

The Novelist in the Information Society: Don DeLillo's *Mao II*

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Don DeLillo's *Mao II* can be considered an attempt to explore the meaning of novel writing in the American information society near the end of the twentieth century. The protagonist, Bill Gray, is a recluse writer who desperately tries to shut himself off from the flood of media-generated information in order to bring his novels to perfection. Autonomous subjectivity detached from a media-saturated, capitalist society is the basis for his dissident, high art. Bill as a recluse novelist responds to the challenge posed by media machines that disseminate capitalist, political messages and encroach on the autonomy of his art. In his solitary, meticulous act of writing, he goes through a series of corrections and revisions. Yet he gradually loses control over his own language and eventually succumbs to information that violates the aesthetic sphere he jealously guards. The major aim of my study is to explore the role of the novelist in the information order dominated by the media, focalized through his disengagement from society as an attempt to write outside and against the system. However, the problem is that no matter how hard he tries to maintain a detached position, Bill cannot go outside of the information network. The reader witnesses how his attempt to challenge it from the outside fails.

Critics have already examined DeLillo's use of information in his fiction. For instance, Mark Osteen's analysis of "spectacular authorship" in *Mao II* shows how novelists are turned into images in the in-

formation society and stresses the importance of their dialogical response to culture (Osteen 210). John Johnston's concept of the postmodern novel as an "information assemblage" is skillfully applied to DeLillo's fiction. The evolution of DeLillo's novels is "marked by the way in which word and image, film and televisual effects are reconfigured as aspects of an englobing media assemblage . . ." (Johnston 168). He shows how the novel incorporates into itself different types of non-literary signification forms.¹ Using their research as a springboard, my study first investigates the role of the novel as an organizing principle of culture amid changes within narrative forms in an information society. The focus is on the way in which the novel competes with the news as a new narrative of darkness and tragedy in a troubled, violent world. Furthermore, I examine how Bill fails and how DeLillo thrives in their literary endeavors to respond to the power of the information order. The focus is on DeLillo's use of the character called Karen Janneys and her active involvement with that order. The reader witnesses the transformation of her subjectivity and most likely notices that this transformation is closely linked to that of literary forms. My contention is that such transformations in subjective and aesthetic domains can be creative responses to the information society and its culture, and that these transformations can open up ways to establish a certain form of communality with distant, cultural others who are irrevocably located in this information network.

I

The types of information that proliferate in DeLillo's America are both visual and verbal, including commercial, political, and cultural messages from different types of media. A major focus of this novel is the power of information that conveys messages about dark, tragic

events. In his interview with Maria Nadotti, DeLillo himself comments on such news: “The news is fiction, the news is the new narrative — particularly, the dark news, the tragic news. I think that from this kind of news people find a kind of narrative with a tragic stamp which in another time they found in fiction” (Nadotti 114). In *Mao II*, the author lets Bill Gray comment on the same question: “News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative” (42). The novel foregrounds reports on events that affect a large number of people in violent and tragic situations. The reader witnesses upheavals around the world — conflicts in the Middle East, the Tiananmen massacre in China, activities of an Asian religious cult, and a sporting disaster in a soccer stadium in Sheffield, Britain. Those unsettling events constitute the fictional ambience of media-saturated America in 1989. In order to understand what lies behind Bill’s and DeLillo’s comments on the news, we have to look at a remark by Bill’s assistant Scott Martineau, one he made quoting Bill himself: “The novel used to feed our search for meaning. . . . It was the great secular transcendence. The Latin mass of language, character, occasional new truth. But our desperation has led us toward something larger and darker. So we turn to the news, which provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe” (72). In the troubled, violent world the author describes, a strong sense of desperation underlies the characters’ consciousness. Their attempt to understand the “meaning” of world events is frustrated by the overabundance of information about meaningless violence, deaths, and catastrophes. In the novel, the characters are overwhelmed by desperation and even resign themselves to it, wishing for more darkness and tragedies.

Such darkness and tragedies resulting from ideological and military conflicts, and unbridled economic and technological developments

are also observable in other works by DeLillo. To mention a few written in roughly the same period as *Mao II*, *White Noise* depicts an accident where a derailed train car spills deadly chemicals that grow into a cloud and its aftermath in a quiet suburban area. He foregrounds risks and disasters caused by the development of technology. *Libra* gives a fictional reinterpretation of history surrounding the Kennedy assassination, delving into the complex forces that culminate into the traumatic, national event. His magnum opus *Underworld* tells of American history after the Second World War driven by its aggressive competition with the Soviet Union. Apocalyptic overtones ineluctably accompany his version of the history of the Cold War. In those novels, ideological, military, and technological threats and possible disasters haunt the characters, and such dark, tragic events are constitutive of his visions of the contemporary world. *Mao II* is in large measure driven by dark, tragic news as a new, powerful narrative. The author pits Bill's and his own literary narratives against the news in order to respond to the challenge posed by it and to explore the novel's possibility.

DeLillo creates the author figure of Bill Gray, who grapples with that difficult task. In fact, Bill stresses the importance of the novelist's engagement with the shaping of human consciousness and culture through narrative. At one point in the novel, the reader comes across a surprising statement in which Bill as a novelist regards terrorists as his major competitors: "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. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated" (41). Bill is a solitary rebel who intentionally isolates himself from the dominant economic and ideological forces. His literary authority de-

rives from the ability to strike a blow against society from the outside. He feels anger at the loss of such an ideal, as novelists become “incorporated” into a capitalist, media-driven society. His half-ironic remark that praises terrorists’ power to “make raids on human consciousness” suggests a strong sense of frustration rooted in the loss of novelists’ power to rebel against the normative and formulate the core of culture. Bill’s hyperbolic emphasis on the crisis literature faces seems to push his own literary dissidence to the limit until it borders onto terrorism and to empower his literary imagination. DeLillo himself comments on this question in one interview: “There is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to” (Passaro 84). Yet, as we will see, regardless of their shared impulse, Bill and DeLillo tackle the problem in different ways. We have to note that in *Mao II*, the latter lets the character called Charles Everson criticize Bill’s stance exemplified in his statement quoted above: “You have a twisted sense of the writer’s place in society. You think the writer belongs at the far margin, doing dangerous things” (97). Being in a position to co-opt the writer as a commercial publisher and possessing a sophisticated view of the relationship between business and writing, Charles shrewdly points out Bill’s naivete that leads to such an extreme idea.

News about a terrorist activity directs Bill toward the domain outside the aesthetic sphere and consequently drags him into the world of international politics. This is about a hostage situation brought about by the terrorist group led by Abu Rashid. Through the media, the group makes public the fact that it is holding a hostage — a Swiss UN worker who is also a poet — to publicize itself and advance its political agenda. In response to the threat, the committee for free expression Charles works for requests Bill to support it publicly, in-

tent on taking advantage of his fame. Both the terrorist group and the committee act according to the logic of the information order. As Charles Everson, chairman of the committee, remarks, “I want the famous novelist to address the suffering of the unknown poet. I want the English-language writer to read in French and the older man to speak across the night to his young colleague in letters. Don’t you see how beautifully balanced?” (99). To Charles, the importance of the event lies in the mere act of reading in the public sphere and in its appeal to international viewers. The instantaneous dissemination of the news concerning this act can exert a powerful influence over viewers. The content of the poem and even the saving of the poet are less important than controlling the power of the media and advancing the committee’s agenda. DeLillo describes Bill as he gradually becomes powerless in comparison with the characters who find a way to thrive in the information order and use it for their own benefit. Consequently, Bill abandons writing and, surprisingly, sets off on a journey to Beirut to have direct contact with Abu Rashid only to die anonymously without achieving that goal.

The point worth noting regarding Bill’s journey is that it is narrative that drives him toward Rashid. The dark, tragic news about the terrorist abduction generates a counter-narrative of heroism on Bill’s part. On his journey, Bill gets hurt in a traffic accident, yet refuses to be treated: “Certain conditions seem to speak out of some collective history of pain. You know the experience from others who have had it. Bill felt joined to the past, to some bloodline of intimate and renewable pain” (196). Douglas Keeseey reflects on Bill’s unreasonable refusal to be treated and concludes that “he feels that it connects him with all the people who have been injured under terrorism. The more he dramatizes his link with the people, the further he distances him-

self from any true connection with them; *they* would not leave their wounds untreated to serve as mere symbols of suffering” (Keesey 192). Here, what Bill generates is a narrative of false heroism to give meaning to his irrational act, which leads to his meaningless death. The author treats, with respect, Bill’s assiduous act of writing that exhausts him and eventually makes him abandon writing for a political cause, though he does not endorse Bill’s last-ditch political attempt. Bill’s anger at literature’s loss of power in the face of the increasing dominance of political, commercial messages drives him to play an active role in a foreign political situation that he does not fully understand. He throws himself into a complex conflict of forces — a conflict involving Maoism, terrorism, geopolitics in the Middle East, and the U.N. As a result, Bill fails in both his attempts at writing and politics.²

II

DeLillo incorporates into his novel critical events through dark, tragic news and develops literary uses of those materials. As we have already seen, when he talks about “a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts,” he emphasizes their power to “infiltrate and alter consciousness” (Passaro 84). DeLillo’s focus is on the narrative’s power to shape the subjectivity of people and their views of the world, which is comparable to what Bill believes to be the novelist’s power to “alter the inner life of the culture” (41). However, we have to note that the culture of the information society DeLillo depicts is far more complex than Bill’s idea of it. Bill does not seem to go beyond the traditional, closed idea of culture. The following statement made by J. Hillis Miller in his introductory book on literature reminds us of such an idea: “A culture is to be defined as a social group all accepting similar assump-

tions about value, behavior, and judgment” (Miller 90). To be sure, those assumptions are still the constitutive elements of culture, but the modes of cultural formation and transmission are diversified and complexly interlocked, as exemplified by the electronic media. Moreover, narratives from other areas of the world infiltrate into those media and affect the process of cultural formation. As modes of transmission change and the information network grows to encompass human activities in increasingly dispersed areas, the supposedly organic unity of “the inner life of the culture” (41) becomes irrevocably undermined. In *Mao II*, reports about world events — a religious ceremony in Muslim Iran, a riot and its violent suppression in Communist China, and terrorism in the Middle East — are disseminated through the information network. Bill cannot get over his closed, monological understanding of culture grounded in the assumption that it can maintain an organic, unified form. He nostalgically imagines such a form from a privileged position where he can demarcate the inside (inner life) from the outside. That view gradually proves to be powerless in the face of the contemporary America DeLillo presents, and Bill cannot find a way to handle the power of information that overwhelms his own literary means of cultural formation.

The reader can find an example of such a power in the author’s treatment of Brita Nilsson, who travels around the world photographing renowned authors. She ponders on the formation of culture in a rather casual way from a perspective markedly different from Bill’s: “She was thinking that everything 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” (165). As a photographer, Brita understands the logic of popular, image culture in which perceptions become commodified and circulated through the media.

Her idea of culture is an excess of aesthetic, modish, and political images and discourses, where there is no clear demarcation between images created by individual fantasies and media-generated ones. Again, such an idea of culture undermines the wholeness of “the inner life of the culture” (41). Brita’s subjectivity composed of the masses of information is pitted against Bill’s exclusive, aesthetic one. Regarding the uses of capitalist and political images in the novel, Mark Osteen argues that “capitalist spectacles level differences by ‘incorporating’ everything, so that political leaders are as interchangeable as advertisements” (Osteen 211). In the confusion of ontological levels of images, political icons are dragged to the position of commodities. Furthermore, Brita, who takes pictures of writers and sells their images, has the power to reduce novelists into depthless, commodified images. The confusion brought about by information nullifies the differences among politics, economics, and aesthetics, thereby encroaching on the autonomy of art. In such a confusing social order dominated by information, the author addresses the possibility of novel writing, confronting Bill with a new, powerful order, and exploring the conflict as well as examining both positive and negative aspects in Bill’s assiduous act of writing. Regarding the difference between the author and his characters’ relationship to the information order, Timothy Parrish writes: “Although DeLillo recognizes the threat that our many post-modern systems of technological representation pose to the autonomy of the novelist, he never doubts his own authorial ability to reproduce those systems within the universe of his novels. If DeLillo’s characters cannot resist the systems that contain them, DeLillo-the-novelist is not subject to the same control” (Parrish 87). The author’s artistic mastery enables him to incorporate such representational systems within his text and face the challenge posed by them. This challenge

enhances the complexity and subtlety of his own novelistic representation as a composite structure of competing media.

The conflict between literary practices and the disrupting forces of information is further instantiated by the one between Bill Gray and Karen Janney, a runaway girl who was brought to Bill's place by Scott Martineau after her fleeing a religious cult group. Once a devotee of a despotic religious leader, she represents the loss of individuality in the age of the masses, which Bill abhors. The reader notes her receptivity to information especially through the descriptions of her responses to TV messages. Scott quotes Bill's comment on her: "She was thin-boundaried. She took it all in, she believed it all, pain, ecstasy, dog food, all the seraphic matter, the baby bliss that falls from the air. . . . She carried the virus of the future" (119). In that account, Bill describes the subjectivity of the info-addicted Karen as an uncritical receptor of jumbled messages. "[T]hin-boundaried" Karen disturbs Bill, who struggles to maintain the imperviousness of his autonomous subjectivity through the mastery over the complex system of language. The "virus" of information Karen carries could spread to Bill and affect the literary practice essential to him, that is, the act of selection. The jumble of information deriving from different registers threatens the act of constant revision Bill is obsessed with. Michel Foucault's concept of the author as "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning" (Foucault 118) helps us clarify such a literary practice and what Bill tries to protect. Foucault writes: "The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations" (Foucault 118). The Foucauldian author is situated in a network of cultural discourses that is ideologically charged. Bill plays a

role similar to “the principle of thrift” amid the proliferation of information, trying to sort it out for artistic creation. He spends years writing and rewriting a single novel until he is lost in the system of language. His meticulous act of revision indicates the constant inclusion and exclusion of material for artistic perfection.

However, the task assigned to Bill is concerned with an area of linguistic practice slightly different from the discursive one Foucault analyzes. Information and discourse sometimes require different practices for their mastery. To examine the matter, we have to recall that Bill’s position as an isolated rebel is essential to his identity as a novelist. He faces a violent intrusion of information in such forms as capitalist and political messages into his subjectivity. What is crucial is that the economic and political power Bill challenges is encoded in fragments of information, not necessarily in a unified discourse. Scott Lash points out such a form of power in the contemporary information order, when he claims that power takes an informational form rather than that of a linear, coherent discourse: “It lies no longer in discourse but in the much shorter and more transient bits and fragments of information” (Lash 189). Mark Edmundson shows a similar view, when he comments on power and media images in DeLillo’s novels: “The kind of power DeLillo renders exists everywhere and nowhere. It is impossible to confront” (Edmundson 116). For the Foucauldian author, power takes the form of discourse, whereas for Bill power is increasingly dispersed in small units of visual, auditory, and written information. Because of its fragmentariness, it is difficult to challenge and thus can infiltrate and alter one’s subjectivity like viruses. Fragments of information as exemplified by the messages Karen receives from the media serve as agents of economic and political power, and they constitute dominant forces that transform culture.

III

A detailed analysis of DeLillo's description of Karen Janney leads us to examine his artistic response to information. In some instances, she seems at the mercy of intrusive information that determines her mode of thinking and action. The reader knows that she once succumbed to the persuasion of a religious cult, and also observes how she uncritically absorbs capitalist and political messages from the media. Moreover, she seems fascinated with news about dark, tragic events that take place in the troubled regions of the world. Yet Karen's receptivity empowers the author. To be sure, she is vulnerable to informational control and to the appeal of joining the anonymous masses and renouncing individual responsibility, but the reader understands the significance of her attempt to expand her imagination and sympathy toward distant, cultural others, as she becomes absorbed with their media images. For her, information is intrusive yet empowering. At the beginning of the novel, she is bewildered by the whirling flood of information about events in unknown lands. In that regard, the scene where Karen watches a sporting disaster at Hillsborough Stadium, Britain, is worth noting. In the overcrowded stadium, supporters — many of whom are teenagers and children — are crushed to death: "She sees men and boys at first, a swarming maleness, a thickness of pressed-together bodies. Then a crowd, thousands, filling the screen. It looks like slow motion but she knows it isn't" (32). What is stressed in the description of the masses is their physical pain, as exemplified by the following line: "It is an agony of raised and twisted arms and suffering faces" (33). On the TV screen, there appear heaps of fragmentary images of suffering bodies that include: "open mouths and bloated tongues"; an "arm twisted against the steel strands of the

fence”; a “girl crushed and buckled under someone’s elbow” (33). At this point of the novel, Karen is still a passive observer/receptor of images, though she is beginning to feel the suffering of the people through the powerful spectacle of bodies in pain.

DeLillo’s description of the masses on TV points toward ideological and aesthetic conflicts between Bill and Karen. Bill’s obsession with seclusion and Karen’s attraction to anonymous masses represent the two ideological positions of individualism and collectivity. Bill’s individualism is the basis for the autonomy of his art but it leads to self-enclosed isolation. Karen’s yearning for collectivity drives her to connect but it can make her succumb to anonymity and even totalitarian control. The question implies another conflict among different forms of driving forces behind culture: art and information. Out of these conflicts, DeLillo aims to develop an aesthetic form by achieving artistic control over the overflowing images of numerous others disseminated by the information network. In order to pursue the question, let us return to the description of Karen quoted in the previous paragraph. This includes the comment that the riot scene “looks like slow motion,” (32) which gives us a clue to understand DeLillo’s narrative strategies. In this scene, one soon notices that the temporal structure of the narrative changes. One and a half pages of a succession of images are presented in such a meticulously detailed manner that the narrative progresses very slowly. The signal phrase — “she sees” — that calls the reader’s attention to Karen’s absorptive act of watching TV images is repeated throughout the scene, paired with the signal — “they show” — that points toward the incessant flow of images: “They show men standing off to the side somewhere, watching sort of half interested. She sees a great straining knot of people pressed to a fence, forced massively forward. They show the metal fence and

bodies crushed against it, arms upflung” (33). Through the pattern of accumulation and intensification, new fragments of images of packed bodies are added after each signal, and the reader becomes immersed in the fullness of such images. Scott Lash comments on information as it inflects the narrative form: “Unlike narrative, information compresses beginning, middle and end into a present immediacy of a ‘now-here.’ Unlike discourse, information does not need legitimating arguments, does not take the form of propositional utterances, but works with an immediate communicational violence” (Lash X). As DeLillo collapses the orderly duration of the narrative, fragmentary and shocking images with their mesmerizing fullness fill the fictional space and immerse Karen and the reader in a strong sense of a “now-here.” The progression of the narrative flow is suspended by the slow accumulation of visual details for a brief period of narrative time. DeLillo deploys the same kind of narrative strategy in other scenes, e.g. those where Karen watches the Tiananmen massacre and Iranian mourners at the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini. The images of sudden eruptions of these violent and tragic events are communicated in such a powerful manner that they grip the viewer/reader. These images can be considered simulacra, yet the suffering and powerlessness of the masses involved with them are fully grounded in the reality of the contemporary world.

Through her constant exposure and an increasingly active response to dark, tragic news, Karen goes through a rapid psychological transformation. Her fascination with the suffering masses in cultures outside her own leads to such a transformation. In his analysis of the position of the subject in the information society, Mark Poster writes: “In the mode of information the subject is no longer located in a point in absolute time/space, enjoying a physical, fixed vantage point from

which rationally to calculate its options. Instead it is . . . decontextualized and reidentified by TV ads, dissolved and materialized continuously in the electronic transmission of symbols” (Poster 16). To use Poster’s terms, Karen’s subjectivity is “decontextualized” from the environment conferred by middle-class, U.S. citizenship by means of electronic data streams charged with exotic cultural messages. It is fair to say she tries to “reidentify” herself, as she feels strong empathy with the suffering masses in international areas, relocating herself into expanding social contexts. After going through such self-fashioning, Karen consciously attempts at a psychological transformation. For instance, the reader can witness how she tries to develop skills in interpreting politically and culturally-charged information in her peregrination in New York City. In the loft of a tenement building near Tompkins Square Park, she sees pictures of “[f]amine, fire, riot, war” that have taken place in other parts of the world. Walking about the area, she trains herself to interpret images: “There was a dialect of the eye. She read the signs and sayings near the park. The Polish bars, the Turkish baths, Hebrew on the windows, Russian in the headlines . . .” (175). In the confusion of multinational signs similar to those of the media, she tries to read distinct traits in them. As Scott Lash observes, in the information society there is a “nomadic movement of both tribal and global cultures” (Lash 183). This society with its media machines spreads not only homogenized images of Western commodities and popular culture but also distinct local images. Images and signs are nomadic, so are individuals who traverse cultural data streams.

One of the important tasks assigned to Karen is to delve into the distinctiveness of tribal cultures, expanding her imagination as a powerful connecting force beyond local experiential constraints. Jo-

seph Tabbi's comment on the role of the novelist enables us to gain insight into the task DeLillo assigns to her. Tabbi argues that "the contemporary novelist occupies the void left by the media, filling gaps in the historical record and using the ready-made drama of a much publicized yet unexplained act of violence to bring out the unformulated themes, hidden designs . . ." (Tabbi 184). Watching the news about the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini, Karen notices the limits of media images and the excess that lies outside them: "The camera could not absorb the full breadth of the crowd. The camera kept panning but could not inch all the way out to the edge of the anguished mass" (188). The huge scale of the gathering masses and the intense level of anguish cannot be transmitted by informational means. Unlike the passage on the soccer stadium disaster, which depicts the passive reception of images, this scene gives Karen room for reflection. Moreover, to overcome the limits of media coverage, DeLillo intensifies the sense of immediacy in her connection with the mourners who chant and beat themselves in anguish. The reader notes the repetition of "into" in the entire scene, as in "she could go into the slums of south Teheran" (189); "Karen went backwards into their lives, into the hovels and unpaved streets" (190). The following passage conveys what she wants to achieve in her participatory interpretation: "Karen could go backwards into their lives, see them coming out of their houses and shanties, streams of people, then backwards even further, sleeping in their beds, hearing the morning call to prayer, coming out of their houses and meeting in some dusty square to march out of the slums together" (188). Mingling with the mourners in her imagination and her churned emotions, she goes so far as to enter the most private spaces of their houses and share their beds with them. This culminates in a desire to liberate them from poverty.

One major problem DeLillo must overcome is well stated by Katharine Hayles. She points out a mode of existence in the expanding but depthless information network that haunts individuals, that is, “a disembodied, free-floating existence made possible in part by the near-instantaneous transfer of information from one point on the globe to any other” (Hayles 394). In her analysis of DeLillo’s *White Noise*, she shows how the characters who are threatened by informational “disembodiment” try to achieve “embodiment,” reintroducing materiality into their lives (Hayles 410-11). The question of embodiment plays an equally important role in *Mao II*, which was published after the Hayles essay. In the passage I quoted from *Mao II*, Karen strives against the disembodiment of existence in the media space. Her tactile and auditory sensations are intensified so that she can feel the sensation of sharing private life with the distant mourners. She is also at pains to recuperate a strong sense of materiality and that of intimacy in her unreal relation to others. Her intensification of bodily sensations is an attempt to achieve virtual proximity through the reception of and response to information.

A crucial element underscored in the images of distant others is pain, as seen in the mourners on the death of their leader. In the soccer stadium scene quoted earlier, the author describes deformed bodies and the intense physical pain of the masses. Likewise, DeLillo’s description of the Tiananmen massacre includes images of bodies in pain: “dead bodies attached to fallen bicycles” (177); “upside-down bodies and blood dashed everywhere” (178). Critics have argued that DeLillo’s characters tend to believe that violence brings back lost materiality and makes embodiment possible: “Only violence . . . can crack the slick surfaces of fetishized commodification and restore the connection and immediacy that embodiment entails” (Hayles 411). In

that quote, Hayles's focus is on *White Noise*, in which the main character, Jack Gladney, shoots the man who slept with his wife in revenge. This act is also an attempt to bring back materiality that has been usurped by the mass of information — commercial and political messages, and medical data that determine who he is. However, the images of violence Karen witnesses in *Mao II* do not lead to such a selfish, horrific act. The intense sense of physical pain brings to the surface tragedies that are shared by many. Karen asks herself the following question concerning the sense of connectedness achieved by millions of viewers watching the Iranian mourners: “[D]oesn't it mean we share something with the mourners, know an anguish, feel something pass between us, hear the sigh of some historic grief?” (191). The suffering of the masses due to disaster, political oppression, and a national tragedy drastically disturb the subject in the First World.

As we have seen at the beginning of this study, dark, tragic news as a new, powerful narrative emotionally affects a large number of people located in the information network, and yet it is in danger of exploiting and, what is worse, intensifying their sense of desperation. Bill Gray is defeated by the dark, tragic narrative in spite of his initial struggle to maintain his enclosed aesthetic sphere. His following attempt to recklessly plunge into the politics of the troubled contemporary world fails. However, unlike Bill, DeLillo tackles such a new and powerful form of narrative and salvages it from the self-defeating sense of desperation. He turns the dark, tragic narrative into a narrative of connectedness that binds Karen with distant others. DeLillo turns the negative form of connectedness grounded in a sense of desperation into the one that reflects an undeveloped yet strong sense of empathy. Still, Karen's attempt could be dismissed as uncritical, yet DeLillo's is a serious exercise aimed at the empowerment of literary

and social discourse. He implements it by his own aesthetic means, paying attention to the nuanced transmission of information concerning others through the intensification of embodiment and intimacy. He shows us innovative ways of representation when he incorporates and recreates dark, tragic news in an attempt to nourish a fragile yet far-reaching and disturbing sense of communality in the information network.

Notes

1. As to Mark Osteen's concept of "dialogue," see his following comments: "DeLillo imitates the discourses he aims to deconstruct [media and photographic discourses] and thereby generates a dialogue with those cultural forms that both criticizes their consequences and appropriates their advantages" (Osteen 193). "Spectacular authorship" is "the power to use photographic or televised images to manufacture, as if by magic, spectacular events that profoundly mold public consciousness" (Osteen 193). John Johnston remarks on the position of DeLillo's novels in the assemblage of discourses and images in the following way: "DeLillo's writing machine functions as an offshoot of this mass-media assemblage, taking its representations and social codings as so much material for novelistic reflection" (Johnston 166).
2. A complex mixture of motives impels Bill to abandon writing, and he dies meaninglessly, while trying to become a hostage in exchange for the Swiss poet. Other critics' views from different perspectives will help us clarify this. Silvia Bizzini claims: "By going away from London and from the press conference Charlie Everson had organized, Bill tries to rebel against the society which transforms everything into spectacle and himself into the

image of a writer; he tries to take back his own destiny and so demonstrate to himself that he still exists as a committed intellectual” (Bizzini 251). David Cowart writes: “DeLillo is fully aware of the irony that makes western writers comparative non-entities, while their colleagues under repressive regimes are hunted down and jailed. . . . A further irony of Bill’s failure is that, conceivably, his becoming hostage in the Swiss poet’s place might have worked as the consciousness-raising gesture that literary artists can no longer effect through writing alone” (Cowart 117).

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