

## Chapter 5

### The Return of the Real Reclusive Author

I have so far demonstrated how the terrorists are able to rescue the real from the image media, overturning the logic of simulation from within the sphere of image boundary. As farfetched as it may seem, it is possible to apply the terrorists' resistance strategy to the reading of *Mao II*, even with its surface narrative structure engineered toward the totality of simulation. The novel emphasizes the overwhelming power of the simulation process at every level of its structure from the incorporation of photographs and the characters' representation symbols. Consequently, what the readers see, read or take as an understanding of the text is the result of a pre-calculated gesture that ultimately leads to the acceptance of simulation as the norm. *Mao II's* elaborate literary structure makes it a true postmodern text because it gives the reader a front row seat to the simulacra. We are able to literally consume Baudrillard's and Jameson's simulation theory from surface reading of *Mao II* alone. Thus, it should be logical to generalize the novel as a "simulated text".

As hopeless as the situation appears to be, my assumption is that Bill Gray could recover the essence of realness from within the simulated text by replicating the terrorists' counter reproduction strategy. Before proceeding any further, I would like to recall the terrorists' counter-reproduction strategy. They are able to neutralize simulation process by re-projecting their image to be captured by the media, simultaneously inflicting real pain to the victims. Their strategy involves three parties

- the terrorists as the projector of the captured representation, the media as the enactment of the simulation process, and the victims who experiences the residue of the real that are supposed to be commodified. What the media captures is merely the image of terrorist, a depthless surface. The real terrorist dwells in the mind and the pain of the victims. The terrorists' existence on two levels of realities, one as a captured image and the other as a pain inflicting force, enables them to escape simulation and reinitiates the real at the same time. This method allows the terrorist to symbiotically exist with the media, maintaining a mutual relationship.

The terrorists' emergence from simulation verifies the essence of the real, overturning the seemingly indefinable monolithic simulation theory. The proven realness of the terrorists exposes the flaw in the simulation theory that the commodified image may not have captured the real entirely. The residue of the real that lingers beyond a photograph or a TV show is the personal experience and memory that exist in their own context, unrecorded, and have yet to be commodified.

Both the terrorist and Bill Gray are entities struggling in his own simulated boundaries – their own simulated mediums. They are rebels trying to project the real into the world. I have analyzed in the previous chapter how every portion of *Mao II* relentlessly attempts to commodify and eliminate Bill Gray's existence and his status as the representation of the real. However, I detect a small loophole that enables Bill Gray to perform the impossible recovery of the real. What he performs at the simulated textual level is similar to the terrorist's counter reproduction strategy. The only difference is that his recovery of the real is right at the moment of his death. Bill Gray's death works on a paradoxical logic. It is his death that affirms the essence of realness at the textual level – a gesture that triggers the remodernization of the

simulated text. The episode that I will be referring to is also one of the least discussed in *Mao II* literary criticisms, the conversation between Bill Gray and the veterinarians. He refers to himself as a character, describing his painful condition from a third person point of view, projecting the image of himself to be captured by the simulated text.

Bill Gray's fictionalization of the self marks the separation between the 'real' and the simulated. His conversation with the veterinarians finds him project himself as representation. His character is a projection of himself, an identical representation who "has a tendency to drink" (207) and is "hit by a car on a city street...[but] is generally okay" (206). This character will incidentally take an ocean voyage trip, a ferry trip to Beirut that the real Bill Gray is about to take as the plot progresses (209). This method splits the real Bill Gray as a person and the character Bill Gray apart. The fictionalization of the self then creates two separate realities. The first is the realities of the real Bill Gray who is projecting his representation, while the second is the simulated reality of the character that is being referred to.

Bill Gray's split self then exists in two textual plains: the simulated surface structure and the deep textual one. There are two levels of death: the death of Bill Gray as the mythical author, the surface image, and the death of the real Bill Gray as a person. This allows him to follow the terrorist's counter reproduction strategy of existing in two simultaneous realities. Through the fictionalization of the self, Bill Gray succeeds in projecting his representational image into the surface of the simulated text. Conversely, the real remains at the depth of the text. Hence, by dying, Bill Gray has paradoxically completed the resurrection of the real. The Bill Gray that dies at the surface simulated structure signifies nothing but the success of

simulation in capturing his depthless image. In his death, Bill Gray has succeeded to dismantle his mythical identity.

In fictionalizing himself, Bill Gray does not just mindlessly duplicate the terrorists' counter reproduction strategy. Despite its obvious magnitude of absurdity, the creation of another fictive Bill Gray is equivalent to the act of writing, the testament of the real author. In fact, this is the only time in the novel that he writes for us as he has been avoiding to sit down and work on his novel throughout the narrative. The act of writing is a gesture of un-representable realness of the author. However, Bill Gray is not aiming to write in order to "live" as the material he chooses as his subject is his death. The veterinarians inform us that this character will surely die and as the plot progresses, Bill Gray did not defy this prediction. On one level, his death is real as it is a literal manifestation of writing, an art that is supposed to be thrice removed from reality as it could not represent the real in the postmodern world. Hence, it can be stated that Bill Gray writes to materialize his real death. In doing so, he successfully salvages his realness of the self at a personal level.

When Bill Gray fictionalizes his self, he acknowledges its consequence perfectly. He knows that it is necessary if he wants to dislodge from his status as the mythical author and reclaim his realness essence. Ultimately, if Bill Gray knows that he must dislodge his mythical identity before achieving his preferred status of an individual, then along this line of logic, it means that he knows before hand the essence of realness exists in his context of the simulated text. It is just a matter of devising an appropriate method to achieve his goal, which is of course to follow the terrorist's strategy. Thus, it should be safe to say that Bill Gray chooses to die as an "individual" of his own freewill.

What has passed on at the ferry is the real Bill Gray as his mythical self continues to live on in Scott Martineu. He has certainly been simulated, there is no question about this fact. However, in his death the essence of realness makes an appearance. Bill Gray's death is a real death rather than the death of the real. In other words, we can say that Bill Gray's death on the simulated surface structure is staged, a fake cover-up for the reality that is happening underneath. The simulated narrative structure is merely showing us the image of Bill Gray's death. What has passed away is only the image of the mythical author. What the reader has witnessed during the initial sympathetic reading of *Mao II* is the death of Bill Gray as a captured depthless image - a Bill Gray II. Indeed, if we examine the death scene carefully, we can see how Bill Gray's death is never actually described in details. The passage rendering his passing on the ferry cabin is rife with the real Bill Gray's interior monologue but never the act of dying:

He could hear this breathing change, feel a slowness come upon him, familiar though never felt before, an old slow monotone out of the history of shallow breathing, deeply and totally known.

Measure your head before ordering.

His father. We need to have a confab, Junior.

He knew it completely. The glow, **the solus**. And it became the motion of the sea, the ship sailing morning ward toward the sun. (216, emphasis added)

If we accept that his death is real, the interior monologue is Bill Gray's personal memory – the testament of his status as a real individual. Bill Gray uses the word "solus" in describing his death from the narrative. This word carries a theatrical connotation as it is used to refer to a moment of the character exits from a play. The

allusion to the theater should bring to mind Bill Gray's admiration for Samuel Beckett as "the last writer to shape the way we think and see" (157). I have identified that when Bill Gray fictionalized himself, he shown us his awareness of his simulated textual surrounding. His use of the word "solus" as he passes into his death is not to give a tribute theatrical performance to Beckett. Instead, the word "solus" elaborates how he views his textual environment as a form of "play" rather than a novelistic one. I would like to say that Bill Gray's final thought successfully shows us the spatial nature of the text. Thinking along Bill Gray's frame of mind, the text is a kind of theatre, an abstract textual plain that the characters' exist and interact according to a predetermine plot progression. In his death, Bill Gray literally informs us that he has to die - it is an inevitable event bound to happen, a mechanism in a structually devised plot. By telling that his death is predetermined, he exposes that the text is just a "text", a fictive theatre created from a definite and tangible source, the "author" Don DeLillo, rather than just being pure simulation-generating machine that justifies its representational status through self-generated narrative progression. He knows the exact moment of his death and "[he] knew it completely" because it has been designated to him by the "author".

On a broader scale, it is possible to say that his real death, like the terrorists' infliction of pain to the victims, prompts a brief return of modernity, whence the essence of the real is materialized to expose the flaw of the simulated text. His death justifies that the notion of the privileged real is graspable even in the postmodern context through the identification of one's own personal experience, memory and consciousness. His real death does not generate a return to modernity. Rather, it neutralizes the monolithic perception toward simulation, which leans toward the

totality of the image pole. Bill Gray's relationship with the simulated text is similar to that of the terrorists and the media – an endless chase of cat and mouse in which the simulation can never fully eliminate the real completely. The persistence of the hunted real will always remain as the source of constant tension within the simulation context.

Bill Gray's death leads to the reincarnation of the real author, Don DeLillo, who directs the play of the characters and the plot progression. From this framework, it is as if Don DeLillo manages to write a postmodern novel that challenges and redefines even its own genre classification. What *Mao II* presents is the realness of the author through its simulated surface structure. The presence of Don DeLillo allows us to look at the simulated in a different light. I have analyzed in chapter 3 that the simulated narrative, especially the linear progression of the novel, creates a sense of false completion because the motion of time is distorted. The emergence of Brita, from a linear narrative progression that places Bill Gray's narrative in a mythical past, only serves to reinforce the inevitability of simulation. On the contrary, the presence of the real DeLillo alerts us to the fact that the distorted linear progression is entirely of his accord.

The consistency of the real could be pushed to further illustrate the resistance of the real at narrative level. DeLillo creates a narrative that reproduces itself in circular motion that resists against the simulated linear narrative. The narrative reproduction will start from Brita's quest in "In Beirut." The analysis will show how, despite the denial of narrative connection at the surface level, the narrative in this chapter stealthily binds with the rest of the novel to form a perfect narrative apparatus. It is possible to say that Brita, as the protagonist of the chapter, intentionally replicates

the terrorists' counter reproduction strategy by acting as the reference point for the real, therefore, overturning the attempt of the simulated narrative to obscure the notion of the real.

“In Beirut” opens with a taunt to justify the simulation of the surface narrative structure. The part opens with Brita's remembrance of her conversation with the Beirut cap driver who “[told] her three stories:”

First one, people are burning tires. In the midst of car bombs and street skirmishes and the smash of long range field guns...people are burning tires to drive away mosquitoes and flies.

Second, a pair of local militaries are firing at portraits of each other's leader. These are large photographs pasted to walls or hanging from awning poles...There is a new exuberance in these particular streets, based on this latest form of fighting.

Last, they are making bombs contain flooring nails and roofing nails. The police are finding quantities of common nails, nails sprayed and dashed and driven into bodies of victims of random blasts. (217)

Brita quickly disregards the cap driver's stories to be of little relevance. She thinks that “[s]he has come here already tired of these stories, including the ones she has never heard. They're all the same and all true and it is sad that they are necessary. And they almost always exasperate her, especially the stories about terror groups that issue press credentials” (228). The disunity of the three stories could be interpreted as

a reflection of the novel entire surface simulated structure as both are disconnected in space and time continuum, or lacking a reference of the real, to be exact.

The confirmation of the real in the narrative is conducted through identifying the characters' memories strand that bypasses the distorted time frame. When Brita says that she "does not photograph writers anymore. It stopped making sense. She takes assignments now, does the interesting things, barely watching wars, children running in the dust" (229), in her denial she also triggers a moment of narrative circulation. The very moment she admits that she used to "photograph writers" her denial resonates the existence of the real Bill Gray, who is supposed to be a myth and mere commodity in the novel's simulated surface structure. In her denial she also initiates the process of narrative reproduction, confirming the essence of Bill Gray's realness, confirming that there is in fact a certain level of truth to back up the myth. Hence, it is not the act of speaking that returns the real to the narrative but the act of recollection. Bill Gray's mythological narrative is made real through the confirmation of Brita's memory. By denying the story of Bill Gray, which is presented in a form of myth, the third installment of the narrative manage to perform the impossible as it managed to fold time back on itself at a narrative level – a moment of referential of the real. In her memory, she projects for us the realness of Bill Gray's mythological narrative. Consequently, the narrative of *Mao II* becomes a narrative that narrates itself. It does not just tell the story of characters but also, in another level of depth, manages to confirm that its existence in the episodes orates itself in a kind of continuous circular motion, not a singular monolithic linear one.

The chain of continuous oratory links together the essence of the real beyond the simulated form of presentation. In the second part, when Scott reminiscence

Karen's past, his memories synchronize to the events occurred in the first chapter. Scott's memory does not tell his personal experience but contains the residue of Karen's wedding at the Yankee stadium. Scott recalls that Karen "often thought of her husband, Kim, who was attached to a mission in England, the husband she didn't know" (78). The connective embedding is complete when Scott manages to fill in the blank between the real event in "At the Yankee Stadium" and his residing simulated narrative parts. The real emerges as Scott recollects how Karen's father, Rodge, is waiting to interrogate and brainwash his daughter in a hotel room (79). Rodge finally finds his daughter who is lost among the indistinguishable "eternal boy-girl, stepping out of the runway beyond the fence in left-center field" (3) in Scott's memory as the narratives unite, echoing back and fourth beyond the distorted space and time continuum. Despite the space and time distortion, the narratives exist in a form of memories, beyond the images and photographs, link together through personal experiences and words, privileged and real to the individuals. Her multiple appearances in the novel simulated structure suggest that Karen, as an individual, carries the notion of the crowd through multiple strands of time. It is a gesture that reinforces the power of narrative and the essence of the real over the presupposed domineering postmodern simulated condition. The same Karen echoes the being of one another, confirming each of her individual existence. Thus, the narrative reproduction, therefore, is a justification of personal identity, the authenticity of the self.

The core of *Mao II* textual simulation stems from simulated narrative progression that falsifies the monolithic reading of the novel – the depthless oneness narrative structure that generates the entire simulation process. The textual simulation

functions on false unification of disconnected narrative parts appearing as a singular narrative stream. Thus, the dissection and identification of the deep narrative structure from within sphere of textual simulation will not only reconstruct the notion of the real but also recover the modernist essence of individuality from the simulated crowd. The conceptualization of the narrative depth should stand as a concrete manifestation of the real and the high modernist spirit in the novel. The reemerging Karen, is in itself, the counter-reproduction method similar to that employed by the terrorists, which prompts the return of the realness essence at the narrative level. The slight difference is that the process is not conducted at the image-level but at the narrative one. Her role is identical to that of Bill Gray. She also performs the function of an individual who echoes the existence of the other narrative streams that exist in different space and time. Taking what Karen represents into the narrative context, it is quite plausible to say that the haunting remark of “the future belongs to the crowd” in the first part is referring to a deeper narrative level rather than the simulated surface one. Karen is a physical manifestation of the crowd of narrative because she contains both the notion of the crowd and acts as the vessel of individuality. The linkage between the first Karen and the second in two different narrative parts suggests that they are connected through the act of writing – DeLillo’s personal time as the “author” of the novel. Karen is a symbol of different kinds because she represents the structure of the narrative instead of literary symbol. She serves as a missing link that binds the concept of individuality and the real at the representational and narrative depth together to the point where both concepts become inseparable. In Karen, the individual is distinguishable among the crowd.

One could say that DeLillo is writing a novel of different spatial time altogether than what is initially presented at the surface narrative structure. As a matter of fact, DeLillo creates a circular narrative continuity that flows endlessly - a narrative progression without a clear definite ending that captures the very act of “live” writing itself. Consequently, this narrative structure not only negates the foregrounding of the text's simulated linear structure but also very idea of simulation at the textual level. The circular narrative structure establishes a text that manages to write itself - a continuous act of writing as it flows endlessly without ends. It is a time that belongs solely to the author who is able to control the time in his narrative. It is a returning of the real to the simulated text.

*Mao II* is arguably DeLillo's high modernist achievement, a novel that continuously writes itself toward the innocence and pure play of form experimentation in the veins of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. With DeLillo's presence taken into consideration, the sudden time shift, a foregrounding of the simulated pole of representation at the surface structure, become a testimony of DeLillo's complete mastery of the text. When Bill Gray reminisces of his childhood he says that he “used to announce ballgames to myself. I sat in a room and made up the games and described the play-by-play out loud. I was the players, the announcer, the crowd, the listening audience and the radio. There hasn't been a moment since those days when I've felt nearly so good” (46). This particular memory is important to Bill Gray because he has been “trying to write toward that kind of innocence ever since. The pure game of making up. You sit there suspended in a perfect clarity of invention...Everything is seamless and transparent. And it's completely spontaneous. It's the lost game of self, without doubt or fear” (46). The emotional connection

between writing and Bill Gray's childhood reminiscence is a projection of invention and originality rather than an act of typing on paper for it to commodify later.

He does not strive to write a novel. Writing, for Bill Gray, carries a more significant notion than putting ink on paper and hope for the mediums to influence the mass mind. The novel is merely a medium to project an individual thought, a vessel of realness affirmation. To him, writing is the reaffirmation of the real, the very essence of a high modernist author. His desire to reclaim "that kind of innocence" is a return toward the essence of authenticity or originality, a way to return the essence of the real to the world in any shape or form. What Bill Gray accomplishes is a return to authenticity. The deep narrative structure of *Mao II* sees a return to innocence state of narrative oration and personal connection, unhindered by the process of simulation. Bill Gray performs the "pure game of making up" as he projects his representations during his conversation with the veterinaries, a gesture that triggers a recovery of the real in the simulated text. Ultimately, writing is glorified as a grand gesture that prompts a burst of authenticity of the self. Bill Gray may have given up his belief in writing as a craft and as a commodifiable representation. However, he still has hope for the essence of authenticity, the originality an individual can create. Bill Gray emphasizes his belief on the essence of realness and authenticity in his conversation with George Haddad. He assures that "anybody can write a great novel" as an individual possesses "[the] spray of talent, the spray of ideas. One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next" (159). Bill Gray's firmness implies that anyone can perform a return to the real or to affirm their place in the world – to retain the essence of individual identity. Anyone can be a distinguishable individual among the

crowd just as he is able to separate his realness - essence from the grip of the simulated text.

When Bill Gray mentions that his goal in writing is to write toward “innocence” he clearly echoes DeLillo's ability as the real author. DeLillo shows a total control of his novel, a theatre of experimentation. He controls the plot progression and the time of the narrative. As previously analyzed, the residue of his realness could even be found in the text. Indeed, his high modernist playfulness reaches its peak as he literally makes an appearance in the novel. His moment of godliness is in the final scene where Brita captures Beirut with her photographic eyes. Let us once again return to the excerpt that seems to highlight the simulated domination:

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 sound. **What could it be then if not the start of the day's first exchange of automatic-weapons fire? Only one thing of course. Someone is out there with a camera and a flash unit.** ...The dead city photographed one more time. (241, emphasis added)

Here, Brita's speculation could have been DeLillo's as its casualness hints at the narrator's omniscience knowingness. There is no hesitation or doubt that the flash in the dark might have been something else beside “a flash from a camera.” The narrator is certain because he is DeLillo who paints the picture of a representational struggle, a game of camera men pursuing their quest to capture the real. This scene, when taken out of the circular narrative context, is literally DeLillo's finished pieced

of writing. Thus, the “dead city” that Brita captures with her photographic eyes is not the real Beirut but an image of Bill Gray's writing - a scene of high modernist literariness. Hence, it can be said that the all imposing power of photography is neutralized in DeLillo's writing. Brita's photograph is comparable to the relationship between picture and writing outside of the novel - thrice removed from reality.

To complete the analytical loop, the presence of DeLillo prompts us to look at the novel in a grander scheme. If the real DeLillo is detectable outside of the text, then one could also say that this is because the novel also functions as a metaphorical photograph that captures the image of the real DeLillo. This proves that *Mao II* is a novel of tension and depth as the relationship between the real and the simulated denies absolutism on every level. Ultimately, what is being threatened the most in *Mao II* is its status as a postmodern novel as the modern values such as the real, the author and the high modernist art maintain perfect parallelism with the postmodern one. To rectify this ambiguity, I would like to propose that *Mao II* is a novel of plurality, in which the crowd of representational ideas and differences exist in a state of competing unity. It is not a regression into the modern as the struggling tension between the poles of representational differences will always remain, perhaps in a state of perpetual playfulness rather than a celebration of one extreme.

The analysis of *Mao II* deep narrative structure shows that Bill Gray restores the real to his identity and the simulated text. His overturning of the simulation process deserves recognition. By replicating the terrorists' counter reproduction strategy, Bill Gray accomplishes his quest to reclaim the mass mind, our attention, through his modernist writing. The act of terrorism, which prompts to the recovery of the real in *Mao II* is a modernist gesture. The terrorists' assault on the postmodern

image world sparks a fragment of reality, triggering real fear to the mass mind. To the victims, the terrorists are as real as their pains. In the victims' minds, the terrorists are privileged individuals. As ironic as it may sound, the presence of the terrorists return the notion of the real to the postmodern world. The term authenticity is still valuable when associated with the terrorists as the infliction of death and pain becomes a modernist grand stance. Both Bill Gray and the terrorists manage to remodernize their own respective mediums. Now I am not trying to reestablish *Mao II* as some sort of modern novel or a piece of avant-garde art. Unfortunately the return to modernity is impossible. Likewise, the total recuperation of the real is out of the question. What I mean by remodernizing is an act of affirmation in identifying the essence of realness in the postmodern image world. It is a gesture of defiance toward the monolithic simulation framework, in which the presence of the real is entirely denied. The remodernization of the terrorist and the author solely reminds us there is an original *Mao*, a real human figure in history and the mass mind. Mao should not be identified and authenticated as merely Warhol's pop-art or as a silk-screen graphic on a teenager's t-shirt. In doing so it would be a gesture of disrespect toward the memory and experience of the people who are touched by the presence of the real Mao – a denial of individuality.