

Don DeLillo's World of Image in *Mao II*: The Crowd vs. Individuality

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the possibility of individuality amid the world of image depicted in Don DeLillo's *Mao II*. The image is built on the notion of the crowd as a constant threat to one's individuality. However, while the image is mostly considered transmitted via media, Don DeLillo extends the notion of the image to include the empirical and the imagined.. That is, the crowd implied in the image can be perceived in the empirical, mediated, and imagined, respectively referring to the mass gathering, photography and TV watching, and the writing experience. The image suffusing life not only thwarts the recognition of reality but disturbs the certainty of self distinction. Mark Osteen contends that characters in *Mao II* are "thin-boundaried and permeable" and Mark Edmundson considers the self no more than a "conductor, a relay point . . . for currents of forces" (Osteen 1999: 656). Nonetheless, such argument merely account for part of what Don DeLillo presents in *Mao II*. His keen observation of the image-encompassing life shrewdly implies how individuality remains possible in face of the self-diminishing image. In *Mao II*, individuality emerges by both responding to and creating the image. Don DeLillo deliberately emphasizes the distinctive responses to the image to accentuate one's individuality. With such characters as the photographer and the writer, DeLillo confirms the individual creativity with their creation of images. Hence, no longer restricted to the exploration of the boundary between fiction and fact underlying the image, Don DeLillo profoundly and skillfully expresses his concern about the individuality wrapped behind the incessant and ubiquitous image.

Keywords: Don DeLillo, *Mao II*, the image, the crowd, individuality

Contemporary American society is the worst enemy that the cause of human individuality and self-realization has ever had.

(Lentricchia 243)

An image is a crowd in a way, a smear of impressions. Images tend to draw people together, create mass identity.

(IC 72-73)

Don DeLillo, in *Mao II*, probes into the possibility of individuality in the world flooded with images and its subsequent self-diminishing swirl. As the postmodern age is “commonly understood being awash with images” (Campbell 99), numerous and various images prevail over such media as photography, TV, and those construed in daily life. Images here refer to those on TV, those presented on photographs as well as those people construed in daily life like those of the political or spiritual leaders evidently illustrated in the novel. That is, the media are not the major concern of the discussion of the images; instead, the focus falls on the image emitted from the media that the self responds to. DeLillo starts from the photographic images through those on TV to those conjured up in writing and daily life. His depiction of image in a sense extends from the concrete to the imagined, which makes up the major structure of the following analysis.

The dominating role of the image corresponds to Susan Sontag’s observation of the accruing historical role of images which goes from “Plato’s evoking the standard of an image-free way of apprehending the real” through “the age (the mid-nineteenth century) of unbelief strengthen[ing] the allegiances to images” to the society of the twentieth century when

society becomes “modern” because one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images, when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for firsthand experience become indispensable to the health of the economy, the stability of the polity, and the pursuit of private happiness. (153)

Indispensable and unavoidable in life, images make up the *reality* we are obliged to face. However, the image, from the empirically perceived, to the technically mediated, and to the imagined, involves quite complicated facets and forceful impacts on the notion of the self. It not merely empties the substantial quality of reality but particularly poses threat to personal individuality. The self, no longer able to assert a presupposed or well-demarked identity, is constantly challenged and even dissolved. The analysis of *Mao II* would discern if individuality is able to be retained in DeLillo’s chronicle of the image-suffused contemporary life. The discussion is mainly divided into two parts: the first concentrates on the self-diminishing confrontation

with the image and the second part centers on the exploration of individuality.

I. The Confrontation with Image

What is peculiar in *Mao II* is that the image is more than the replicated of the original object or situation. DeLillo's image is actually interwoven with the notion of the crowd, submerging the individual encompassed in the generally-recognized uniformity. That is, the sense of the crowd was permeated in every transmission and confrontation with the image. The crowd here does not only designate the concrete reality of the mass gathering but also the one duplicated on different media. More intriguing is the crowd implicated in the image, referring to how the image-consuming public flattens individual distinction. A repeated phrase in the novel—"the future belongs to the crowd"—stresses the crowd-implicated nature of the image which opens up the very variable and menace to the integrity of individuality. DeLillo observes that

[t]here is something about a crowd which suggests a sort of implicit panic even when it's a friendly crowd. There's something menacing and violent about a mass of people which makes us think of the end of individuality whether they are gathered around a military leader or around a holy man. . . . The photographic image is a kind of crowd in itself, a jumble of impressions very different from a book in which the printed lines follow one another in a linear order. There's something in the image that seems to collide with the very idea of individual identity. (CDD 110)

Focusing on the photographic image and depicting the characters' immersing themselves in the charisma of the heroic figures on TV or in real life, *Mao II* does impress the readers with the impact of the crowd *in* and *out* of the image. The crowd makes distinct DeLillo's notion of the image versus the individual. DeLillo associates the inevitable confrontation with the image as an encounter with the crowd which potentially diminishes the self.

DeLillo's notion of the crowd embedded in the image works on three levels. First, the image of the crowd is empirically perceived in various social gatherings. The second is mediated and demonstrated by photography. A more cryptic image of the crowd lies in an intriguing domain—writing, the writer's facing the image(s) of his own in writing process. That is, the image does not merely refer to the practical embodiment of an actuality or the replicated but an *imagined* entity. Hence, images are categorized as the empirical, the mediated, and the imagined in *Mao II*. The self confronts the irresistible impact of the image which stages the tension between the

individual and the crowd as the self is at once found diluted and remodulated.

II. *Mao II*: The Crowd in the Wor(l)d of Image

A. Critique of *Mao II*

Few critics do not take note of the issue of image in *Mao II*; differences take place in the critics' perspectives regarding the antagonism between the crowd-connoted image and the self. According to Thomas Carmichael, "DeLillo began *Mao II* in response to two photos, one of J. D. Salinger being surprised by photographers, and one of a mass wedding led by Reverend Moon" (Hardack 384). The writing of the novel is ignited by DeLillo's response to these two images which are integrated as the major scenes in *Mao II*. The ubiquitous demand for response to the images is exactly what confronts characters in the novel, including Brita's seemingly intrusive and dominating manner to photograph Bill the writer and the opening image of the mass wedding. Laura Barrett considers that the images deplete individuality as the photographs do not reflect but replace the original subject—it is a claim of "the demise of the individual in the reproduction of photographs of crowds . . . reject the possibility of uniqueness" (797). The images are far from transparent representations which allow personal perspectives and interpretations. Rather, "photographs affect our notions of who we are and how we see. . . . every image we see has been shaped by someone else's vision: every image is a representation" (Barrett 803). The image substitutes and represents the original but simultaneously defies the possibility of individuality. Likewise, Joe Moran relates DeLillo's foregrounding of the demise of individuality to "the loss of a 'depth model' of human personality" in postmodern culture and contends that Bill's consent to Brita's request of taking his photograph indicates his realization of the powerlessness "to avoid the media's unremitting glare" (142). As Barrett and Moran observe, characters in *Mao II* are helplessly and unknowingly cast and incorporated into the world of the images in which the self's individuality is highly questioned and even eroded.

Still other critics think that the invincible and consuming power of the image world leads to the divided or contingent state of the self in the postmodern ethical scenario. Jeffrey S. Bull does not take *Mao II* as the war between two polar ends—the crowd and the self. Instead, he attends to the diverse and contesting forces or discourses presented. He agrees to the ideas of David Lodge and Frank Lentricchia as the former thinks the novel "display[s] all the passions and contradictions that politics and religion engender and set conflicts between characters and ideas" and the

latter refers to DeLillo's fiction as "irredeemably heterogeneous texture" (Bull 218-19). Immersed in such a social fabric, characters in *Mao II* are "at the mercy of contingencies" (Bull 220). Fractured or provisional is the subjectivity of the self in face of image. According to Richard Hardack, "Don DeLillo stages a battle between the notion of the individual Western identity and that of a 'mass-produced' foreign conscious" (374), since "anything photographed . . . already exists in duplicate. It has joined the impersonal mass, is no longer individual(It) replaces the soul of the unique original" (379). The photograph, as that of Bill, is responsible for self-divisions, shattering the supposedly pre-determined integrity. It is a remarkable observation about the self-alienating process. What's more, Hardack mentions a significant factor which undermines the individual identity—the confrontation with the crowd or mass by dint of encountering a mediated image. However, Hardack does not give much elaboration on the confrontation between the self and the duplicated image from which the notion of the crowd is implicated and hence greatly matters.

With the focus either on the loss of individual identity or on the contingency of the self, what underlies the self-substituting or self-alienating image is an antithetical relation between the self. However divergent the critique is, individuality in face of the world of image is on the verge of dissolution or dissipation. Nonetheless, the following analysis does not presuppose any universality of subjectivity but stresses how individual singularity is sustained in the image-confrontation. The individual singularity will be elaborated by Lyotard's paganism which is not founded on any prescriptive or a priori rule for interactions. It evokes new ruses or new moves as the interaction between the self and the image is compared to the game of the pagan in which "to play moves means precisely to develop ruses, to set the imagination to work. . . . Pagans are artists. . . they try to figure out new movesinvent new games proposes new rules" (61). It features in self-imagination and creativity which are conducive to making up one's singularity. The pagan game is not based on a regulating Idea but a politics of opinions where no finality, totality and unity will be subsequently construed. That is, one's ruses could not be applied to another occasion and it is where distinctive personal responses emerge. The singularities are illustrated by the characters' ruses or moves which differ from one to another.

B. The Image: The Empirical, the Mediated, and the Imagined

DeLillo in *Mao II* apparently marks his interest in media and mediation and substantially makes unique his idea of the image, no longer restricted to the mediating language of the image since the empirical and the imagined are under prudent examination. It makes up a complicated social meshwork in which the characters could not dispense with or evade from. TV and photography are two prominent

distributors of endless images simultaneously thickening and unifying people's recognition of the world. These images have tremendous influence on the way characters perceive the world as well as themselves. As every image presented in the media is framed in a relatively specific and fixed context, it is frequently inferred that a subsequent stable meaning-designation is liable to be attained. DeLillo's characters, exposed to or thrown into the world of media, tended to apply the impressions construed in image to the empirical perception of real life. The mediated outdoes the present or the experienced in claiming reality. That is, a conscious attempt to flatten or reduce the evanescent real to something graspable and determinate in the image. Moreover, in *Mao II*, DeLillo demonstrates that the image wields its power not merely in the visual form but in the *imagined*. DeLillo demonstrates that writing is, likewise, a response to the image as the imprisoned writer in the novel survived by forging some images to respond to. To sum up, the image, from the empirical to the mediated and the imagined, on the one hand, seeps into the real life and engages the self's responses in different aspects of life. On the other, it is what is capable of solidifying self-recognition. From the image of the real to the virtual, from the mediated words to the imagined figure of the author, the flow of the image makes an inescapable social meshwork. And, it is mainly from these three aspects that DeLillo probes into the world of image. DeLillo depicts man's confrontation with the image responsible for the inevitable network of social interaction, the disturbance to self-recognition, and the striving arena for individuality in particular. What is stressed is that as the characters are socially connected or identified in the encompassing wor(l)d of image or *imagined* reality, are they completely lost or silenced or able to strive for an individual space of their own?

III. The Crowd in and out of the Image

What is worth-noting about Don DeLillo is that he does not merely conflate the crowd and the image as they are qualities to each other. Instead, characters in *Mao II* demonstrate how the notion of the crowd is implicated in the image from different angles, staging the ebb and flow of individuality.

A. From the Crowd to the Image

As mentioned above, the image of the crowd not merely demands the self's response in empirical daily life but extends itself to the world of representation, TV and photograph. By connecting the crowd with the image, DeLillo makes more explicit the image as the double-edged sword, an anchor and antagonist to the

individual. Karen first exemplifies how the image of the crowd devours or submerges one's individuality. Karen's appearance in the mass wedding hosted by Master Moon was indirectly assured by the attendance of her parents who were busy taking pictures as a record of the important moment of their daughter. However, as the individual is blended into the mass, the genuine interaction would surely become a difficulty or even a source of anxiety as Karen's daddy, Rouge, perceived that "[t]hey're one body now, an undifferentiated mass. And this makes him uneasy," whereas Karen's mother, Maureen, noticed that "there's a lot of looking back and forth. Nobody knows how to feel and they're checking around for hints" (3-4). They lost the track to handle the crowd in which the self was temporarily unbuckled from the original social girdle and was reoriented into a completely new orbit where she, seemingly willingly and expectedly, responded to it by giving herself in as if it were another force to remold her. More striking was her engagement to an assigned marriage with a person she hardly knew. The mass wedding presents an image of the crowd which shatters the autonomy of the self. Submerging oneself in the mass gathering demonstrates how the crowd engages and subsumes the individual. However, what is exactly involved in the self's response to the image of the crowd here? Gustave LeBon states:

Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act while he is in a state of isolation.(57)

LeBon (1841-1931), an initiative and significant contributor of the crowd theory, maintains that the crowd is non-individual since "the crowd has a 'group mind' whose workings did not follow the same laws as the workings of an individual's mind because it was unconscious" (qtd in McClelland 11). Self-consciousness, according to LeBon, is intercepted and suspended by the unconsciousness owing to the collective hypnotism of the herd-instinct. The self is then stripped from previous social designation and obligation. In contrast to LeBon's crowd theory¹, Floyd Allport rejects the idea of the non-individual or unconscious collective mind. He asserts that "individual behavior inside and outside the crowd was controlled by innate and learned tendencies that predisposed the individual to behave. . . . crowds formed because individuals with similar predispositions were compelled to converge on a common location" (qtd in McPhall xx). His argument goes against LeBon's notion of collective mind, insisting on the innate individual intension to forge the crowd. What

¹ LeBon's ideas of the crowd are well received by psychologists like William McDougall, Everett Dean Martin, Freud, and by sociologist like Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess (McPhall xx).

is at stake is Allport's confirmation of the possibility of individual inclination. DeLillo's Karen straddles these two counter perspectives. On the one hand, she was almost taken in by the image of the crowd where her selfhood was subjugated to the cause of the crowd, as she constantly preached the world of peace brought up by Reverend Moon, showing her faithful belief in the doctrines. On the other hand, though she accepted the assigned marriage with a man she was barely acquainted with, she did not feel a bit hesitant or guilty in having the intimate relationship with Scott and Bill. Cognitively, she understood and knew what was instilled by the Reverend Moon and lived out the ideals of a universal and single family in her interaction with the street people. Nevertheless, her personal relation with Bill and Scott manifests that Reverend Moon's ideas were both in and out of her life. That is, the individual and the crowd are not necessarily incompatible or contradictory, since Karen's response to the crowd of the homeless did not indicate the inherent and predisposed individual tendency but still preserved certain extent of self-awareness and individual intent.

Similar intoxication with the image of the crowd took place in the TV-watching experience. One was the parade with the portrait of Mao Zedong as Karen "is mesmerized by rows and rows of jogging troops and those riot guns they carry" (189). The image incorporates her in a represented totality and unity. The other is Karen's watching the scene of Khomeini's funeral where the crowd gathered mourning over his death. "Karen felt she was among them" (189), experiencing the whole event in person. She became part of it. These "crowds" are marked by the individuals acting as bricks to "construct" the only image in every scene—the Master Moon, Mao Zedong, and Khomeini respectively. It is an identification with the collective—a duplicated identification with the same image. Submerging herself in the crowd, Karen is actually responding to the image which amalgamates and structures the group as if she were one with the Master Moon, Mao, and Khomeini. According to McClelland, Freud thinks what binds the group together is eros and the identification with the central character featuring in 'regression.' It is presented as

'substitution' where the impossibility of ever possessing a loved object leads to the introjections of the loved object into the lover's own self, as happens in romantic and selfless love where the idealized love-object becomes the lover's own 'I', the highest and purest part of himself, so that he sets out to live his life as she would want it to be. (249-50)

The account about the individual's identification with the leader of the crowd is based on the erotic ties. Yet, it does not account for Karen's immersion in the crowd since first of all Karen did not take the Master Moon or Mao or Khomeini as her own self and secondly the erotic tie was not clearly established. What is rather obvious is the absorbing and mysterious atmosphere created in the image of the crowd as the

individual could temporarily rid himself or herself of the original self-recognition and embrace a bigger identity represented by the leader in which every individual can take a part. However, it is not the complete forgetting or erasure of the self as an individual.

B. From the Image to the Crowd

The dissolving and forgetting² of the self varies in manner and extent, marking their singularity. Karen reveals little consciousness of her-self easily drifting in and out of the image of the crowd. In contrast, Scott is relatively sober about his reaction to the image and has his own way to interpret and react to the image. First of all, keeping a critical distance from the mass-produced image, Scott perceived the image's liberating force from the historical or social shackles illustrated by his reaction to the image of Chairman Mao presented in various styles. With no standard or original meaning attached to it, these images promised certain kind of emancipation which was obvious in the image-duplication. In other words, the repetitions of the image stagnating the normal flow of designation significantly initiated novel possibilities as people "repeat it, repeat it, repeat it until something new enters the world"(4). In addition to the repetitive images, Scott held that the crowd was another way to "survive as a community instead of individuals trying to master every complex life" and hence regarded the Moon system as "brave and visionary" (89). Taking shelter in the merger of the repetitive images and the crowd, he was distinct in his emancipation from the mediated image. The newness was revealed in his desperate effort to approach and identify with the real person--Bill the writer. Interestingly, while Scott was approaching the original or authentic, in reality, he treated Bill as the image he forged in his mind by reading his books, saying "[a] great man's face shows the beauty of his work" (61) and identified himself with the image of Bill as if he were the representative image of his books. Scott believed that the image, the face of the writer, epitomized the essential part of his works. Here, DeLillo indicates that words are not the only thing that makes up the reading; the image of the author counts, too. Scott's identification with Bill was marked by the intended erasure of the self, as he intended to disconnect himself from his original dogged life. He was thus able to start a new life: "[h]e was in Bill's material mesh, drawing the same air, seeing things Bill saw" (60). His identification was vividly portrayed in his relaying what Bill said and even in his being able to read what was on Bill's mind. Constant identifying and

² Here the forgetting has to be discriminated from what Nietzsche's claim of forgetting which is "the capacity to feel *unhistorically* during its duration." It is the essential element to a happy being since "*the unhistorical (forgetting) and the historical (memory) are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and a culture*" (Nietzsche 62-63). The forgetting of the self consciousness is caused by a response to the crowd with which the individual hardly acts as oneself.

imitating process revealed his taking Bill as his “real self,” losing himself to Bill. With Scott’s example, DeLillo shows what an important role the image of the author played in reading experience. The power of the image made more forceful imposition than that of words, paradoxically thwarting and extending what the words may designate, which foreshadowed DeLillo’s description of the writers’ losing war to the terrorists.³

The cases of Karen and Scott demonstrate that two distinct mechanisms between the interaction between the image and the self in *Mao II*: the former immersed herself in the image of the crowd, while the latter derived his sense of self from the image conjured up in the Bill’s books. However, although the process ostensibly risked the loss of individuality in confronting the self-dissolving crowd, DeLillo shrewdly called our attention to the potential individuality.

IV. Individuality in the cracks of the image

A. Responding to the image

The relation with the image was ostensibly self-diminishing and dissolving according to the ongoing analysis. However, more significant is the possibility of individuality behind the self-dissolving process, which was illustrated by a picture of refugees in the novel: there was nothing but boys crowding each other, waving urgently, and looking in the same direction. Yet, what caught the attention in the picture was a single worried adult “standing diagonally and peering in the general direction of the frame and peering over the heads and across the frame and out of the picture . . .”(147). He was and was not part of the crowd. Assuming a collective identity as he situated himself in the crowd, he marked himself by extending the vision toward an unknown domain—self-alienating from the crowd.

For Scott, as for Karen, the relation with the image, empirical, mediated or imagined seemingly dissolved the self into the image of a Big Other. Karen’s constant shift from one image to another, from the personally experienced to the represented on the media, indicates the lack of certainty. Mark Osteen regards Karen as “[t]hin-boundaried’ and permeable,” corresponding to what Mark Edmundson calls a “conductor, a relay point . . . for currents of forces” (Osteen 656). Yet, such reading of

³ While the terrorists make a forceful image, the novelists couldn’t help casting doubt on the power of the words as Bill laments that “[t] here’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. . . . Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory.” (41) Moreover, what the terrorists do is more than a concept. They are construing inevitable haunting images as the photographer, Brita, comments that “We are giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios. . . . The darker the news, the grander the narrative. News is the last addiction before—what? I don’t know” (42).

Karen may partially attest to DeLillo's recognition of the overwhelming imposition of the modulating image on the self. Karen's individuality was manifested in her distinct response to the image of the crowd. The first example was demonstrated by the news report on TV which was usually accompanied by the audio messages to guide the audience's perception and interpretation. Trying to break the bondage between the audio and the visual, Karen chose to watch the news by turning off the volume and made up her own story with the images on TV. As applied to demarcate the meaning of the mediated image, language takes a prominent and essential role in the image circulation. To revive the liberating and even vibrating power of the image, Karen silenced the dubbing and spun her own story. An expression of herself, thus, was integrated into the confrontation with the image. Another example was illustrated by her taking another angle while watching Komeini's funeral on TV. DeLillo especially singled out her individual vision, narrating:

It was possible to believe that she was the only one seeing this and everyone else tuned to this channel was watching sober-sided news analysis delivered by three men in a studio with makeup and hidden mikes. . . . She watched the body sticking out of the door and dust kicking up and that mass of black-clad mourners hanging off the skids and dragging the craft down to the ground. It was the delicate tending of the dead that was forgotten here. (190-91)

DeLillo emphasized the individual observation of the image instead of treating all the audience of the TV program as a unifying crowd "consuming and consumed by" the image. What especially distinguishes the difference lies in the subtlety of the extension of the image which contributes to the self-assertion. Karen's euphoria and devotion to the image of the crowd did not end up with a complete denial of her individuality; rather, DeLillo, as Hardack contends, portrays being in crowd as "increas[ing] one's duality under a false guise of universality Everything in this text, from photo to answering machine to Coca Cola to Mao, is rendered a secondary, hence mass, hence foreign, source of anxiety. Anything that can echo, duplicate, or join you to the mass becomes a radically foreign body" (383). The duality, referring to the self and the foreign body, represents the increased self-awareness accompanied by one's immersion to the image presented in mass media. That is, although the image does assert certain kind of unifying or self-dissolving force, it paradoxically implies a space for self-assertion.

In contrast, Scott made another example to demonstrate his self-distinction by walking out of the crowd—the face-to-face encounter with Bill. Once, "he stood before a silk screen called *Crowd*. The image was irregular, deep streaks marking the canvas, and it seemed to him that the crowd itself, the vast mesh of people, was being

riven by some fleeting media catastrophe” (21). The important message conveyed by the image of the crowd was that it did not present a totality but a body brimmed with differences, arousing disquiet and anxiety—one being part of a crowd without the sense of belonging. Scott was originally distraught with life until he came to the works of Bill Gray, who hence became the vital anchor of his life. At the moment he saw Bill, he thought that “[h]e had a life now and that’s what mattered. . . . Had to be Bill and he was coming right at me and I seemed to need oxygen” (60). Overwhelmed by Bill, he had a conscious urge to identify himself with Bill. He was not content to be merely one of the anonymous readers as being in the *crowd*. Scott tried every means to construct his own unique relation with Bill. His uniqueness emerged from his approaching, invading and even interfering Bill’s personal life. He then was granted the privilege to work with Bill’s personal stuff and even manuscripts of his books. One thing that would particularly contribute to such a distinct relation was his knowing Bill’s real name—Willard Shansey Jr. (143). The real name established Scott’s individuality, as it resembled the ultimate code to the real being of Bill, inaccessible to anyone in the reading *crowd*. Scott went from Bill as the image construed in his works to the unknown secret of Bill’s real name. It was something which would not go public like the manuscript of the new novel, or his pictures. The secret made distinct his sense of self in face of the public-accessible image of Bill. Scott had the right to Bill’s privacy to establish his individuality, as if “it was a small whole contentment, a way of working toward a new reality” (139). It was observable that Scott was breaking up the limits of his original identity.

DeLillo regards the proximity to the unknown secret or privacy of the author as a paradoxical way to reveal Scott’s individuality as Scott ostensibly served as a parasite to Bill but actually took hold of his life. From Scott’s walking out of the *crowd* to the devoted identification with Bill in person, Scott was rummaging through the so-called original materials to reestablish his sense of self. Even after Bill was on the hostage-salvaging journey, Scott insisted on guarding Bill’s things, seemingly assuming that his sense of self could only be sustained by Bill’s manuscripts and personal data despite his losing track of Bill’s whereabouts. Scott was keen on his individuality in his confrontation with the image. Under the imposing image of Bill lay Scott’s consistent striving for individuality.

B. Creating the image

Karen and Scott were similar in asserting the uniqueness of the self by responding to images presented, construed and even imagined. Brita and Bill took different strategies. They responded to the images and asserting their individuality by creating them. As a professional photographer, Brita was entitled to manipulating the

perspective of the public by angling her pictures. However, with the reproduction and publication of her works, the creativity and originality invested in her work were immediately consumed or even digested as the public property with which she could hardly claim her originality. The crowd consumed the images of her photographs and flattening her individuality. She then was rendered the freedom, an unavoidable necessity, to work on something original. She has no other choice but to keep shifting her topic from the street people to the secluded authors to the dictatorial terrorists, constantly reconfiguring the self. However, the situation is difficult and un-avoidable as Brita's extreme topics in photographs indicated her being practically stuck in the world of image and her urgent need for a space of her own. Uniquely and somewhat deliberately, Brita responded to the image in person (her photographic material) before the image was forged. Her sense of self was incessantly remolded as the image infiltrated in her mind before being realized with her camera. "She was the person who traveled compulsively to photograph the unknown, the untranslated, the inaccessible, the politically suspect, the hunted, the silenced" (66). As expected, little did she know what might exactly be left to her. Nevertheless, it was not a journey divested of any sense of self consciousness. Brita preserved her critical distance and was especially aware of her individuality in the tug of war with the crowd of the image. On the one hand, it was done by creating her own image in framing and angling the photographs. It is the privilege of directly confronting the mystifying target and having the picture taken as intended. It echoes what Susan Sontag contends, "[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power." (4) The camera equipped Brita with the power to reveal what could be known about her subject as if a definite meaning had been imposed on raw material. On the other hand, photography, as a message without code in Roland Barthes's terms, could never be specified in meaning; instead, the images as well as the messages of the photography either go beyond what is real or are being the real with their autonomy. Barthes remarks that the subversion of photograph occurs "not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks" (38). It means what is unexpected in photography does not lie in what is represented but in how the image *expresses* itself. The image is fraught with meanings which could not be deduced or exhausted. In addition, another facet of photography is founded on the manipulation of the mass culture in which people could consume millions of images in a few seconds. The mass consumption of the image erased her individual relation with the image strenuously forged. Moreover, the culture marked by the dissemination of various and numerous images further deprived her of the right to justify her distinct intension in the photographs. She found

everything that came into her mind lately and developed as a perception seemed at once to enter the culture, to become a painting or photograph or hairstyle or slogan. She saw the dumbest details of her private thoughts on postcards or billiards. She saw the names of writers she was scheduled to photograph, saw them in newspapers and magazines, obscure people climbing into print as if she carried some contagious glow out around the world. (165)

She was submerged in the images of the *mass* culture and became one member of the crowd with her individuality objectified and inevitably consumed. With images, she is responding to the crowd and simultaneously being incorporated. Yet, it did not mean that such a photographer as Brita could only consign herself to the massive flow of image production and circulation. DeLillo demonstrates that Brita's response to the image as the Other was not so distressing as it seemed. Her continuous search for the mysterious attests that individuality did not rely so much on what was known but on what was unknown or remained secret. Accessing certain secret was the key to the individuality of the self. Interestingly, Brita underwent a recurrent process from groping for the unknown subject to the re-presentation in photographs to the image-consumption by the public. Brita, diverting from the writers to the terrorists, lays her vision on a more enigmatic domain—the image of terror, Abu Rashid. He represented a world that was enigmatic or hadn't been appropriated by Western thinking. Brita's self-assertion in the unknown significantly designates DeLillo's unique strategy by basing individuality on the image of terror.

Terror is more an intense and haunting feeling than a clear idea. Its threat was cast in the early part of the novel with the release of the news about the kidnapped poet. The obsessive fear lingered among the characters. Not until Brita came to take Rashid's photographs was the veil of terror lifted a bit. Rashid ruled and unified a world that was counter to the West. Surprisingly, terror implied a uniformity of identification. Rashid asserted that "terror is what we use to give our people our place in the world. What used to be achieved through work, we gain through terror. Terror makes the new future possible" (235). His talk suggested terror as the resistance to the dominant Western rationalism and culture as George Haddad, a "spokesman" of the terrorists in the novel, contended that in face of the univocal Western culture, "[o]nly the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him. It's confusing when they kill the innocent. But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the West understands" (157-58). DeLillo depicts how the terrorists apply the language of terror as a smart spur to the Western narrative. Walter Benn Michaels, drawing on Fukuyama's *The End of History*, claims that terror is not a threat to a political system or nation, but to the law (107). It was on the surface a kind

of behavior that goes against the rules for the world order, investing or arousing incomprehensible or extreme elements in the well-structured social body. Yet, regarding terror as more than counteraction to the laws, the basis of social mechanism, DeLillo maintains that “[t]rue terror is a language and a vision. There is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to” (Simmons 679). Terror defies the regulations as well as the laws of the world, shattering our previous recognition of the world and even the self. The way the terrorists transformed the consciousness went to certain extreme—erasing the self. Rashid transplanted his image onto each youngsters who worked for him, building up their identity by dissolving their individuality—“They are all children of Abu Rashid. All men one man. . . . The image of Rashid is their identity” (233). Hence, their future came from the creation of a language comprising an image of terror and a vision beyond appropriation. And, as Brita admitted that “I’m devoting my life to a gesture. Yes, I travel. Which means there is no moment on certain days when I’m not thinking terror. They have us in their power” (40-41), her traveling and photography were not intended merely for the representation of reality, either hidden or mysterious but meant to respond to the image of terror with *language* of her own—photography. Still, she could temporarily frame and fix it up in the camera as the image of terror presupposing her responsibility retained her presence and singularity. She preserved her individuality with her witness by abruptly taking off one of Rashid’s boys’ hoods and snapping a picture of him. Lifting the hood off the boy’s head and looking into his face, Brita captured what was not allowed to go public by breaking into what was hidden but solidly there. Brita simultaneously asserted her individuality and restored the boy’s individual identity by violating the unifying power of terror. Being a photographer who added images to the social context, Brita had the *crowd* to face—the mass culture. Nevertheless, she located the niche to demonstrate her individuality by exposing the image of the unknown or that submerged by terror.

While the photographer made her response by creating her own image, the writer had his own latent but zealous way to react to the image of the *crowd*. The writer, endowed with a certain extent of autonomy, presented another face of the image; yet, the image came in different medium—the words. Writing, according to DeLillo, is a process opening oneself to the construction of the self-image as he says in an interview with Thomas LeClair, “a writer can begin to know himself through his language. He sees someone or something reflected back at him from these constructions. Over the years it’s possible for a writer to shape himself as a human being through the language he uses. . . . He not only sees himself but begins to make himself or remake himself” (CDD 7). Writing was less an automatic or authoritative

process of life representation than a response to oneself as an image which was constantly being remade. That is, writing provided an access to the grasp of the writer himself who always had room for self- *re-imagi*-nation. DeLillo foregrounds the writer's self-exploring or self-remaking experience which puts into question authorship as voiced by Bill.

Even if I could see the need for absolute authority, my work would draw me away. The experience of my own consciousness tells me how autocracy fails, how total control wrecks the spirit, how my characters deny my efforts to own them completely, how I need internal dissent, self-argument, how the world squashes me the minute I think it's mine.
(159)

Writing was never a totalistic or unitary construct, and thus, Bill as a writer was never fixed or determined by the image forged among his readers, the crowd. Similar situation occurred when Bill ambivalently reacted against his photograph which solidified but eschewed him at the same time. Writing provided him a chance to surpass or remold himself since every writing was “a democratic shout” (159). It was more than the voice of the authoritative writer that was expressed. What DeLillo presented here somewhat corresponds to Bakhtin's notion of polyphonic novelistic discourse. However, what marked their strike difference is DeLillo's emphasis on writing as a self-remaking process. Writing paradoxically reified and dissolved the image of the self at the same time, since it led the self to an ever-renewing practice in which the determinacy and dissolution of the self alternate with each other as Bill stated that “[t]he language of my books has shaped me as a man. . . . It speaks the writer's will to live. . . . I've worked the sentences of this book long and hard but not long and hard enough because I no longer see myself in the language” (48). That could account for how Bill the writer would never end his revision of the manuscript—a relatively significant message conveyed aside from the perfection of his work. Writing was a means not merely to forge but to dissolve the image of the self. To better illustrate the situation, DeLillo takes Bill's writing of another writer, the poet Jean-Claude Julien, as a demonstration of how the writer paradoxically incorporated and alienated himself in writing. On his trip to help rescue Jean-Claude abducted as a hostage, Bill engaged himself in writing about Jean-Claude in that “a writer creates a writer as a way to reveal consciousness, increase the flow of meaning” (200). Bill blended himself into his writing by making himself one of his characters. To live out the life of his character's, he personally experienced and envisioned what happened to the character by consulting the doctors about what would happen to a person with lacerated liver after he was in reality struck by a car in Athens⁴. Bill's

⁴ It is the same with DeLillo's writing experience, as the inspiration of his writing of *Mao II* came from

individuality lies in the interpenetration of his writing and real life, both of which delicately molded each other. What is especially worth noting is Bill's imagination of the hostage's extreme solitude after being cut off from everything except the hooded boy who sent him the meals and tortured him with the relentless beatings. It was described as the experience of losing the sense of time⁵, not knowing where to anchor himself. He was stuck in the stasis where not a single difference stirred the monotonous and repetitious existence. In that situation, the writer taken as hostage wanted badly "paper and something to write with, some way to sustain a thought, place in the world" (110). Ostensibly to the prisoner, but actually to Bill himself, "[t]he only way to be in the world was to write himself there. . . . Let him write ten words and he would come into being once again" (204). Writing designated his ability to imagine, to think, to react, and, most importantly, to live. It was the concrete proof of his existence as a human being. Nonetheless, writing here did not make a uni-lateral and linear presentation. Writing had the self partly dissolve and partly construe himself as if writing was composed of counter forces pulling against each other. Bill thought "the pages he'd done showed an element of conflict, the wrong kind of exertion or opposition, a stress in two directions, and he realized in the end he wasn't really thinking about the prisoner. Who is the boy It was writing that caused his life to disappear" (215). According to Mark Osteen, Bill's writing of Jean-Claude "is actually a desperate attempt to reinvent himself, and this moment again implies that characters create their authors by providing foci for thoughts and dialogue and loci for plots" (663). Incorporating himself in the characterization not only re-forged the self-image but also blurred the previous one, demonstrating the impossibility of the monolithic authority. Hence, as writing is depicted as a response to the image of the self, the self turns out to be an image perpetually reformed. The self-image was never a fixed entity. Besides, the constantly remade or renewed self-image redefined the writer who would never be appropriated or taken hold of by

his reaction to two pictures, the mass wedding and the picture of the author of *Catcher in the Rye*. They in turn became two of the most important images in the novel in which the self was construed and dissolved.

⁵ DeLillo presents how the imprisoned poet's experienced the gradual dissolution of the self while losing the sense of time. It is a depiction which conveys DeLillo's peculiar notion of time and its relation with the sense of the self. To be more specific, DeLillo does not regard time as an objective reality which moves on. Instead, time is a sense closely related to the empirical response carried out in daily confrontations. Time is first felt in his pain after being tortured by the boy as the prisoner thought to himself, "This was part of the structure of time, how time and pain became inseparable" (108). Another example shows how the sense of time is perceived as "[t]ime moved tormentingly, carried by insects, all-knowing, if we can, it moves" (108). That is, the notion of time is based on the dynamic response to objects as well as experiential perception. Besides, a redefined concept, acts as an indicator to confirm one's existence. His loss of the self is accompanied by the time sliding away from him, as he was imprisoned and exempted from any correlation and interaction with others along with feelings for the world.

the reading crowd. The writer's case indicates that individuality, though not perpetuating a fixed or assured identity, maintains the self's potential to express him- or herself.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to general understanding of the world of image, the possibility of individuality was given a subtle exploration and confirmed in *Mao II*. What was intriguing in the novel no longer focused on the exploration of the image in terms of representation or how the image was related to the real. Instead, the image implied the self-dissolving power and was stratified into the empirical, represented and imagined—the immediate life experience, photographs and TV, and the writing process. The empirical one lay in the actual body of the crowd as the one that Karen was immersed in and made responses to. Another crowd concerned with the image was related to the mass media which Brita acutely perceived as the immediate threat to her individuality and originality. A more delicate demonstration of the image was shown by Bill's confrontation with his own photograph and, more significantly, his writing.

However, although DeLillo demonstrated that the self was almost inevitably overwhelmed by the power of the crowd embedded in the image, he confirms the possibility of individuality in the confrontation with the self-submerging image. That is, DeLillo on the one hand portrayed that the image was what the characters could not dispense with and, on the other hand, worked on the possibility of individuality which varied from one character to another. Some came in responding to the empirical and mediated/represented image while the other was done in responding to the image conjured up or created by the self. Karen and Scott belong to the first camp. Yet, they were as similar as different from each other. While Karen *imagined* her unique vision and status by immersing herself in the image of the crowd, Scott walked out of the crowd and concealed the real name of Bill as a means to construe his individuality and distinguish himself from the rest of Bill's reading crowd. The other camp created image to sustain their individuality. Bill wrote to respond to the image of him-self who then was constantly being remade. Writing became the necessary process of facing and surpassing the image held by the reading crowd. Individuality was shown in writing, a self-remolding process. Brita, working for the media, was destined to seek out such unknown, hidden images as that of the terrorist. The image of the *crowd* to Brita was derived from the mass culture which was an irresistible image-(re)producing and consuming machine. That is, her photographs with which

she could claim her individuality were instantly consumed by the public. As terrorism evoked fear, the more Brita unraveled about it, the more individuality she could assert. She set her foot in the forbidden area which had not yet been regulated or appropriated. Yet, her difference from Bill is that the individuality in her image went from the experiential to the mediated whereas Bill's and Brita's was *imagined* and construed either in words or new images.

In terms of *Mao II*, DeLillo points out how the world is suffused with images and, more importantly, and how the images imply the notion of the crowd and dissolve the self's individuality. However, under the depiction of the self's confrontation with the image, DeLillo had his ultimate concern—the possibility of individuality. To be specific, as characters were ostensibly drowning in responding to the *crowd* implicated in the image, their individuality was subtly revealed. However, what is worth-noting is that the individuality did not presuppose a constant identity but a perpetually renewing process. However, contingency and evanescence were not enough to account for the self's striving for individuality since personal intention was obviously perceived. That is, DeLillo does not mean to rebuild the modern subjectivity but believes that people are able to forge one's individuality amidst the self-dissolving *crowd* of the images.

Abbreviations for the works of Don DeLillo

CDD Conversation with Don DeLillo

IC "The Image and the Crowd"

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唐·迪立羅《毛二》的影像世界： 群眾 vs. 自我獨特性

摘要

本論文旨在探討唐·迪立羅在《毛二》所勾勒的影像世界中的自我獨特性。迪立羅的影像建構在群眾的概念上，呈現其不斷消蝕、瓦解自我獨特性的特質。而不同於一般將影像侷限在媒體再現上，迪立羅將這個概念延伸至生活經驗和想像的範疇，影像中所蘊含的群眾概念也就包括親身經驗的、媒介的和想像的，分別指涉群眾聚集、攝影和電視、及寫作經驗。由於影像不僅顛覆大眾對現實的認知也強烈干擾自我認同，自我獨特性更顯得模糊、不可能。一般評論認為迪立羅所呈現的自我具有濃厚的後現代色彩，馬克·歐斯丁認為《毛二》中的角色彼此間的「界線十分薄弱，是可以被穿透的。」馬克·艾德馬桑甚至認為自我在《毛二》中只不過是「一個導體、一個轉接點…乘載不同力量的流動。」然而，如此的評論只說明《毛二》中自我的部份輪廓，迪立羅藉由細微巧妙的觀察和書寫，意圖呈現自我在面對影像時，自我獨特性的可能路徑，其分別表現在對影像的回應和創造上。對迪立羅來說，隱含著群眾概念的影像確實對自我產生相當的消融作用，但他並不認為自我將淪為隨機的、稍縱即逝的結果，反而在自我對影像的不同回應中，凸顯其獨特性。攝影師和作者的角色安排更顯示自我並非只是被動地回應，更能主動創造影像，強調自我創造的可能。因此，迪立羅在《毛二》中所深入的影像世界，描繪的不再是現實和虛擬的辨證，而是包裹在層層影像下的自我獨特性。

關鍵字：唐·迪立羅 《毛二》 影像 群眾 自我獨特性