

As the world turns in violence-torn urbania

Starring Robert Pattinson, new Cronenberg outing *Cosmopolis* takes you on an awesome stretch limo ride



By Julio Nakamurakare

Herald staff

FILM REVIEW

Erick Packer is right: we need a haircut. The traffic uptown may be and indeed is a ride through hell, but we do need a haircut. Period.

And what's the reason for such a chaotic state of things, if we may ask? The president's in town. Which president are we talking about? The question and the answer, depending on the context and timeline David Cronenberg's new movie *Cosmopolis* is watched in, is far from banal, ironic or downright stupid.

Hardly a day has gone by since Barack Obama's clear victory in the US presidential elections, flatly defeating Republican hopeful Mitt Romney, and it seems quite right for the release of the new Cronenberg (actually, first shown in May at Cannes).

We need to stay focused, don't we? So before we move on to a different topic, let's agree on this simple fact of life: when you need a Haircut, a haircut you must have regardless of physical obstacles. Good. Now casually onto a different, seemingly more important matter: how has the NYSE done today? Have our stocks soared or plummeted? Have we made huge gains or turned enormous losses? Not that it matters: money is immaterial, printed bank notes are bonds to be redeemed some time in the near or distant future, always at a profit.

Adapted from Don DeLillo's nouvelle and starring *Twilight's* Robert Pattinson as Erick Packer, an eccentric yuppie billionaire who's made his fortune as an asset manager, David Cronenberg's new outing *Cosmopolis*, not unlike Obama's win, is clear, uncontested proof that he (Cronenberg) is our darling filmmaker, the one director we can rightly trust to come up with a jaw-dropping opus every time he develops a new project.

In fact, we could say that Cronenberg is our resident favourite filmmaker, and we wouldn't be wrong or under the effect of controlled substances. What we could not assert before watching *Cosmopolis* was that heartthrob Robert Pattinson would be able to turn in a knockout performance as the dark-suited, dark glassed, suavely stoic businessman obsessed with just one thing, one superficially banal haircut.

Author DeLillo, director Cronenberg, and actor Pattinson know better: a haircut is not a haircut but a metaphor for the kind of epiphany we may rightly feel entitled to after a long day's toil in the quarter of town where every machine, every gadget is a money spinner that makes or breaks fortunes at the snap of a finger.

Wall Street has that capacity embedded in it as though it were only logical. And young Mr. Packer — a redolent 28-year-old bachelor — is fully aware that the cosmic order could be in danger of disarray if the minutiae of life, be it a haircut or a stopover for a quick gastronomic fix or a blood-drenched bar romp as a matter of routine, are not duly respected.

This is why Packer, in veritable Ulyssean fashion, staunchly repeats that we need a haircut, that we need to jump on a stretch limo and drive uptown to have the job done.

Agonizingly self-conscious and visually arresting, *Cosmopolis* is Cronenberg at his very best. Say, at the level of *A History of Violence* (2005), in which Viggo Mortensen quietly, unassumingly accepted the role slapped on him by society: an ordinary family man forced by extraordinary circumstances to become a killer in order to defend and uphold his town's status quo. Sound like a Western? That's because it is a Western.

If Cronenberg's previous work *A Dangerous Method* (2011) was a bit of a Freudian disappointment, *Cosmopolis*, hard on the edges but resplendent, dazzlingly brilliant like a polished diamond, is full of raw intensity, and the anecdotal evidence it brings, such as an ultraviolet, mobster-style shootout lived and viewed as a mere accident, is not alarming: it's just bothersome.

This is the pace at which *Cosmopolis* rides ahead: relentless, full of determination, minimalistic yet full of incident, like a day in the life

of Stephen Dedalus. But Packer's and Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* is full of squalor and moral decay, and rather than introspective it's more akin to a projection of everything that's wrong with today's socio-economic disaster in which the financial culprits get away with murder with only a slap on the hand. But, need we say this, Cronenberg packs a gun, and so does his protagonist, the facially magnetic Pattinson, who proves, at least in Cronenberg's hands, a natural-born killer.

Er, that was actor, sorry.