

Chapter 3

The Simulated Narrative: *Mao II* Postmodern Narration

In *Mao II* DeLillo presents series of photographs at the beginning of each chapter. The images have different function and usage from traditional literature. In storybook, the images are used to accompany the text. They function as illustrations to their textual counterpart. The images signify very little solitarily. For the images to function logically in an Aesop fable, the text must carry a message, a narrative that alludes to the image. A child would not understand an illustration of a fox staring at the grape without the accompanying textual narrative. The importance of the text will always precede the images in any traditional form of literature but *Mao II* points to the contrary. In the context of this specific novel, the image is the message. DeLillo's inclusion of photographs as part of the novel's form of presentation is to reinforce the state of simulation upon the textual narrative, creating a unique postmodern simulated narration.

At first glance, it may seem impossible to determine the exact meaning between the photo images and the text. The images appear to be disconnected and share nothing in common with one another. Moreover, the relationship between the images and the text is not directly traceable as those of the storybook. That is, the images at the beginning of each part bear little resemblance to their accompanying textual narratives. We may understand how the picture of a Moonie's wedding is a portrait of its following textual narrative – a relationship similar to those of the

storybook. However, the same could not be said of the picture of the confronting crowd as it only captured a single frame of story from the entire narrative part. Analyzing the relationship between the image and the text of each part solitarily would undoubtedly be an exercise in futility. Hence, it is necessary to conceptualize the relationship between the images and the textual narrative in *Mao II* form of presentation as a whole.

What I refer to as the form of presentation here is the artist's choice in placing the photo images prior to the words – the immediately recognizable surface structure of the novel. Taking *Mao II's* dramatization of Bill Gray's struggle against the media into consideration, it should be logical to presume that the images are not postmodern literary gimmicks but DeLillo's artistic intention to include them as part of the narrative. Indeed, Joseph Tabbi, a postmodern literary critic, affirms that DeLillo's constant examination of the media is common in his fiction. Tabbi remarks that the need to explore the limit of information technology is because "DeLillo has always been a writer for whom the "natural world" is one of created objects, and his fiction always accepted the collapse of distinctions between nature and technology, and consequent primacy and proliferation of reproductive images" (Tabbi, 1995, p. 174). *Mao II's* form of presentation here consists of the combination between images and textual words – a surface form of presentation.

If we can draw the struggle between the real and the simulation from reading the story, then it should be logical to presume that similar representational tension exists in DeLillo's decision to place the two mediums side-by-side. Focusing solitarily on the form, the tension between the mediums asks the classical question of the nature of representations and their power to capture reality. Susan Sontag, a

highly respected cultural critic, proposed an intriguing observation that “...photographed images were themselves first compared to writing” (Sontag, 1977, p. 160). She then indicated that the criteria in comparing these two mediums is their aptitude of capturing reality, which is a universal function of representation. Her observation confirmed that there is detectable tension between image and writing. Her comments on their capabilities are as follow:

Photographs do more than redefine the stuff of ordinary experience (people, things, events, whatever we see—albeit differently, often inattentively—with natural vision) and add vast amounts of material that we never see at all. Reality as such is redefined—as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as target for surveillance. The photographic exploration and duplication of the world fragments continuities and feeds the pieces into an interminable dossier, thereby providing possibilities of control that could not even be dreamed of under earlier system of recording information: writing.

That photographic recording is always, potentially, a means of control was already recognized when such powers were in their infancy. (Sontag, 1977, p. 156)

According to Sontag, photograph is a superior medium to writing because it gives the viewer the possibility of redefining reality. A person could think and interpret multiple meanings from looking at a single picture; therefore, negating the traditional notion of photograph as a direct replication of the real. The reality captured in the photo may or may not be the same as the one in our mental perception. Without any reference or confirmation of the real, the photograph could contain infinite

representational meanings generated from the human's perception of the picture. In spite of its claim to capture the truth, the essence of the real, the image could be the medium that controls our perception of reality and obscures what it supposed to be recording.

It is noticeable that Sontag's proposal on the effect of images in altering the notion of reality also echoes Baudrillard's simulation theory. The postmodern theorist proposed the potential of images to undermine our ability to associate ourselves with what is real, original or authentic as what we could on perceive is a state of hyper reality. The postmodern person is trapped between the real and illusion. Sontag's comment could be taken as an elaborate explanation of photograph as a concrete manifestation of the simulacra. She affirms how photograph is the representation of simulation in itself. Photograph is neither the illusion nor the real as its very form captured both the realm of possibilities. It is impossible to deny that a photograph is an object of illusion as its real subject exists elsewhere in different time and space. Yet paradoxically, it would be difficult to place the term false or imagery into a subject of the photograph for its realness stand before the viewer. Putting these theories into practice with *Mao II's* form of presentation, it should be reasonable to suspect that the presence of photographs themselves represent Baudrillard's state of simulation.

It is as if *Mao II* was written to replicate Baudrillard's simulation theory. The images, when examined in chronological order along with their accompanying textual narratives, embody the obscurity of the real by foregrounding the simulation. Baudrillard states the successive phases of images that proceed to undermine the notion of the real in the following list:

- 1 it is the reflection of a basic reality
- 2 it masks and perverts a basic reality
- 3 it masks the absence of a basic reality
- 4 it bears no relation to any reality (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 11)

Baudrillard's observation of the simulacrum is an elaborate explanation of the relationship between the real and the representational image, which can be narrowed down to three logical stages. In the first stage, the image resembles the real as an accurate reflection of the basic reality. The second stage constitutes the process of masking and obscuring the real as it is when every image is real because it has been replicated repeatedly to the point where it is impossible to accurately determine its origin and authenticity. This stage hints that the essence of the real may have disappeared and replaced by the mass-produced identical image. The final stage is when image bears no resemblance to reality or any other form of representations. In this stage, the image then only refers to itself; therefore, establishing the state of simulation. The relationship between the photos and the subsequent textual narratives could be translated to the relationship of the image and the real. Consequently, the state of simulation is materialized in the final image of the book as the plot moves toward the ending.

There are four images accompanying three narrative parts conspiring to enact the simulation state in the novel's surface form of presentation. The analysis will begin with the first image in part one, "At the Yankee Stadium" – the first stage that the image and the real is still referable. The novel begins with the blurry photo of a mass Moonie's wedding. Coincidentally, the following text also narrates the story of the photographed wedding. The photo, which depicts multiple lines of bride and

groom, amplifies Rodge's awe of the majestic sight of "the eternal boy-girl, stepping out of the runway beyond the fence in left-center field...hundreds, already to many to count. They assemble themselves so tightly, crossing the arc of the outfield, that the effect is one of transformation" (3). The description of Rodge's view of the stadium maintains the initial belief in the function of photograph as a recording of reality. We can be certain that the reality recorded in the photo is the same as in the text because both act as constant reference to each other.

The narrative never ventures beyond the story of the characters' experiences and their opinions of the Moonies' wedding in the setting of the Yankee Stadium. The third person omniscient narrator tells the story of Rodge and Maureen, husband and wife, who stand witness to the marriage of their daughter, Karen Janney, to her Korean groom as part of Master Moon's religious ritual. The narrative also airs Karen's experience at the wedding. Incidentally, when the text projects Karen, it is showing us the direct experience of the photographed subject. As part of the eternal boy-girl, Karan feels "intact, rayed with well-being" as she "glances over at Kim Jo Pak, soft-eyed and plump in his nice new suit and boxy shoes, husband-for-eternity" (8). It is undeniable that her thoughts are not captured in the photograph. However, with the photo as referential evidence, we can be certain that Karen is overwhelmed with gratification during this specific time. The photo becomes a testimony to her joy as there will always be a captured reality ready to confirm the realness of her memory. Another point of note on the relationship of the two mediums in the first part is the level of consistency in their reflection. No matter how much the characters' experiences and point of views may switch back and forth, their thoughts and bodies never move beyond confinement of the photograph and the text; therefore, creating a

parallel and referential reality. Thus, it is safe to say that the relationship between the image and the text functions as a kind of illustrative portrait. The reality in the text could be represented through the photo or vice versa. The relationship between the image and the real is clearly stable at this point of the novel.

The second and third pictures that accompany Bill Gray's narrative signify our loss of reference toward the real. The second picture is of a football crowd in confrontation, while the third picture shows us the foreboding portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini that seems to be gazing down on its human followers. The function of these two photos changes when compared with "At the Yankee Stadium." The picture of the crowd confrontation and the portrait of Khomeini lost their illustrative qualities to their following narratives, which describe Bill Gray's struggle to maintain his real identity. The photos evolve to perform a more visualizing role as they manifest the textual narrations of Karen's television watching experiences in concrete forms. That is, the text describes how Karen actually views these exact same pictures on the television in the narratives. As Karen gazes at the televised images, she sees "a crowd, thousands, filling the screen" as the mass "pushed toward the fence and people at the fence pressed together and terribly twisted" (33). When the camera moves to capture the peoples' faces she "sees the hopelessness of knowing. They show men calmly looking on...a crowd twisted vision of a rush to death as only a master of the age could paint it" (34). Similarly, the photo of the Islamic leader is projected in detail in the narrative through Karen's television screen. We are able to see the emotional reactions of the mass who attended Khomeini's funeral where "[great] photographs of Khomeini hung from building walls and many people in the crowd beat themselves on the head and chest" as they "[try] to bring the dead man back

among them” (188-189). Judging from how these two pictures are presented, it is clear that what the novel presents to us is a picture of a picture – a reproduction of what could be the real in a form of multi levels facsimiles.

Here, we encountered an ambiguity in the origin of authenticity. The image of the confronting crowd is replicated on two levels – the level of the text (Karen’s television screen) and the concrete photograph. The image of the confronting crowd reproduced itself in exact likeness thus making it impossible to pinpoint the real reference or originality. Both the image of the confronting crowd in the photo and the text could be real. This mass production of the image on both literal and metaphor obviously renders the second state of Baudrillard’s simulation where the origin of the real is no longer identifiable. If the picture of the confrontation is not present at the beginning of the narrative, it should be viable to conclude that the description of Karen’s watching television would be just to fulfill her role as a character watching an ordinary image of a raging football crowd. She would be another literary symbol that, after a traditional reading and interpretation, would reveal countless meanings alluding to the novel’s theme of simulation. Indeed, one could have easily marked her down as a representation of images for her hearty television consumption. The picture of the confronting crowd would be just another picture.

The mass production of images also affects our status as a reader because we are literally watching the process of image reproduction obscuring the real. As far as the logic of image is concerned, we are not reading *Mao II*. We are watching it. After all, both Karen and we are seeing the exact same pictures. Keeping Baudrillard’s simulation theory as the fundamental framework, it is reasonable to speculate that the obscurity of the real took place after the viewing of the raging football crowd. To put

it simply, the act of reading is redefined and transformed to the act of watching television. This put the origin of our mental image during the reading in a questionable state. Our response to DeLillo's description of Karen's emotion toward the televised image of the crowd in the text is arguably preconceived as we have witnessed the real likeness of the textual narration in the photograph before hand. Consequently, the reader, like Karen, is redefined into a viewer of *Mao II* world of simulation. In the position of the viewer, the act of reading *Mao II* becomes a trip into the realm of the simulacra - an adventure into the literal depthlessness. The transformation of our status as a reader into an image consumer is also one way of entrusting us with the sense that the simulation process is unavoidable. Every aspect of the postmodern world, including the seemingly safe reader, is susceptible to entering the process in one way or another.

Before proceeding to the final image, it is necessary to state that the simulation process enacted at the novel's simulated form of presentation coincides with the event in the plot. Bill Gray, as the representation of the real, died pathetically on his attempted trip to Beirut just as the progression of the image obscures the notion of reality in the text. This parallelism suggests that *Mao II's* form of presentation conveys the triumph of simulation over the real. It is as if the novel forces us to believe that simulation is inevitable through its form of presentation. The doomed nature of Bill Gray's effort is symbolically repeated on the surface structure of the narrative when it is Brita, who happens to be a photographer and representation of image, manages to capture Abu Rashid and officially ends the novel.

Predictably, the final photo reinstates the authoritative power of simulation and verifies Brita's status as the individual suited to the postmodern image world. "In

Beirut”, opens with a photo portrait of three children, possibly in the middle of a battlefield, staring at the camera from a bunker. One of the boys is holding an ambiguous object, which could be a camera or a riflescope. The ambiguous relationship between the photo and its following textual narrative is the point of interest. Unlike the previous three photos, it is impossible to draw a direct representative relation between the subjects in the photo to anything portrayed in the textual narrative. The boys in the picture are clearly not members of “the children of Abu Rashid” because they are not hooded or wearing any shirts with the terrorist leader’s picture printed on them. Are they victims of war, poverty, famine? Are they even in Beirut? If they are, where are the Coke II sign and street graffiti written in the text? With this image, it is impossible to associate any reference to the realness essence in textual narrative. The indeterminable status of this image transcends it from being a portrait (the capturing of the narrative in “At the Yankee Stadium”) or mass-produced realities (in the images of the confronting crowd and the funeral of Khomeini) into a non-meaning image that would only refer to itself – a concrete manifestation of the Baudrillard’s simulation theory. Thus, this simple photograph of children in a bunker carries a grand symbolic representation of the completion of Baudrillard’s simulation process, in which the image itself is the final reality just as the emergence of Brita is *Mao II* only necessary finale.

The proven state of simulation in the photographs reinforces the crisis of the real. However, the parallelism between the photos and the plot is only the top of *Mao II*’s Chinese-box. A closer look at the novel’s actual linear narrative progression implies that the concept of simulation extends to a deeper level of the text. The simulation process at the top level creates a gap that disrupts the flow of the narrative,

placing Bill Gray's narrative in a mythical spatial time continuum, creating a contradiction between our sense of the novel monolithic completion and the actual way the novel is written and presented. Looking at the novel, one can easily see how the photos separate the narrative into parts and each is narrated in different time spans. The novel challenges and forces us to accept its awkwardness regardless of how the actual text is presented. I strongly believe that the narrative is attempting to simulate our reading behavior, forcing us to unconditionally accept the absence of the real.

There is a sense that *Mao II* narrative does progress from the beginning to the end and is immediately comprehensible within the linear timeframe during the initial reading. A sense of completion arrives as we finish reading *Mao II*. The plot appears to be completed. Bill Gray is dead and commodified, while Brita emerges in her grand finale to embrace the postmodern image world – the beginning, middle and ending come to a completion. Yet, there is a sharp contrast between the linear reading logic, which completely accepts the monolithic plot progression and believes in its validity completely and the actual narrative structure written on paper. The moment of self-contradiction strikes as we flip through the pages and are able to see literally how the spatial time continuum in the narrative is distorted. Soon we realize that the main narrative, the story of Bill Gray's struggle and his death, happened in the past, separated from the rest of the novel. We are stung by the facts that *Mao II* is a novel of broken timeline and how our perception of its linear progression is a false one. What we think we feel as a sense of completion is a misconception resulted from traditional reading training and instinctive assumption that this novel functions solely on a monolithic linear narrative and a singular movement of spatial time continuum.

The contradiction between our sense of a monolithic plot progression and the textual evidence is visible in the tense usage. Logically speaking, different tense usage constitutes different timeframe. *Mao II* narrative is clearly distorted as the parts do not progress linearly. The first part, “At the Yankee Stadium” is narrated in present tense. The importance of this tense usage reveals that Rodge and Maureen as well as Karen are experiencing the wedding in the present. The wedding is neither memory nor fiction but real event. Their experiences at the wedding as described by the omniscient narrator are happening in the present spatial time continuum. The happening and realness of the event is completely visible right at the start of the novel:

Here they come, marching into American sunlight. They are grouped in twos, eternal boy-girl, stepping out of the runway beyond the fence in left-center field. The music draws them across the grass, dozens, hundreds, already too many to count....Karen’s daddy, watching from the grandstand, can’t help thinking this is the point. They’re one body now, an undifferentiated mass, and this makes him uneasy. He focuses his binoculars on a young woman, another, still another. So many columns set to closely. (3)

It is clear how the excerpt is narrated using the present tense from the excerpt. Rodge’s response to the image of the gathering crowd before his eyes is that “he has never seen anything like this or ever imagined it could happen. He hasn’t come here for the spectacle but it is starting to astonish him” (3). Moreover, the sense of “here and now” that the present tense conveyed also confirms, in hindsight, to the logic that the plot is moving linearly forward. The present tense could never be more appropriate as the part end with the haunting remark “the future belongs to the crowd”

(16). A present tense describing the crowd of Moonie followers gathering at the Yankee Stadium hints that the plot and the time span of the novel should be moving into the future. Yet, as the next part appears, we are greeted with extreme sense of disbelief.

The second part, which is divided into two sections separated by the photos of the confronting crowd and Khomeini's portrait, is narrated using the past tense. The instantaneous temporal distortion is visible from this excerpt:

He walked among the bookstore shelves, hearing Muzak in the air. There were rows of handsome covers, prosperous and assured. He felt a fine excitement, hefting a new book, fitting hand over sleek spine, seeing lines of type jitter past his thumb as he let the pages fall. He was a young man, shrewd in his fervors, who knew there were books he wanted to read and other he absolutely had to own... (19)

The second part begins with DeLillo's description of Scott Martineu's scanning over the book store for Bill Gray's works, a complete shift in reality from the Yankee Stadium. Is the plot moving forward? The answer would seem to be so had it not been for the appearance of Karen, who also exists in the previous episode. Does this mean that Karen is moving into the past as the plot progresses? This scenario could take the turn for the worst as the Karen in this part may not be the same Karen who is at the Yankee Stadium – a facsimile or mass produced representation. The problem in comprehending the text is the literal evidence of how DeLillo's usage of the past tense creates a void between the logical progression of the plot and the logic of reading. The narrative progression is trapped in a paradoxical state as the future moves forward into the past. The space and time continuum of the plot progression is

distorted; therefore, could no longer be apprehended through linear logic. A strong sense of irony encompasses *Mao II* as the “future of the crowd” exists in the past.

This disruption in the narrative clearly parallels with the process simulation drawn from the analysis of the photographs. The broken streams of narrative bear similar resemblance to photo shots than it is to a traditional narrative structure - a literal manifestation of simulation. It should be safe to assume that the structure of the narrative is governed by the logic of image production rather than literariness. This phenomenon is almost a stance of mockery toward the representation of the real, Bill Gray. The indiscriminate movement from the present to the past implies that Bill Gray’s story does not fit in any representational contexts of both the photo and the textual narrative – the mythologization of the real. His story is generated not by a credible and present narrator but from the womb of the novel’s simulated narrative.

The death of the real is further confirmed in the final part “In Beirut.” Here, the narrative time is miraculously transported back to the present as Brita ventures on her quest to photograph Abu Rashid. The return to the present is not the return to the real but the totality of simulation. If we follow Baudrillard’s theory similarly to the analysis of the photograph, it is apparent that what follow the mass production of realities are their own referential images. Indeed, this narrative part is a glorification of how Brita is an effective representation of image and simulation. The narrative in this part tells the story of Brita Nelson and her successful trip to meet and photograph the terrorists’ leader, Abu Rashid. Brita’s encounter with Abu Rashid is portrayed heroically. Despite being a woman photographer, she is able to penetrate and expose the terrorists’ masculine ideology and stance as “[eloquent] macho bullshit” (236). She bravely questions the group’s policy, resisting the dominating male authority as

in the following situation: “Take away their faces and voices, give them guns and bombs. Tell me, does it work?” she says, to which Rashid replies defensively by saying “[don’t] bring your problems to Beirut” (234). To add insult to the injury, she also manages to rid the boy of his hood “on an impulse” and shot a photo of his naked features simply because “it seems important” (236). This dramatization of the plot progression and the empowerment of its newly emerge female protagonist suggests that Brita, who carries the all powerful image-capturing device, is more suitable in the postmodern environment than Bill Gray. The narrative glorifies Brita’s success because there is no reason to refer to any other representations but its own dominance.

The distorted narrative construction also forced us to look at the novel’s time construction more carefully. The novel’s linear narrative flows smoothly from beginning to end, creating a sense of false completion. If we look at the narrative construction purely from a linear module, the narrative could have progressed directly in one swift motion time flow, from “At the Yankee Stadium” to “In Beirut” and the stories would still make sense because they exist in the present time continuum. What linked these two narrative parts together are their presentness, the fact that the events portrayed exist in a singular time span. Conversely, the presentness of the two parts undermines the existence of Bill Gray’s narrative, creating a sense of exclusion, separating Bill Gray’s mythical past from the overall narrative entirely. Thus, the core of the novel is left stranded in the past – a non-existent time.

From the analysis so far, there is a sense that the novel is trying to dramatize Bill Gray’s death. Reading the novel from beginning to end, we will accept his death naturally. It has come to my attention that the text’s attempts to kill Bill Gray grow in intensity. It is as though the simulated text is trying to assure that the residue of the

real in the novel is completely obsolete. The first degree is the novel's simulated surface structure, its form of presentation. The incorporation of photographic images physically manifests Baudrillard's simulation theory at a concrete level. The series of photographic images then break down the narrative structure, separating it into parts. The distorted parts contribute to create a sense of simulated unification of the plot structure. Consequently, the second and most important part of the novel, the narrative of Bill Gray's struggle to reclaim his identity, is written in past tense. This grammatical disjunction reduces the importance of the episode to merely an unconfirmed myth, degrading his struggle to mere insignificance. The aftermath of Bill Gray's mythologization is the logical emergence of Brita to signify the dominance of the simulated image in the postmodern world. All in all, it is as though the narrative and the photographs are all accomplices in the killing of the real Bill Gray.

Moving one level down from the narrative, it is apparent that the novel is littered with the symbol of the death of the real. Here are some examples of the scenes that purposely glorify the killing of the real - scenes that lead to the completion of the simulation process. The first scene is the literal death of the real, the depiction of Bill Gray's death on the ferry trip to Beirut. After the dramatic portrayal of Bill Gray's final thought, what follows is a description of a janitor searching through Bill Gray's "bruised and unshaven face and the dirty clothes" for "the man's passport and other forms of identification, anything with a name and number, which he could sell to some militia Beirut" (216-217). DeLillo's decision to shift the perspective from Bill Gray's monologue to the treatment of his corpse is an interesting one because it changes the focal point of the dramatic effect. The ending of his life is not how he

passed away but the aftermath of his death. The shift in dramatic tension becomes an act of heralding the process of commodification. It is the image rather than the real that carries transaction value in the capitalist context. The author's physique and his memory, his essence as an individual, could be narrowed down to mere numbers and signs. Bill Gray is worth more in death, existing as the mythical image, than he is alive.

After Bill Gray's has been commodified on the ferry, Scott Martineu immediately assumes the position of the mythical author, projecting the simulated Bill Gray unto the world. Scott, who now owns "the secret of Bill's real name", "the photographs, the great work of describing and cataloguing", the manuscript of Bill's new novel, the entire house filled with pages could have been the old janitor who scours Bill Gray's corpse for passport" (223 – 224). With these representational artifacts at his disposals, Scott does not need the return of the real Bill Gray. He has every image necessary, including Bill Gray's real name, Willard Skansej Jr., to be able to live his life as the world-renowned reclusive author. As a matter of fact, he has already lived Bill Gray's existence when he decides that "[the] manuscript would sit" to "collecting aura and force, deepening old Bill Gray's legend, undyingly" (224). His tone of voice is clearly not suggestive but rather commanding and methodological. He speaks of his master's manuscript as though it was his own. He imagined the future of where he would "talk to Charles Everson, just a word concerning the fact that it was finished" and "meet with Brita and choose the pictures that would appear" (224). It is useful to note that the talk with Charles Everson and the meeting with Brita has already been conducted by the real Bill Gray in some part of the novel. What Scott is saying here is that he would live Bill Gray's life but the

only thing he would not do is write. Thus, what Scott is aiming for here is not to replace Bill Gray as the author but the real Bill Gray as a person. He is not looking to be the mythical author but the real Bill Gray himself, in which the decision to write or not to write is entirely up to him. Scott's existence would forever obscure the reference to the real Bill Gray as he is in possession of every possible reference. He is the image that will only refer back to itself because there is no reason not to do so – a physical manifestation of the simulacrum.

If Scott is the simulated Bill Gray, the manifestation of the simulation on personal level, then Brita's appearance in the final chapter would logically finalized the state of simulation in the postmodern world. The definite state of simulation is confirmed in the final paragraph of the novel, in which Brita photographed the nighttime Beirut:

There is a flash out there in the dark near a major checkpoint. Then another in the same spot, several more, intense and white. She waits for the reciprocating flash, the return fire, but all the bursts are in one spot and there is no more sound...Someone is out there with a camera and a flash unit. Brita stays on the balcony for another minute, watching the magnesium pulse that brings an image to a strip of film. She crosses her arms over her body against the chill and counts off the bursts of relentless light. The dead city photographed one more time. (241)

The act of photography is grandiose as numerous camera flashes appear against the back drop of the darkness, illuminating a firework-like quality. The flashing light is almost a celebration of Brita's success and act of justifying the camera's status as the initiator of the image commodification process. However, DeLillo's cleverness in

establishing the definite state of simulation is not in his description of the photoflash in the background, it is how Brita looks at the city. The ending line of the novel reads the “dead city photographed one more time.” Yet, aside from the flash of intense white light near a major checkpoint, there is no other camera in sight. So what could be photographing the dead city? Is Brita referring to the cameras below? Is she photographing the city herself? In my opinion, what captures the “dead city” is not an ordinary camera but eyes of a postmodern woman – perceiving and deducting any realness essence and putting it into simulated image context, ready to be commodified. Brita does not see Beirut, she photograph it. Hence, she is “watching the magnesium pulse that brings an image to a strip of film” while erecting the crossed-arm posture she employed while photographing Abu Rashid and Bill Gray. DeLillo is making the metaphor literal in this scene. Her eyes are one of the same with the camera, experiencing the after-effect of a magnesium pulse that conjures the image of Beirut. Her presence overshadows Scott because she comes pre-equipped with an image-ready vision to remove the reference to the real in the postmodern world. She does not see the real, only images. She does not consider Beirut as a battlefield, a place where human lives are at stakes. Beirut becomes a “dead city”, a lifeless image, as soon as she gazed upon it just as Bill Gray’s death is sealed when she took his photographs. In conclusion, the ending scene not only functions as the grand symbolic triumph of simulation, it also reveals the final accomplice in the murder of the real at the lowest structure of the novel, the character.

It is clear that *Mao II* operates mainly in the simulation frame work. Every element in the novel, whether in the surface form of presentation, the narrative structure or the character and their symbolic representations inside the narrative are all

accomplices in killing the real Bill Gray. The analysis of *Mao II* narrative structure so far transmitted a single message: the notion of the real no longer exists in the postmodern context. However, Bill Gray's death does not just mean the absence of the real, which suggests the notion of originality and authenticity. His passing also symbolizes the death of individuality, the essence of the self that carries no transaction value in the late-capitalist logic. To accept Bill Gray's death docilely would mean to betray our conscience as a real individual.

The surface reading of the novel and Bill Gray's mythical narrative further emphasize the death of the real. Bill Gray died at the end of part two, while his assistant Scott Martineu takes over his role as the reclusive author. The use of past tense and the enforcement of the mythical time seem just in this framework because both the author and the real are dead and commodified. The use of past tense also symbolizes a seamless transgression that finds Brita emerges as the image representation at the end of the novel. It should be apparent that the postmodernity of *Mao II* comes from its foregrounding of the postmodern characteristics, for instance, the dominant of image over the real. If they are taken at the face value, these characteristics clearly reinforce the novel's status as a postmodern statement. Despite the obvious attempts to foreground its postmodernity by excessively to present itself as simulated text by forcing us to accept its postmodern gesture and the absence of the real, the novel offers hints of its abilities to deconstruct itself.

The text achieves its postmodern foregrounding through its form of presentation — the incorporation of the photographs that bare resemblance to their following text in varying degree. The inclusion of photographs proves to be methodological as it alters the text form of presentation from an ordinary novel into a

kind of “multi-media”, which in turns foregrounds the pole of image. Hence, it is easy to interpret *Mao II*'s multi-media form of presentation, couples with the novel's obvious narrative distortion, as a testimony to the inevitability of postmodern simulation. Surprisingly, this simulated structure is a surface disguise. The appearance of the text wants us to believe in the seemingly undeniable simulation state.

It could be said that the novel's surface form of presentation and the disconnected narrative that foreground the image representation, replicate the simulation theory perfectly. The simulated structure clearly conceals the pole of the real inside. However, the recovery of the real, even for an instance, should reveal the constant tension between the real and the simulated rather than an extreme preference toward latter pole as the novel's surface structure seems to imply. That is, there is always a constant tension between the surface form and the underlying meanings. Likewise, the existing tension is unstable and could be pushed to lean in support of one extreme over another. Hence, the interpretation of *Mao II* is a selective process—the art of pushing the interpretation in form of one extreme over another. The tone toward the novel as a postmodern glorification of simulation is only one way of pushing the form of the novel in support of the argument. The balancing of tension between the real and the simulated ultimately signifies the lack of absolutism in either pole that can be found in the text, making *Mao II* a prime textual candidate for deconstruction. The balance of the scale could be tipped toward the pole of the real and of the high modernist author. Here, the foregrounding postmodern simulated text overshadows the opposing high modernist representational meaning. Under the deconstructive logic, the novel's postmodern textual appearance is merely an image-

disguise on the surface, concealing the high modernist value within. If the real could be recovered from within the simulated text, it should be possible to postulate that the postmodern appearance of the novel could also undergo similar process. The exploration of the terrorists' strategy in the next chapter will prove that it is possible for the real to resurface from within the simulated sphere. The terrorists' explosion of realness provides an unlikely revelation that the suppressed notion of the real could emerge to sabotage the postmodern simulation theory.