وایت ولی غلامی (نویسنده مسؤول)

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## چکیده

این مقاله با تمرکز بر نحوه روایت‌پردازی در تاریخ، به بررسی پیچیدگی تعامل تاریخ و داستان می‌پردازد. بحث اصلی مقاله، این است که متون تاریخی متعارف، تحت تأثیر محدودیت‌های اعمال‌شده که متفکرانی مانند مارکس و لوکاچ به آن پرداخته‌اند، در بررسی تمام و کمال گذشته، پیش‌بینی آینده و توصیف حال حاضر از ناتوانی رنج می‌برند. در عوض، هایدن وایت معتقد است که متون داستانی از این نظر برتری دارند و بر توانایی آن‌ها در ارائه تصویر دقیق‌تری از تاریخ تأکید می‌کند. این برتری از توانایی منحصر به فرد قصه در ارائه دیدگاه‌های چندگانه، دور زدن سانسور و نمایش رویدادهای تاریخی به شیوه‌ای جذاب برخوردار است. برای اثبات این ادعا، مقاله، تجزیه و تحلیل دقیقی از رمان جهان‌شهر نوشته دان دیلو ارائه می‌دهد: رمان در سال ۲۰۰۰ میلادی اتفاق می‌افتد اما پیش‌بینی قابل اعتنائی از تغییر و تحول‌های اقتصادی بین سال‌های ۲۰۰۸ تا ۲۰۱۱ را به تصویر می‌کشد. این رمان، با ارائه زندگی معاصر قهرمان داستان در دنیای تکنولوژی و در مواجهه با افراد دیگر، مدخلی مهم برای ورود به تاریخ آمریکا در آن سال‌ها است. با استناد به چارچوب نظری بر گرفته شده از هایدن وایت، مقاله ادعا می‌کند که متون داستانی — که جهان‌شهر نمونه‌ای بارز از آن است — در مقایسه با تاریخ، با استفاده از طیف گسترده‌تری از دیدگاه‌ها، فهم دقیق‌تر و کامل‌تری از تاریخ ارائه می‌دهند. در نتیجه، بهره‌گیری از این رویکرد، تفسیر پیچیده‌تر و جزئی‌نگرتری از رویدادهای تاریخی به دست می‌دهد.

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## 1. Introduction

Donald J. DeLillo is an acclaimed American author who excels in various literary genres including novels, short stories, plays, and essays. Over the past few years, his contributions have gained broad recognition, resonating with both academics and the general public. Through his distinctive narrative style, DeLillo aims to present a nuanced depiction of modern American society. According to DeLillo himself, his approach involves translating the world around him in what appears to be a matter-of-fact manner, providing readers with a perspective that may not be immediately familiar but accurately representing the author's observations, "I'm just translating the world around me in what seems to be straightforward terms. For my readers, this is sometimes a vision that's not familiar. But I'm not trying to manipulate reality. This is just what I see and hear" (McCrum, 2010). Consequently, DeLillo employs a blend of reality and fiction to create vivid portrayals of contemporary American experiences.

*Cosmopolis* is a significant piece of literature penned by Don DeLillo in 2003. Set within the vibrant cityscape of New York in April 2000, the novel offers a comprehensive view of the protagonist's daily journey through the metropolis. Throughout the course of this single day, we witness Eric, the protagonist of the novel, encountering various individuals and circumstances that represent the historical and cultural evolution of America over several decades. Moreover, the narrative anticipates the impending economic crises that would occur between 2008 and 2011, making it a prescient reflection of the country's past, present, and potential future challenges. As such, *Cosmopolis* serves as a poignant reminder of the cyclical nature of human experience and the ever-evolving landscape of our shared existence.

Hayden White, a narrative theorist concerned with the relationship between historiography and fiction, sheds new light on traditional approaches of historiography. He underscores the potential of fiction to offer a more profound insight into historical contexts, cultivate empathy, and question established narratives. White offers the idea that fiction and history are not entirely distinct, blurring the lines between the two and revealing how narrative plays a vital role in shaping public perception of history. Furthermore, he proposes that

fictional narratives present a multi-dimensional representation of history, delivering a more enriching and immersive experience when contrasted with conventional historical texts. Moreover, he highlights the potency of literature, especially fiction, in animating history through vivid descriptions and emotional connections. This, in turn, enhances our understanding and appreciation of historical events.

## 2. Review of Literature

Among the researchers who have analyzed *Cosmopolis* (2003), Toon States undertakes a comparative study of two novels by Don DeLillo, namely *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003). He discusses the influence of "late capitalism" and the repercussions of the "post-industrial" era on American society during the period under consideration. Indeed, he proves that DeLillo rewrites history and pays attention to the future more than the past when he claims: "DeLillo's historiographic metafiction nonetheless shows how rewriting the past can prevent history from being conclusive and teleological" (States, n.d. 1). This study aligns with the themes explored in Toon States' article. Govinda Poudel, in an article, argues the vices and evils in a capitalist world. This research claims that all human beings are victims of this system, exactly like what happens to *Cosmopolis*'s protagonist, Eric Packer. The examination of this system and its impacts constitutes a significant aspect of American history. This study will leverage the assertions made in States' article to illustrate how a literary work such as *Cosmopolis* can serve as a lens into America's political and sociological history. Finally, in 2017, Haydon Hughes conducts a comparison between Walter Benjamin's concept of the flâneur and characters in *Cosmopolis* (2003). He believes at those days, flâneurs were interested in the city rather than the pastoral areas. Additionally, flâneur had a specific role in the literature of those days. Now, he believes in the 21st century, people are interested in technology and spend their time in digital life and forget about their real-life; indeed, he believes they are flâneurs of the digital age. These issues are intricately tied to cultural history, and this research aims to explore how Don DeLillo conveys and reflects these cultural aspects within the realm of literature.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Hayden White, an American narrative theorist, challenges conventional historical approaches by introducing the term metahistory<sup>1</sup>. Metahistory is “an elaborated reflection on the principles of historical thinking” (Rusen, 2020: 92). White contends that history lacks inherent validity; instead, he posits that history is essentially a facet of literature. White's argument stems from the belief that merely presenting facts or incidents in chronological order does not constitute true history. He asserts that history involves more than a simple chronological arrangement of facts; it requires interpretation, narrative structure, and the recognition of the subjective nature of historical accounts.

Consequently, White suggests that historians must go beyond a mere chronological arrangement of facts and establish meaningful connections between them. In contemporary terms, this process is referred to as interpretation, imparting a literary dimension to the discipline of history. White's scheme discloses the logic of historical thinking in general. Indeed, this is the difference between representation and interpretation (Rusen, 2020: 97-100).

Moreover, White believes historians can deceive themselves and readers, not only by the facts they are representing but also by way of connecting these facts. Certainly, historians have the capacity to emphasize certain incidents through the narrative techniques they employ and the interconnections they establish between these events. For instance, imagine that we have some facts by the names of a, b, c ... and they are in chronological order; historians can demonstrate these facts like:

A, b, c, ...

a, B, c, ...

a, b, C, ...

It can be seen from the above analysis that historians can highlight some incidents by the tool of narrating, so they are using imagination and art. White argues that history requires textualization and cannot escape the realm of imagination. Consequently, he suggests viewing history as a sub-category of fiction, attributing the perceived shortcomings of history to this inherent connection with

imaginative storytelling. In fact, historians could not admit history as a science with absolute freedom from other sciences. This is why later, in the 20th century, critics doubted history's validity and started to look at it in diverse ways (Hughes, 2008: 225-227).

Furthermore, additional pieces of evidence support White's belief that history is intertwined with fiction. He posits that historical discourse places a heavy emphasis on the pursuit of truth, whereas fictional discourse is more concerned with the concept of the real (White, 2005: 113-118). He believes history refuses the possible, and that is the other reason for its failure. However, some modern historians pay attention to the possibility, which is different from possibilities of fiction. In the face of such criticism, history (true) is a part of fiction (real), a repressed form.

History refuses the possible, and it is precisely this refusal that prohibited history from becoming a modern science. For it is a characteristic of modern science (as against its Aristotelian prototype) to be more interested in the real than in the true; that is why it can, like fiction, proceed hypothetically, testing the boundary between the real and the possible exactly in the way that modernist writing did in Pound, Eliot, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Musil, and others (White, 2005: 147-148).

In the Marxist perspective on literature, literary texts are seen as mirrors reflecting the underlying social, economic, and power structures of a given society. This viewpoint contends that fiction, among other literary forms, provides insights into the prevailing class struggles, power dynamics, and economic conditions of its historical context, offering a lens through which to analyze and critique societal structures. Hayden White, on the contrary, asserts that a literary text has the capacity to reveal political, cultural, and other events that occurred in specific times and places. White contends that literary narrative encompasses both causes and effects due to the causal nature of the text. In contrast, when addressing history, he refers to Louis Althusser's concept that history serves as the "absent cause" of effects. This distinction highlights the different ways in which causality operates in literary texts compared to historical narratives. Moreover, literature serves to motivate readers by offering insights

into the past, present, and potential futures. In this manner, it has the capacity to inspire readers with motivations for various potential futures (White, 1982a: 1-5). Hayden White posits that fiction possesses three semantic horizons, which he outlines as follows:

1. Political history
2. The relevant social context
3. "History now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us" (White, 1982a: 4). According to White, these horizons contribute to making fiction a more effective tool for understanding the past compared to history. He suggests that fiction, by encompassing these semantic horizons, provides a richer and more nuanced exploration of historical events.

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Furthermore, White underscores the significance of introducing a certain level of meaninglessness into the study of history. This, he argues, is essential to spur individuals to take control of their lives, shaping them in a way that holds personal responsibility for creating meaning for themselves and future generations (White, 1982a: 50-51). One can never move with any politically influential confidence from an apprehension of 'the way things actually are or have been' to the kind of moral insistence that they 'should be otherwise' without passing through a feeling of repugnance for and negative judgment of the condition that is to be superseded. Moreover, precisely insofar as historical reflection is disciplined to understand history in such a way that it can forgive everything or at best to practice a kind of 'disinterested interest' [...], it is removed from any connection with a visionary politics and consigned to a service that will always be anti-utopian in nature. (White, 1982b: 72-73).

### **3.1 The Concept of Historical Imagination**

Hayden White's concept of historical imagination centers around the evolution of historical knowledge and its separation from literature and



other disciplines. He contends that historical knowledge was previously second-hand and subsidiary to other fields but moved toward self-autonomy in the 19th century. White emphasizes the use of narrative and novel forms to express historical concepts during this period. Additionally, he introduces the idea of historical imagination, which involves analyzing historical events free from personal biases and within a value-free framework. White's view aligns with Presentism, suggesting that historical and social outcomes depend on human actions and interpretations. Furthermore, he argues that historical narratives are not inherently legitimate, opening the possibility of distortion and the rise of complex interpretations in modern histories. In his book *The Metaphysics of Discourse*, White explores the role of interpretation in historiography, asserting that historical narratives lack inherent truthfulness and can be subject to distortion. He suggests that history has transitioned from straightforward representations to complex and multi-layered interpretations, influenced by the shifts in 20th-century thoughts and disciplines.

### 3.2 The Concepts of Microhistory

Hayden White's theory of microhistory underscores the importance of conducting a concentrated and detailed analysis of specific events, individuals, or communities within historical contexts. As opposed to traditional macrohistory, which emphasizes broad and overarching narratives, microhistory delves into the nuances of everyday life and the particularities of localized experiences. This approach allows historians to uncover the unique characteristics and complexities of smaller historical units, shedding light on overlooked aspects of human experience and societal dynamics. Microhistorians often utilize diverse sources such as personal correspondence, legal records, and material culture to construct finely-grained narratives that offer insights into the lived experiences of individuals and groups within specific historical settings.

White's theory of microhistory challenges the grand, sweeping narratives of traditional historiography, proposing a more intimate and detailed exploration of historical phenomena. By shifting the focus from broad structures to intricate details, microhistory offers a richer understanding of the texture and diversity of historical



experiences. Additionally, this approach enables historians to address questions of agency, subjectivity, and power at a granular level, illuminating the ways in which historical actors navigate and shape their social, cultural, and political environments. White's endorsement for microhistory underscores the significance of localized narratives in complementing and enriching our comprehension of broader historical processes and phenomena.

#### **4. Critical Overview of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis***

##### **4.1. *Cosmopolis* and Making Microhistory**

In DeLillo's autobiographical novel, central themes revolve around the materiality and mediality of history and historiography. The processes of crafting textual narratives and exploring intertextuality are also focal points in the narrative. The concept of microhistory places the individual, represented by DeLillo, at the heart of the narrative, challenging the traditional focus on macrohistorical perspectives. *Cosmopolis* serves as a critique on late capitalism, reflecting and questioning various aspects of the socio-economic system during a significant period of United States history, coinciding with the development of the late capitalism crisis and pre-9/11 events. Through the depiction of the main character, Eric Packer, engaged in high-risk financial speculation and detached from productive endeavours, the novel mirrors the tendencies of financialization and globalization, characteristic of late capitalism. Packer's mobile and extravagant lifestyle within New York City symbolizes the interconnected and unrestricted movement of global financial markets, embodying the features of late capitalism.

Breaking the basis of the traditional mode of narrativizing history, which is the dominating presence in historiographies, is the main common interest of the author. The discourse of narrative history reflects the deeper layers of individual lives usually neglected by the old metaphysics of presence. Another aspect of the historical imagination that has come to our attention is the realization that the past's results and accomplishments depend on individual actions more than what is usually credited to individual

narratives. In other words, historiography and microhistory certainly successfully depict the past in terms of mass movements of people and eventful moments. However, what remains important and neglected is the individual experience.

DeLillo suggests that history is inherently connected to literature and fiction, aligning with White's view that historical narrative embodies literary elements. White also posits that the process of acquiring knowledge about the past can be viewed as a form of poetry, as both writing and reading history involve the imposition of narrative devices and ideological techniques. Similarly, the interpretation of historical documents or events can be seen as a literary activity, involving the construction of meaning from multiple interpretations. This challenges the traditional distinction between literature and history, especially evident in historiographic meta-fiction, which blurs the line between fiction and truth. This critique questions the concept of scientific history, which seeks to rebuild historical narratives using scientific methods.

DeLillo's works address technological and economic aspects, focusing on technological alienation within late capitalism. In *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer's isolation and reliance on technology, particularly within his sophisticated limousine, symbolize the detachment and estrangement stemming from excessive dependence on technical systems, highlighting the potential for technology to intensify feelings of solitude. The narrative unfolds amid a significant economic downturn, reflecting the recurrent financial crises characteristic of late capitalism. Packer's individualistic pursuits and disengagement from broader societal concerns exemplify the self-absorption and lack of empathy associated with individualism in late capitalist societies.

When discussing the junction between historiography and capitalism in DeLillo, there are a few issues to take into account. The significance of economic variables demonstrated in *Cosmopolis*, especially capitalism, as a driving force in determining historical events has been investigated by a number of historians. According to

economic determinism, the economic structure of a society, such as capitalism, significantly impacts that society's political, social, and cultural evolution. Marxist historiography, which has its origins in the writings of Karl Marx, places an emphasis on the role that conflicts between social classes and economic forces have in the formation of history. It is the contention of Marxists that the growth of capitalism and the struggles that have arisen between various groups, particularly the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, are essential to comprehend the progression of historical events. Historiographical fiction of DeLillo also investigates the ways in which the emergence of capitalism has impacted many parts of society, such as the social structures, power dynamics, and cultural norms that the society has developed. It examines the ways in which economic systems influence the manner in which individuals arrange themselves and interact with one another:

The man waited for a response. Eric was looking past him at a large shop window, one of the few on the street not showing rows of precious metal set with gems. He felt the street around him, unremitting, people moving past each other in coded moments of gesture and dance. They tried to walk without breaking stride because breaking stride is well-meaning and weak but they were forced sometimes to sidestep and even pause and they almost always averted their eyes. Eye contact was a delicate matter. A quarter second of a shared glance was a violation of agreements that made the city operational. Who steps aside for whom, who looks or does not look at whom, what level of umbrage does a brush or a touch constitute? No one wanted to be touched. There was a pact of untouchability. Even here, in the huddle of old cultures, tactile and close-woven, with passersby mixed in, and security guards, and shoppers pressed to windows, and wandering fools, people did not touch each other. (DeLillo, 2003: 28).

In examining the historical and fictional representations of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism, a common focus lies on exploring the interconnectedness of capitalist economies with imperial expansion, colonization, and global commerce. This investigation extends to fiction, where authors delve into individual experiences within these broader themes. DeLillo's historiographical

fiction and metafiction in *Cosmopolis* specifically probe into the cultural and intellectual history of capitalism, exploring how economic concepts have influenced historical narratives and shaped societies. DeLillo's work also scrutinizes the impact of economic ideologies, such as neoliberalism, on policy and historical interpretations within the context of capitalism in crisis. Furthermore, the study of global capitalism encompasses an analysis of its effects on different regions, highlighting both economic advancements and disparities resulting from interlinked nations.

Historians deprive history of having performative subjects by writing and imposing a non-negotiable frame. One can never move with any kind of politically influential confidence from an apprehension of how things actually are or have been to the type of moral insistence that they should be otherwise without first experiencing a feeling of repugnance for and negative judgment of the condition to be superseded. And precisely insofar as historical reflection is disciplined to understand history in such a way that it can forgive everything or, at best, practice a disinterested interest. Thus, it is severed from any connection with visionary politics and consigned to a service that will always be anti-utopian in its nature (White, 1982a: 72-3). White's observations are provocative, opening the space for ambiguity and performativity regarding the representation of the historical subject in fiction. Out of the chaos of a city such as New York and the protests, DeLillo manages to give the readers a glimpse of the performativity of the subject in the face of the imposing Other:

They were confused and wrongheaded. But his respect for the protesters' ingenuity grew more certain. He slid open the sunroof and poked his head into the smoke and gas, with burning rubber thick in the air, and he thought he was an astronaut come upon a planet of pure flatus. It was bracing. A figure in a motorcycle helmet mounted the hood and began crawling across the roof of the car. Torval reached up and scraped him off. He tossed him to the ground, where the bodyguards took over. They had to use a stun gun to subdue him and the voltage delivered the man to another dimension. Eric barely noticed the crackling sound and the arced charge of current that jumped the gap between

electrodes. He was watching the second ticker begin to operate, words racing north to south. It took him a moment to absorb the words and identify the line. He knew the line of course. It was out of a poem he'd been reading lately, one of the few longer poems he'd chosen to investigate, a line, half a line from the chronicle of a city under siege (DeLillo, 2003: 68).

The encounter with the "other" disrupts self-identity, as the self truly knows itself only when confronted with alterity. In the narrative, the protagonist is unexpectedly confronted with the "otherness" inherent in history's trajectory, embodied as a spectral presence. This encounter unfolds as a site for the manifestation of distorted identities, challenging conventional historicism and macrohistory. DeLillo's approach involves employing microhistory to liberate history from the constraints of traditional historiographic viewpoints, emphasizing the performative mobility of subjectivity. His writings demonstrate the falsehood of stability in both historical and subjective experiences, highlighting the need for an adaptable structure that considers individuals in addition to their historical context. This evolving structure is central in the construction and reconstruction of historical narratives

The high-tech long limousine that encapsulates Packer's lavish and secluded existence serves as a metaphor for the alienation from history that may result from being too occupied with capital, overly reliant on technology, and detached from the ordinary experiences of others. A feeling of estrangement is emphasized as his quest develops via a succession of disjointed meetings. In a world where artificiality reigns supreme, Packer's quest for a haircut symbolizes his yearning for authenticity on his journey, Packer meets several "others," such as a protestor, his estranged wife, and even a reflection of himself in a mirror. In a society fixated on personal interests and technology interfaces, these interactions show how broken modern relationships are and how hard it is to connect with other people. As Packer faces his own death and wonders about the purpose of his life, *Cosmopolis* delves into existential issues. The quest for meaning and belonging in a cold and impersonal world is front and center in the book, delving into existential questions via examining identity. The book resonates

with postmodern and metamodern anxieties surrounding identity disintegration in a world characterized by data overload, constant surveillance, and materialistic pursuits. As a postmodern figure in decline, Packer has witnessed the firsthand fragmentation of the self into its constituent elements. In his complex novel *Cosmopolis*, Don DeLillo examines modern capitalism and technology through the individual and collective lens. This thought-provoking book will make you question your assumptions about human connection and purpose in this hypermodern world as you consider the consequences of living in a world where the lines between real life and virtual reality blur. The blur and alienation can be observed in these lines:

The rain came washing down on the emptying breadth of Times Square with the billboards ghost-lighted now and the tire barricades nearly cleared dead ahead, leaving 47th Street open to the west. The rain was fine. The rain was dramatically right. But the threat was even better. He saw a few tourists creep along Broadway under bunched umbrellas to stare at the charred spot on the pavement where an unknown man had set fire to himself. This was grave and haunting. It was right for the moment and the day. But the credible threat was the thing that moved and quickened him. The rain on his face was good and the sour reek was fine and right, the fug of urine maturing on the body of his car, and there was trembling pleasure to be found, and joy at all misfortune, in the swift pitch of markets down. But it was the threat of death at the brink of night that spoke to him most surely about some principle of fate he'd always known would come clear in time (DeLillo, 2003: 45).

#### 4.2. DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, and Historical Imagination after 9/11

In addition to portraying the decline of the American ideal of capitalism, DeLillo illustrates an extraordinary proliferation of plot points. He situates these narrative elements at the intersection of a tumultuous and significant chapter in American history—the post-9/11 era. Laist argues this point, noting that despite the narrative unfolding in April 2000, Don DeLillo's inaugural novel post-9/11 is, in fact, *Cosmopolis* (257). As an author based in New York City, whose literary career revolves around themes of terrorism and technology, Don DeLillo has often incorporated the World Trade

Center into his fictional works. Notably, his magnum opus, *Underworld*, features a profoundly evocative photograph of the Twin Towers on its dust jacket. Due to these thematic elements and visual associations, DeLillo's name has frequently been linked to 9/11, almost as if he had foreseen the tragic event. This is because DeLillo has built his career around the themes of terrorism and technology, two themes embedded in the contemporary world's history. Therefore, a piece of microhistory that employs tragedy and eventfulness of this world will be a perfect conduit for a novel that focuses on specific events as minute as those of a single day:

A cab squeezed in alongside, the driver pressing his horn. This set off a hundred other horns. Shiner stirred in the jump seat near the liquor cabinet, facing rearward. He was drinking fresh orange juice through a plastic straw that extended from the glass at an obtuse angle. He seemed to be whistling something into the shaft of the straw between intakes of liquid. Eric said, "What?" Shiner raised his head. "Do you get the feeling sometimes that you don't know what's going on?" he said. "Do I want to ask what you mean by that?" Shiner spoke into his straw as if it were an onboard implement of transmission (DeLillo, 2003: 16).

DeLillo weaves this fragile and minutely private narrative into the fabric of the meta-histories. He deepens our engagement and understanding of this segment of history. White and Frankman's observations of history render the interconnectedness of historical events makes it possible for historical accounts to be fictitious and rooted in factuality simultaneously. Fictional writings may represent historical events just as well, if not better than historical texts. Literature does not only portray the past but also indicates the present and the future aesthetically and interestingly. White's ideas and DeLillo's narrative address the dilemma of history. What dilemma would that be?



Metahistory offers aesthetically insignificant insight into the events of the past in hindsight. Admittedly, however, there may be outstanding works of historians that border on the definition of art. Perry Anderson or Thucydides may come to mind in this regard. Narrative, in particular, that of DeLillo and his likes, do not wait for hindsight and time to cast light on the past. Rather, *Cosmopolis* does not wait around for the Sylvan historian to express a dull dream of ages bygone, to paraphrase John Keats, speaking of whom brings about the equation of beauty and truth:

All this optimism, all this booming and soaring. Things happen like bang. This and that simultaneous. I put out my hand and what do I feel? I know there's a thousand things you analyze every ten minutes. Patterns, ratios, indexes, whole maps of information. I love information. This is our sweetness and light. It's a fuckall wonder. And we have meaning in the world. People eat and sleep in the shadow of what we do. But at the same time, what?

There was a long pause. He looked at Shiner finally. What did he say to the man? He did not direct a remark that was hard and sharp. He said nothing at all in fact (DeLillo, 2003: 16).

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This 'nothing' discussed here within the sinews of the everyday events points out to the bigger picture of history and the more aesthetic dimension of microhistory. White observes (268) that Hegel's categorization of historiography into universal, pragmatic, critical, and conceptual forms was not adopted as a guiding principle for the myriad of historiographies developed in the nineteenth century. To surmise that a Hegelian approach does not meet the full account for micro-histories and narratives like *Cosmopolis*. White adds that historians did distinguish between the criteria that guided the writing of national and local histories and the criteria that would guide a study of "universal" or global history (ibid.).

Moreover, White differentiates between the historian's reconstruction of what *actually* occurred at the time of the events occurrences based on the records and observations of the events under

investigation and the original stories. Added to this is the elevation that comes after adding historical imagination, which is lacking in the accounts written by historians. Language (used in the widest meaning of the word, encompassing structure, morality, poetry, will to power, imagination, psyche, and story) is interpreted by White and scholars like him in the sense that it is what fundamentally circumscribes all of epistemology (Skodo, 2012: 485). This is to say that whoever arrogated truth, objectivity, continuity, purpose, or any other so-called style of realism was actually concealing something. Literary language presents truth and more epistemological experience through narrative, while microhistory and grand narratives fall behind. However, we have learned from postmodernism and Derrida that since the structure of language does not belong to any particular discourse/party, any given text will eventually pave the way to open up its secrets, bearing the seeds of its own deconstruction. Sokodo, analyzing White, believes that this is possible because the structure of language is universal, and when the realist discourses discover that they are operating in a different universe of human affairs, microhistory in the form of fiction steps in.

DeLillo, in crafting *Cosmopolis*, illustrates that the postmodern conception of history is a woven tapestry of interconnected personal narratives. In his fiction, the space of microhistory is a not a Euclidean sphere with a smooth surface. Instead, in a postmodern form through the works of fiction he writes, Don DeLillo demonstrates how the pervasiveness of current shifts in meaning and interpretation in everyday life is reshaping contemporary American literary consciousness. Mostly, he accomplishes this by employing symbols to represent the currents of technology and their consequential impacts. In 2015, we witnessed the same strategy employed by Thomas Pynchon in his astonishing *Bleeding Edge*. In the works of DeLillo, however, the technical marvels like television sets, films, communication tools, computers, and nuclear weapons are not the only things in the world of the characters that serve to mark a period of time. Rather, DeLillo illustrates in his novels how contemporary technology can shape the possibilities of action and influence the very nature of human perception and the interpretation of texts, expanding the concept of historiography into the realm of microhistories. "Stuck in traffic, Packer anxiously monitors the value of

the yen on the limo's computer. Using the car as his office, he summons advisors from nearby shops and restaurants" (*Cosmopolis* 2). This interconnection of business, technology, and history is a theme that runs across all of DeLillo's novels. It seems that Don DeLillo is especially fascinated by technological advancement's role in altering people's perspectives and ideals (Samani, 2). Inevitably, this technology, along with the Americans' perception of it, plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary history. Technology penetrates our minds, shapes our destinies, and is a miracle that we alone have the power to create. Microhistories in DeLillo's novels more effectively capture and engage with this trend. In microhistory and its grand narratives, we only read about how these marvels are created and distributed in production lines through *geist-less* numbers and figures. We can refer to ourselves as the observers and shapers of history. Thus, what we write on history and about history, if given the shape of a literary narrative, can aestheticize traditional history writing and make it more effective.

White (2005: 18) argues that the "modernist conceptions of literature as writing provide ways of seeing how art can complement, rather than undermine," other logical and pragmatic discourses such as history. "This is especially important when it is a matter of 'coming to terms with' real historical events like the Holocaust, which resist encodation by traditional humanistic disciplines such as historiography, law, and philosophy." When we consider postmodern thinking on history, it seems that literary narrative has taken over the grand narrative of history. Now events such as the 9/11 or Holocaust become aesthetic representations of the most tragic aspects of human experience. Only postmodern and metamodernist perspectives have the capacity to infuse history with such aesthetic allure and profound content. Essentially, the historical process only manifested itself in the form of a fundamentally human process. But it is not enough to record this process as it is. In essence, a passive observation of the past alone cannot delve into the philosophical depths and effectively document it. And because "humanity" was the only conceivable manifestation of the process that was called "historical," it seemed impossible to make generalizations about the process as a whole, of the sort that one could

legitimately make about “nature” in its purely physical, chemical, and biological dimensions (White, 1989: 46).

White further adds that each of the most influential cultural movements and ideologies of the post-Enlightenment era, such as Positivism, Idealism, Naturalism (literary), Realism, Symbolism, Vitalism, Anarchism, Liberalism, and other schools, asserted that they would offer more realistic knowledge and insight into the history and social reality in comparison to its rival discourses. Even the assertion by symbolists that “the world is a forest of symbols” and the nihilist denial of trust in any potential system of thought were accompanied by arguments in favor of the “realistic” nature of their respective world views. This was the case even if symbolists and nihilists disagreed with each other (46). After considering this argument of White, the critical issue is that DeLillo has never been known for writing realistic depictions of life. To believe in the existence of micronarratives and bringing them into the light of non-traditional historiography is the pinnacle of DeLillo’s fiction.

However, *Cosmopolis*’ storylines and characters are not intended to be taken at the surface. They are palimpsests that show the history and modern life in the United States can be uninteresting and dehumanizing. But the narrative offers aesthetic significance to this dullness. The American dream and the American tragedies meet in this novel. In retrospect, the novel also makes this admonition that a greater tragedy approaches. The first part of *Cosmopolis* lays the groundwork for Eric’s habitual dependence on others professionally and in terms of his evolving worldview. In the course of the story, Eric’s limousine serves as a setting for both philosophical debates and corporate strategy sessions, attended by a wide range of his acquaintances. When Shiner asks Eric, “Do you get the feeling sometimes that you don’t know what’s going on?” they set the tone for their relationship.... people live in the shadow of our actions when they eat and sleep. However, given that ... what? (DeLillo, 2003: 14). Shiner’s statements reveal a significant ambiguity about his job and his life. Eric and Chin’s discussion of a rat as a unit of currency and Didi and Eric’s dialectic about the alleged worth of art and its link to money are examples of this philosophical method of dialogue.

These exchanges establish the novel's storyline as intellectual and amusing. The nature of urban history prior to the modern period - a basic query with a complex response. These layers of microhistory happen in a network established in an urban area, as it is apparent from the title. There was no modern idea to draw from, and historians failed to agree on a single, comprehensive description of urban history. However, behind the scenes, a body of thought exists on the hallmarks of urban history that is still profoundly impacted by the nineteenth century and the editorial endeavors of that era. It is generally accepted that the German Empire, covering the Swiss Confederation as well, and Northern Italy are the primary centers of urban history since this kind of writing's subject breadth is most directly tied to the town as an independent political authority. Like the German Empire of those days, DeLillo's New York exists in the nexus of immense changes and forces of history.

"The vehicle is armored of course. This complicated the cork-lining. But they managed in the end. It's a gesture. It's a thing a man does."

"Did it work?"

"How could it work? No. The city eats and sleeps noise. It makes noise out of every century. It makes the same noises it made in the seventeenth century along with all the noises that have evolved since then. No. But I don't mind the noise. The noise energizes me. The important thing is that it's there." (DeLillo, 2003: 53).

Postmodernism and the cultural shift have prompted new methods and interpretations in the study of medieval and early modern urban environments and urban history. The space of the limo offers a perfect medium of hermeneutics. DeLillo endeavors to underscore the multitude of distresses and phenomena in New York through interactions, as exemplified in the quote above. This stands in stark contrast to a traditional historical approach that might solely concentrate on mundane bourgeois aspects.

## 5. Conclusion

Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* intricately weaves together literature and historiography, serving as a microcosm of late capitalism and pre-9/11 American society. The novel's focus on individual experiences rather than sweeping generalizations aligns with the concept of microhistory, showcasing the centrality of personal narratives in the historiographical discourse. Through the character of Eric Packer, *Cosmopolis* mirrors the anomalous tendencies and existential isolation emblematic of late capitalism, delving into the interplay of economic forces with individual quests within this tumultuous landscape.

The narrative craftsmanship of *Cosmopolis* bridges historical fiction and metahistory, prompting a reevaluation of historiography through the lens of literary invention. DeLillo's engagement with Capitalist dynamics underscores a crucial intersection between historiography and capitalism, invoking Marxist historiographical insights while also offering a reflection of macroeconomic phenomena. The novel's depiction of an America on the brink of change post-9/11 reflects the intricate relationship between individual microhistories and broader historical currents, emphasizing history as a living and constantly evolving entity shaped by both socio-economic transformation and individual experiences.

In conclusion, *Cosmopolis* challenges the nature of historical truth, positioning historiography as a living entity shaped by subjective experiences within the ever-changing mosaic of history. DeLillo's work serves as a profound exploration of modern history and capitalism, resisting traditional historiography and acknowledging the performative nature of historical narratives. Through the narrative, DeLillo emphasizes that history is not a fixed past but a complex and dynamic entity continually shaped by individual realities and socio-economic forces.

## Footnotes

See: Jörn Rüsen, *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* (New York and Oxford:

Berghahn, 2017), 7-12: "What is Metahistory?"

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