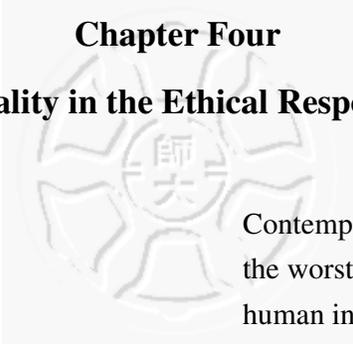


## Chapter Four

### Individuality in the Ethical Responsibility



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

(Lentricchia 243)

An image is a crowd in a way, a smear of impressions.

Images tend to draw people together, create mass identity.

(DeLillo 1993b: 72-73)

*Mao II*, focusing on the ethical relation with the language of the image as the Other, evokes great concern on the possibility of individuality.<sup>1</sup> In the postmodern age “commonly understood being awash with images” (Campbell 99), man is inevitably confronted with numerous and various images prevailing on such media as photography, TV<sup>2</sup>, and those visually construed in daily life. The dominating role of

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<sup>1</sup> In the following discussion of this chapter, the recurrent ideas of the self, the subject and the subjectivity might seem confusing since different theorists would have their own intention or preference in talking about certain states of man. Generally speaking, the self is the general state of a person, often used in contrast with the Other. As for the subject, it refers to the Cartesian modern subject which is based on autonomy, self-sufficiency and rationality and especially marked by distinct boundaries. Modern subject “is not only inscribed through a dualism between self and other, but also between here and there, via the spatialization of inclusion and exclusion, presence and absence, and the specification of what is ‘in-place’ and ‘out-of-place’ . . . In sum, the subject of modern ethics is a subject fundamentally constituted through the maintenance of boundaries, both social and spatial” (Popke 2003: 302). In contrast, subjectivity is a more commonly-used term in contemporary theory which no longer believes in monad-like modern subject. It refers to the state of the subject, evanescent and contingent like a flow of stream or energy. To envision the center of the self becomes a mere impossibility. In a sense, Levinas contends the decentered or indeterminate state of the subject. However, obviously ethically concerned, Levinas’s subjectivity lays more emphasis on the overwhelmed and absolute passivity of the self in face of the Other. And, the individuality here designates the possibility of the self to exert himself as an individual with their own unique creativity or originality in responding to the Other. It is a notion which has to be concerned along with that of singularity in which the self takes every confrontation with the Other as a singular or non-repetitive chance to act out his individuality. The idea of individuality aims to explore its distinction from Levinasian subjectivity which focuses on the for-the-Other responsibility of the self and neglects the significance of the self’s individual or singular response to the Other.

<sup>2</sup> Images here include those on TV, those presented on photographs as well as those people construed

the images has been confirmed in Susan Sontag's observation of the historical transformation of images which goes from "Plato's evoking the standard of an image-free way of apprehending the real" through "the age (the mid-nineteenth century) of unbelief strengthen[ing] the allegiances to images" to the society of the twentieth century when

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

Indispensable and unavoidable to life, images are not a mere representation or preservation of scenes that constitute our life. Instead, they make up the reality for us to respond to. However, DeLillo in *Mao II*, going beyond the widely-discussed issue of the blurred distinction between the real and the representational, works on an extended but more immediate dimension—how man is going to situate himself amid the world of encompassing images, which pose great threat to one's individuality. As the image, according to DeLillo, involves quite complicated facets and forceful impacts on the notion of the self as well as the possibility of individuality, what the chapter foregrounds is the ethical response to the image which is conducive to the exploration of individuality with the notion of the crowd essentially embedded in the image.

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in daily life like those of the political or religious leaders evidently presented in the novel. Yet, the media are not the major concern of the discussion of the images; instead, the focus falls on the image emitted from the media and, more importantly, acting as an essential counterpart or the Other that the self responds to. Still, DeLillo starts from the photographic images, since photography would present a more concrete and fixed entity people respond to than the images on TV. That also corresponds to DeLillo's idea of image which seemingly extends from the concrete to the abstract.

DeLillo makes both a detour and a unique exploration of the image with the idea of the crowd. He demonstrates how the image makes an essential nexus of the social or inter-personal relations and raises our awareness of how the crowd forges and asserts itself in it. A repeated phrase—“the future belongs to the crowd”—stresses its future-oriented nature which opens up a variable and even a menace to the integrity of individuality. DeLillo observes that

[t]here is something about a crowd which suggests a sort of implicit panic even when it's a friendly crowd. There's something menacing and violent about a mass of people which makes us think of the end of individuality whether they are gathered around a military leader or around a holy man. . . . The photographic image is a kind of crowd in itself, a jumble of impressions very different from a book in which the printed lines follow one another in a linear order. There's something in the image that seems to collide with the very idea of individual identity. (1993a: 110)

Focusing on the photograph and also presenting the characters' immersing themselves in the charisma of the heroic figures on TV or in real life, *Mao II* does impress the readers with the impact of the crowd *in* and *out* of the image. The crowd makes distinct DeLillo's distinct perspective of the image vs. the individual. The crowd becomes a central concern in DeLillo's social context. DeLillo associates the crowd with the effect of the image which besieges the individual and makes an inevitable confrontation. DeLillo's notion of the crowd embedded in the image works on different levels. First, their complex and intricate interaction occurs when the image of the crowd appears in daily life. It makes up the sense of a unitary identification with certain figure or leader, with whom the self initiates his paradoxical tug of war between the mass identity and individuality. Second, a more delicate observation of

the image of the crowd is demonstrated in photography, the axis of *Mao II*. Different angles are engaged to examine the intricacies of the crowd in the image vs. individuality—receptively from the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer. All have their tactics in dealing with the self-devouring or self-dissolving power implicated in the photographic image. A more cryptic level of the image of the crowd is examined from a more fascinating arena—writing. It is through the integrated plot that DeLillo confronts and confesses the reflective writing in which the writer writes by dissolving himself and creating another image. DeLillo's examination of the image of the crowd in writing is done in a self-deferring device as Bill the writer in *Mao II* made himself a character of his writing and renewed his self perceptions, an-*other* image of the self. That is, the image does not necessarily mean the practical embodiment of an actuality or a replicated one but an *imagined* entity to which the individual is obliged to respond to. Hence, DeLillo's observation of the image as the Other has been centered on the drama of the self's responding to the menacing *crowd* implied in images and, more importantly, aims to present the possibility of individuality in the ethical responsibility.

### **I. The Self: Suspended or Sustained?**

The individuality does not aim at the demarcating the boundary between the self and the Other since the ethical relation with the Other goes beyond the possibility of differentiation as discussed in the previous chapters. In *Mao II*, DeLillo's delving into the self's individuality mainly focuses on how the response or responsibility for the Other reveals about the self. The individuality thus refers to the self-assertion in the ethical responsibility which is preconscious but original and creative enough to cast new meanings or possibilities into life. It is the ethical stance that DeLillo applies to work out the postmodern dilemma. In other words, DeLillo neither draws

a dead end for the self nor promises a self-sufficient or self-autonomous subject. Even though the self is revealed as for-the-Other in terms of Levinas's account of proximity and diachrony in *The Names* and *White Noise*, DeLillo's examination of the ethics does not seize at the self's confrontation or obsession with the overwhelming Other which is marked by the radical passivity and vulnerability of the self. Instead, DeLillo's effort in literary creation is meant to continue his *individual* exploration of how the self oscillates between a completely nullified possibility and the hardly sustained self-autonomy.

Much meditation and animated discussion over the self have been made among postmodern theorists. However divergent their arguments appear in Jameson's claim of "the death of the modern subject," Deleuze's nomadic subject<sup>3</sup> or Lyotard's notion of the subject in the pagan games,<sup>4</sup> a persistent implication of the loss of the self-autonomy and self-sufficiency is stressed, while the self, provisional and contingent, is besieged with uncertainty and indeterminacy. The self is hollowed out since the subject is no longer a guaranteed identity or integrity. DeLillo's *Mao II*, continuing his concern about the ethical structure, shifts the focus from the dominant

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze's notion of the schizophrenic state of being is based on the tripartite theoretical background comprising the desiring-machine, the body without organs, and the nomadic subject. Yet, these three components are in separate but interconnected relations. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze regards man no longer as an integrated or consistent entity but as a desire-producing machine which reveals that "the unconscious is less a theatre than a factory" which features in functionalism. Yet, the functionalism is "one devoid of reference to goals, efficiency, or systematic unity" (Bogue 91-92). And the body without organs refers to a body with parts unrelated to any integrity or whole. Every part is considered a desiring machine, which "evolves and involves through weak and strong intensities and through active and passive affects." Thus, the nomadic subject designates a self resisting any identity or interiority, "exist[ing] as a mode of intensity, never simply as a personal subject" (Pearson 97). In Deleuze's ethical configuration, it is less meant to talk about the relation between self and the Other than to foreground a fluid, provisional, and evanescent state of the subject.

<sup>4</sup> Different from Deleuze's notion of man in terms of desire-producing machine, Lyotard's idea of pagan games is his actual attempt to emancipate from the oppression of the grand narratives as so-called truth or knowledge prescribes the modern ethics. With incredulity to the universal criteria, Lyotard claims that being pagan is the route to justice. That is, pagans are themselves adding as many new possibilities and otherness as they can to the world, which could not be assessed or prescribed before the gaming. It is greatly different from Levinas's notion of the self's responsibility or response to the Other. The subject of the pagan is more a pastiche of moves derived from various games than a picture of wholeness.

Other to the individuality of the self. What is conspicuous about *Mao II* is his effort in presenting how the ambiance of the postmodern culture solicits and even stimulates the self's individuality aside from the confirmation of the self's vulnerability and absolute passivity. Simply put, the focus of *Mao II* tracks the self journeying through the image-suffused society in which daily perception of the real is either abnormally expanded or diminished in the image configuration. However, man, though in a sense confronted with the image as the Other, demonstrates new possibilities with his or her own singularity or individuality asserted.

The significance of the ethical contour in *Mao II* sheds light on another aspect which Emmanuel Levinas leaves ambiguous—whether Levinasian ethics designates an ethical self who turns out to be nothing less than a mere fluid and provisional makeup. The gray area starts with his taking ethics as a “depersonalizing exigency,” meant to react against the excessive stress on the autonomy and independence of the self. He maintains, “I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an ‘I’, precisely because I am exposed to the other. . . . I become a responsible or ethical ‘I’ to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself—to abdicate my position of centrality—in favour of the vulnerable other. . .” (Ferreira 456). Levinas's notion of the ethical “I” is based on one's agreement to give up the central position; yet, the agreement implies a paradoxical possibility—to give in the self or not. Basically, we believe that the face of the Other leaves the self in a passive and vulnerable manner. That might be the first phase of the ethical confrontation; few Levinasian arguments work on how the Other stimulates the self to react or response. The critique of Levinas's Other-centered ethics falls into two camps: one corresponds to the death of the subject which is marked by the end of self-consciousness, while the other reserves the possibility of the subject in claiming the existence of the self-consciousness. William Large stresses the engulfing power of the Other with the self totally immersed

and even replaced, regarding the self as an experience of being Other :

I experience myself no longer as a self, but as something other. I become other to myself to such an extent that in this experience we can no longer speak of an “I” or a “myself.” I am so completely engulfed by the milieu of being that there is no longer the possibility of discovering beneath the self of the public world a more authentic self. Even the possibilities of my being are withdrawn from me. (large 137)

With the self becoming his own other, the self is dethroned and deconstructed to the extent that the possibility of the subject is completely denied. The self becomes the medium or incarnation of the Other with little sense of him-*self* sustained. The observation of the seemingly uni-lateral structure is echoed in Paul Ricoeur’s comment on Levinas, whose “entire philosophy rests on the initiative of the other in the intersubjective relation” (188), contributing to the highly questioned and almost completely erased self-esteem. David Ford further points out that Levinas “fails to distinguish the ‘self’ from the ‘I,’ and he therefore ends up with a dissymmetry between self and other which amounts to a lack of relation and to the sterility of interiority. . . . In Levinas there is no return from the other to self-affirmation in the mode of self-esteem and conviction” (Ford 95). The target of their critique is aimed at Levinas’s over-emphasis on the Other in the ethical relation, as the self characterized by the ethical vulnerability and passivity barely has any room to assert himself. Ford harshly criticizes Levinas’s ethical configuration as an exclusively Other-oriented drama. Nonetheless, their anxiety over Levinas’s ethics might imply their insistence on the possibility or capability of the self in the postmodern era, implying that the subject should not be totally deprived of his self-autonomy, or sense of reality.

The other camp of the critics, nevertheless, has a different reading of Levinas

which insists on Levinas's attenuation of the self whose interaction with the Other, instead, guarantees the existence of the self's subjectivity. Levinas takes the shattering of the self in face of the other as "breaking up the limits of identity, breaking up the principle of being in me" as well as "the impossibility to come back from all things and concern oneself only with oneself" (2000b: 114). Prominently, he aims to undermine the idea that the self is equipped with a fixed or recognizable identity but does not go so far as to claim the loss of the self. Per Nortvedt affirms that Levinasian ethics is not meant to illustrate the loss of the subject or the self in face of the other, taking the either/or extremes. Instead, it is "the awakening of subjectivity in the absence of interpretational consciousness. . . .Ethics is the awakening of consciousness in the concrete experience of vulnerability. Ethics is the traumatic awakening of a consciousness no longer for itself, but before the other" (227). Paradoxically, ethics involves both the suspension of the designating or intentional consciousness and the awareness of one's vulnerability and passivity before the Other. The consciousness is not completely eliminated but in a sense suspended and sustained with the awareness of the presence of the Other. That is the state of the self termed as subjectivity that accounts for Levinasian subjectivity. According to Levinas, "Subjectivity is sensibility—an exposure to others, a vulnerability and a responsibility in the proximity of the others, the one-for-the-other" (2000b: 77). The statement points out one especially significant message—subjectivity does not indicate a self-referential state but an Other-concerned or Other-pivoted relation. Nevertheless, what crucially matters is the responsibility, a property that would channel us into deeper understanding of the self. That is, the awareness of the inevitable confrontation of the Other is accompanied by the self's responsibility for the Other and followed by the self's response to the Other. And, it is from the self's responsibility for and response to the

Other that the state of the self is observed. With a more provocative reading of Levinas's responsibility for the Other, Stanvan Hooft remarks that Levinas's refutation of the "death of the subject" and the relativism that comes in its wake is done by "reaffirming the active and creative nature of subjectivity" (236). Greatly different from other critics, his comment sketches Levinas's ethics in his both/and strategy concerning the subject, trying to account for Levinas's way out of the antagonism between the modern subject and the toll of its death in the postmodern. That perspective, in accord with Levinas's ethical contour, points out that the self's responsibility for the Other goes before the self-consciousness and it is the responsibility that makes possible his notion of subjectivity. Levinas's ground for this creative and meaning-making role for subjectivity is not the Ego, but the Other. It is by responding to the ethical demand placed upon subjectivity by the nakedness, vulnerability and absoluteness of the Other, that the self comes to itself. It is not the reflexivity of consciousness that establishes subjectivity but the call that the Other places upon me. (Hooft 236)

Hence, the ethical relation which awakes subjectivity or consciousness does not stem from the self-for-self base but takes its route from the Other to the self, which breaks the myth of totality and self-sufficiency and opens the self to the invincible and incomprehensible power of the Other. With the *Other* route to the self, responsibility would make up the first and foremost characteristic of subjectivity--'the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity' (1985: 95). The responsibility, except attesting to the existence of the Other, solidifies the status of the self in terms of his individuality and answerability to the Other as Levinas elaborates that "[i]t is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual 'I'" (Levinas and Kearney 27). Levinas's account of responsibility does

not rule out the possibility for the self as a possibility of individuality. Instead, it marks an “I” or “Ego” who no longer acts as an homogeneous agent or unitary center but a heteronomous being which is “an experience without the content of the experience being known to the subject or returning to the subject’s intentional efforts. It is an experience of radical alterity, or what Levinas in later works also calls radical absence” (Nortvedt 226). This perspective confirms that the sense of the self comes from the awareness of the responsibility for the Other—the ethical goes before any self-recognition. The self, straddled in an ethical relation, subsequently asserts his individuality in answering the Other.

The heteronomous experience implicates a significant message—we could no longer work on Levinasian subjectivity without taking into consideration the self’s response to the Other. However, the route is not initiated from the self to the Other but the other way around, as Nancy Levene notes. “It is rather difference, the Other, the Infinite, that in fact configures egoism in the first place. The self is never quite alone, even at home, even in the beginning” (Levene 48). In terms of Levinasian subjectivity, the relation with the Other precedes any notion of “ego” or “I.” That is, the ethical bond, therefore, is “anterior” to every *a priori* determination of totality and identity; it is the “immemorial” source of all constitutive social ontologies, which *anarchically* re-emerge in the transcendent pathos of moral feeling (Abbinett 96). Levene’s and Abbinett’s reading of Levinas’s subjectivity significantly brings up not merely the precedence of the ethical relation but the subjectivity in which “I” and “ego” work with certain extent of self-consciousness in reacting and responding. Yet, what is lacking in the ethical structure is the elaboration of how the self’s responsibility establishes the self’s individuality or singularity in the wake of the subjectivity (the exposure to the Other) along with the response to the ethical relation (the response to the Other).

With a view to exploring individuality amid the world of image, DeLillo in *Mao* focuses his ethical concern on the self's responsibility towards the Other. The attempt no longer lays emphasis on the self-for-the-Other but raises the awareness of the individuality of the ethical self. Interestingly, to discern if the self has the potentiality to assert himself, DeLillo makes image the ethical arena by implicating the notion of crowd in the image. With image, DeLillo presents the collision between the self in the ethical responsibility and the crowd in the image. Yet, to DeLillo, the image that the self responds to includes the empirical, the mediated, and even the imagined. That is, DeLillo means to depict a complicated relation between the crowd and the image which at once incorporate and construe each other as it would be elaborated in the following section. The ethical Other designates a process both from the crowd to the image and the image to the crowd, which at the same time complicates the individuality of the self indicating differences in ethical responsibility.

## **II. *Mao II*: The Wor(l)d of Image**

Compared with *The Names* and *White Noise* in which DeLillo lays much stress on the dominance of the Other over the self, the focus of *Mao II*, is placed upon individual's reaction and responsibility to the language of image. Similarly equipped with a postmodern setting, *Mao II* demonstrates how the self, the other end of the ethical bond, struggles for a space of his own under the encompassing *image* initiated by photography, making the prominent tone in the postmodern age. It first indicates a sensual revolution which releases people from the original spatial and temporal constraints and enables them to contact things, far and wide, absent and present, and real and fictional. Ostensibly, it refers to something which is reproducible and replaceable as works of Andy Warhols were repetitively mentioned in the novel. It flattens the meaning that the original aspires to as Benjamin contends that the image

in technical-reproducibility results in the decay of the aura that is originally accumulated in the social rituals and defined as “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be” (1968: 222). Besides, it registers a *super*-human power of another kind as Benjamin comments on photography: first, “photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape natural vision. Secondly, technical reproduction can apply the copy of the original to situations which would be out of reach for the original itself” (Benjamin 1968: 220). The image provides an access to what is originally unattainable in personal contact and, more amazingly, expands its impact in life as ubiquitous existence along with our daily life. That implies an otherness to the self while the image makes a confrontation with something unexpected and unknown instead of a firm grasp of the actuality. That is, photography, deterring and deferring the reach to the original, reveals something additional to our perception. As people’s sensory or experiential perception seemingly has been reduced or flattened to the visual, screened and framed, Lyotard extends Benjamin’s argument on photography, considering it “*too beautiful*.” The image designates, aside from the decline of the aura, the end of experience which is “doubtless the end of the subjective infinite . . . the concretization of an anonymous infinite that ceaselessly organizes and disorganizes the world, and of which the individual subject . . . is the voluntary or involuntary servant” (Lyotard 1991: 123). With the realization of the infinite technological reproduction and dissemination, man could only passively respond to the image as the ethical Other as Lyotard has noticed how the images emitted from the camera would dethrone, or at least sway, man’s status in the world. The status concerns his being active or passive in taking or presenting the images. Frequent is the case that the distinction is blurred as the encounter between man and the images involves complicate interaction since man ostensibly takes what the images present

but meanwhile strongly perceives what overflows the intended in the images. *Mao II*, a depiction of the world of image, does concern itself about how man is besieged with the overwhelming power of image; yet, DeLillo furthers his observation of the image in terms of its otherness and alterity which connotes an image-related or image-derived notion of the crowd. And, ethically speaking, it is especially from the image of the crowd or the crowd of the image that DeLillo sets out his exploration of the possibility of individuality in terms of the ethical responsibility. Hence, before going onto the self's responsibility, we have to be aware that the image and the crowd make two sides of the same coin, instead of a causal relationship: while the image implies a crowd, the crowd also suggests an image that engages the self.

#### **A. Critique of *Mao II***

Few critics do not take note of the image world in *Mao II*; yet, differences take place in the critics' perspectives regarding the (im)possibility of the individuality. According to Thomas Carmichael, "DeLillo began *Mao II* in response to two photos, one of J. D. Salinger being surprised by photographers, and one of a mass wedding led by Reverend Moon" (Hardack 384). The novel is initiated by DeLillo's response to these two images which are found integrated into the major scenes in *Mao II*. The ubiquitous demand for response to the image is exactly what confronts characters in the novel. They are situated in a world of image not merely requiring the self's reaction but empirically immersing the self in the crowd or the mass. With Brita's seemingly intrusive and dominating manner to photograph Bill the writer and the opening image of the mass wedding, Laura Barrett treats the image as a threat to individuality and remarks that the photographs do not reflect but replace Bill—it is a claim of "the demise of the individual in the reproduction of photographs of crowds . . . reject the possibility of uniqueness" (1999: 797). In addition, the image

is far from a transparent representation which allows personal perspectives and interpretations. Rather, “photographs affect our notions of who we are and how we see. . . . every image we see has been shaped by someone else’s vision: every image is a representation” (Barrett 1999: 803). The image represents and substitutes the original and denies the possibility of individuality. Likewise, Joe Moran then relates DeLillo’s foregrounding of the loss of individuality to “the loss of a ‘depth model’ of human personality” in postmodern culture and contends that Bill’s consent to Brita’s request for a photograph indicates his realization of his powerlessness “to avoid the media’s unremitting glare” (142). As Barrett and Moran observe, characters in *Mao II* were helplessly and unknowingly cast and incorporated into the world of image in which the self’s individuality was highly questioned or even eroded.

Still, in face of the invincible and consuming power of the image world, some critics interpret it as a state of the divided or contingent nature of the self forged in the postmodern ethical scenario. Jeffrey S. Bull does not take *Mao II* as the war between two polar ends. Instead, he attends to the diverse and contesting forces or discourses presented. He agrees to the ideas of David Lodge and Frank Lentricchia as the former thinks the novel “display[s] all the passions and contradictions that politics and religion engender and set conflicts between characters and ideas” and the latter refers to DeLillo’s fiction as “irredeemably heterogeneous texture” (Bull 218-19). Immersed in such a social fabric, characters in *Mao II* were “at the mercy of contingencies” (Bull 220). Fractured or provisional, the subjectivity of the self is affirmed in a sense without being completely devoured in the image. It corresponds to Hooft’s and Levene’s readings of the self in terms of Levinas’s the self-for-the-Other ethics. In spite of the self with the evanescent or provisional existence, they still lay much emphasis on the Other without probing into how the self reacts or responds and what kind of message these reactions or responses would

convey. According to Richard Hardack, “Don DeLillo stages a battle between the notion of the individual Western identity and that of a ‘mass-produced’ foreign conscious” (374), since “anything photographed . . . already exists in duplicate. It has joined the impersonal mass, is no longer individual . . . (It) replaces the soul of the unique original” (379). The photograph, as that of Bill, has him undergo self-divisions, shattering the supposedly pre-determined integrity or unity. It is a remarkable observation about the self-alienating process; what’s more, Hardack mentions a significant factor which undermines the individuality—the confrontation with the crowd or mass by dint of encountering a mediated image. However, Hardack does not give much elaboration on the ethical relation between the self and the duplicated image from which a relation with the crowd is derived and greatly matters.

With the substituting or self-alienating character of the image, the critique generally focuses on either the consequent loss of individuality or the contingency of the self. However, *Mao II* conveys an ethical configuration which is based on the relation between the self and the image while the latter implies a notion of the crowd, the antithetical idea of being an individual. With that, DeLillo gives much thought to the possibility of individuality in the ethical responsibility. Hence, the central point of the chapter would fall on what is found lacking in the critique of *Mao II*—the individuality of the self in response to the Other. Yet, the following analysis does not presuppose the universality of subjectivity but stresses individual singularity in ethical relations. It is a notion echoing Lyotard’s account of paganism. *Pagrus* indicates “a place of boundaries. Boundaries are not borders. . . it is a place of ceaseless negotiations and ruses” (1985: 42-43). Paganism does not rely on any prescriptive or a priori rule for interactions. It evokes new ruses or new moves to add meanings to the world as the interaction between the self and the Other is

compared to the game of the pagan in which “to play moves means precisely to develop ruses, to set the imagination to work. . . . Pagans are artists. . . they try to figure out new moves . . . invent new games . . . proposes new rules” (61). It is a manipulation without criteria preexisting for guidance or action. Self-immanence is what features the pagan. Predicatives or prescriptions are replaced by self-imagination and creativity which is potential to make up one’s individuality. Self-consciousness in the part of creation and imagination is surfaced to a conspicuous level. Another significant message is that the pagan game is not based on a regulating Idea but a politics of opinion where no finality, totality and unity will be subsequently construed. That is, one’s ruses could not be applied to another and it is where personal singularities are generated. The singularities are demonstrated in DeLillo’s characters whose ruses or moves in face of the Other differ from one to another.

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

DeLillo in *Mao II* apparently continues his interest in the notion of the media and mediation and substantially emphasizes the expanding concept of the image, no longer restricted to the mediating language of the image since the empirical and the imagined are included. It makes up a complicated social meshwork in which the individual could not dispense with or evade from. TV and photography are two prominent distributors of numerous images in our life as they thicken our perceptions. These images tremendously alter the way characters perceive the world as well as themselves as observed in the previous chapter. As every image presented in the media is framed in a relatively specific and fixed context, it is frequently inferred that a subsequent stable meaning-designation is liable to be attained. DeLillo’s characters, as exposed to or thrown into the media, tend to apply the perspective of

the image to the empirical perception of real life. That is a conscious attempt to flatten or reduce the flowing and evanescent real to something graspable and determinate. *Mao II* began when Karen's parents took pictures of the mass wedding even though they did not catch sight of Karen at all. With the camera, they took their distance and treated it as an image rather than embraced it as part of their living moment. Photography seemingly defines and demarcates real life. TV, a household necessity, is another prevalent source of image dissemination and proliferation. It is a more immediate bridge between the fictional and the real, the far and the near, the public and the personal, actively involving the self in the images.

In *Mao II*, DeLillo demonstrates that the image wields its power not merely in the visual form but in the *imagined*. In the case of the pseudo-religious leaders like Master Moon, Mao Zedong, Kumeini and the fictional terrorist Rashid, what sustains the crowd's unwavering devotion is their images each individual keeps in mind and even identifies with. For instance, as presented in the novel, writers, especially the solitary, were the widely-recognized target for photographers. As the reading crowd construes an image of the writer in mind, they need an actual photograph to solidify their imagination. In other words, reading is not merely a dialogue with the words but an interaction with the imagined Other lying beyond them. Furthermore, DeLillo thinks that the process of writing is, likewise, a response to image as the imprisoned writer in the novel sustained his thinking by writing down some drifting images coming into his mind. The poet, Jean-Claude Julien, was the hostage imprisoned alone by terrorists in a cell. The imprisonment deprived him of the sense of time and space, in a sense nullifying his existence. The only way to sustain or prove his being is to conjure up images to talk with or to write them down. He took the image of his father as his interlocutor and made up things to tell his father as if "these talks with his father were a form of exercise, of self-improvement," hoping that they would

subsequently affirm his being in the world. The response to the imagined image does not mean the material for his writing but the source to sustain his sense of self. Another radical example is Bill's embodiment of his own image in his writing by experiencing the actual wound his character was undergoing. To sum up, the image, from the empirical to the mediated and the imagined, on the one hand demarcates the real life and engages the self's responsibility in almost every way of life. On the other, it is what the self needs to solidify his self-recognition. It is ethically related and would be further elaborated in the following section. From the image of the real to the virtual, from the mediated words to the imagined figure of the author, the flow of the image makes an inescapable social meshwork. And, there are mainly three aspects that DeLillo probes into the world of image—photography, TV, and writing. DeLillo goes from the static to the animated to the imagined, delineating man's relation with the image as the base of social relation, the disturbance to self-recognition, and the striving arena for individuality in particular. That is, DeLillo does not rest the discussion on the image as the overwhelming Other but calls the reader's attention to the self's individual response to the image. As characters are socially connected or identified in the encompassing wor(l)d of image or *imagined* reality, they are not completely lost or silenced but strive to explore a space of their own.

### **III. The Otherness of Image**

The ongoing analysis of *Mao II* first shows that the influence of images on daily life contributes to a significant social pattern in which the individual anchors himself in response to the images, empirical, mediated, and imagined. Guy Debord recognizes and terms the underlying power of the images as the spectacle which "is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is

mediated by images” (12). The social relationship associated with images designates one prominent message—one’s response to the Other is actually done through a screen of the image, either mediated or imagined. In other words, the appearance of images paves the way for people to re-recognize themselves or enhance social understanding, which relates them to things or people beyond the empirical domain of life. Scott’s attachment to Bill was initiated in his reading Bill’s works as he said, “[w]hen I read Bill I think of photographs of tract houses at the edge of the desert. There’s an incidental menace. The great Winogrand photo of a small child at the head of a driveway and the fallen tricycle and the storm shadow on the bare hills” (51). There is an imagined association to bridge the irrelevant elements. He apparently associated Bill’s words with a striking scene representing either his bleak childhood experience or his state of mind. The barely convincing but evident identification with Bill, somehow, prompts him to get close to Bill and treats him as his inexplicable and inevitable responsibility.

However, such a screen at the same time reflects, deflects and even distorts the Other, who is a perpetually unreachable end to the self as the images are more contradictory than corresponding to each other, as illustrated in the triangular relation among Bill, Scott and Brita. Bill took shelter in an image of solitude which accumulated his mystery as well as fame. However, the shelter neither assured his identification nor brought in any certainty. The more solitary the image turns, the more acute the threat appears to him while photographers like Brita strived to meet the readers’ or the public’s imagination with his photographs. The clash between the self and the image occurs while he was torn between being a solitary writer and the image confined in the pictures and consumed by the public. Bill’s self-perception cracked while the mediated and the imagined images practically edge out each other. The image here does not refer to the exact representation with determinacy. It is

contrary to the situation in which “I approach the other not according to his otherness itself, but from a horizon, or another totality” (Burggraeve 36). Instead, in a social fabric, DeLillo’s screen of the image against the Other tends to correspond to Levinas’s face of the Other which, “as a trace, trace of itself, trace expelled in a trace, does not signify an indeterminate phenomenon; its ambiguity is not an indetermination of a noema, but an invitation to the fine risk approach qua approach, to the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of exposure” (2000b: 94). Bill recognized the picture-taking as a mysterious exchange. The doomed menace of picture-taking to the self is revealed when Bill felt he was merely an actor in front of the camera, while Brita decided how the picture looked. Bill first naively compared the picture of himself to a substitute after his death—“I’m playing the idea of death . . . . Sitting for a picture is morbid business. A portrait doesn’t begin to mean anything until the subject is dead” (42). Nonetheless, the image in the picture does work to menace and interrupt the self-contained subject when Bill’s perception of the threat from the picture is manifested in his questions—“What am I giving up to you? And what are you investing me with, stealing from me? How are you changing me? I can feel the change like some current just under the skin. Are you making me up as you go along? Am I mimicking myself?” He almost lost any grip of the self presented on the picture—it was an image of him and not of him. Its power is even more overwhelming when Brita reminded him that “from the moment your picture appears you’ll be expected to look just like it. And if you meet people somewhere, they will absolutely question your right to look different from your picture”(43). Sadly speaking, the image on the picture would become the premier standard to judge what he was like and the primary source people responded to. The elusive otherness of the image presented in the picture corresponds to what Roland Barthes designation of

the photographic image as “*a message without a code*”—it is a continuous message without a finite proliferation of its meanings. The message is divided into two aspects: “a *denoted* message, which is the *analogon* itself, and a *connoted* message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it<sup>5</sup>” (1977: 17). Barthes takes the images as part of the signifiers floating in the social construct which make impossible the very objectivity of the sign as well as the determinacy of the signification. The social force is likewise considered and incorporated in DeLillo as Brita predicted how Bill’s image would undergo a historical process of transformation in which Bill is at most the raw material of the image and the possibility of the authority is completely ruled out. He could only give in to what the image presented—a self which was *other* than himself as Barthes claims that “the Photograph is the advent of myself as other” (1980: 12). Hence, DeLillo presents the tendency of the photograph which is intended to respond to the Other instead of presenting self-reflexivity and forging self-identity. Yet, what is intriguing is the Otherness imbedded in the self. That is testified in DeLillo’s notion of the image connoting the notion of the crowd, mentioned in earlier part of the chapter. It means that an image, owing to its infinite derivations, involves an inevitable response to the Other—a *crowd* to face. The crowd is especially an important concept and reality in the world of mass media. It makes up an interpenetrating relation with the image since they work together to make possible certain mass identification or identity which is significant in the self-integration into the society. The premise could account for the intricate relation between image and

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<sup>5</sup> Barthes contends that the analogon of an image mainly refers to the analogical or imitative property which retains a certain extent of objectivity while the connoted system is closely related to its social fabric and the contingency of the picture-taking since the connoted system is highly “constituted either by a universal symbolic order or by a period rhetoric, in short by a stock of stereotypes (schemes, colours, graphisms, gestures, expressions, arrangements of elements)” (1977:18). What is plausible about the connoted message is its base on a universal symbolic order which is highly disputable in the postmodern age. The exact connoted message could be different from individual to individual while what people could generally agree to rather fall on its rough implication.

the crowd. In a sense, the actual crowd makes an image for individuals to hinge on and in turn every image implies a crowd construed or being construing. More intriguingly, the crowd in the image goes beyond the actual and turns out to be a characteristic which designates the self-dissolving power. Hence, the relation between the crowd and the image could be explored from two aspects. The first goes from the crowd to the image which relates how the empirical experience of the crowd would make an image for the self to respond to. The second refers to the identification with an image whose repetition would make a unique notion of crowd to ponder on.

#### **A. From the Crowd to the Image**

According to DeLillo, the discussion of the image cannot do without the crowd. The notion of the crowd implicated in the image does not merely rest on the life immediacy but is extended to the mediated on TV and associated with the imagined in writing. Karen first exemplifies the response to the image of the crowd as the overwhelming Other and its potential to devour or submerge one's individuality. Karen's appearance in the mass wedding hosted by Master Moon was indirectly assured by the attendance of her parents who were busy taking pictures as a record of the important moment of her daughter. However, as the individual is blended into the mass, the genuine interaction would surely become a difficulty or even a source of anxiety as Karen's daddy, Rouge, perceived that "[t]hey're one body now, an undifferentiated mass. And this makes him uneasy," whereas Karen's mother, Maureen, noticed that "there's a lot of looking back and forth. Nobody knows how to feel and they're checking around for hints" (3-4). They lose the track to handle the newly-forged image in which the self is temporarily unbuckled from the original social grid and is reoriented into a completely new orbit where she, seemingly

willingly and expectedly, gives herself in as if it were another force to remold her, including an assigned marriage with a person she hardly knew anything of. The mass wedding presents an image of the crowd in which the individual is transformed as Gustave LeBon states:

Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act while he in a state of isolation. (1895: 57)

LeBon (1841-1931), an initiative and significant contributor of the crowd theory, obviously thinks that the crowd is non-individual since “the crowd has a ‘group mind’ whose workings did not follow the same laws as the workings of an individual’s mind because it was unconscious” (McClelland 11). LeBon then in a way denies the possibility of self consciousness in the crowd. He further contends that the individual unconsciousness results from collective hypnotism by which the individual is stripped from the original social designation and totally immersed in the othering scenario. In contrast with LeBon’s crowd theory<sup>6</sup>, Floyd Allport rejects the idea of the non-individual or unconscious collective mind. He asserts that “individual behavior inside and outside the crowd was controlled by innate and learned tendencies that predisposed the individual to behave. . . . crowds formed because individuals with similar predispositions were compelled to converge on a common location” (McPhall xx). His argument goes against LeBon’s notion of collective mind. One emphasizes the hypnotic power of the crowd while the other insists on the innate

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<sup>6</sup> LeBon’s ideas of the crowd are well received by psychologists like William McDougall, Everett Dean Martin, Freud, and by sociologist like Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess (McPhall xx).

individual intension to mold the crowd. DeLillo's Karen seems to bridge these two counter perspectives. On the one hand, she was almost completely taken in by the image of the crowd where her individuality was demolished as LeBon states. Karen constantly preached the world of peace brought up by Reverend Moon, showing her conscious acquisition of the doctrines and the role assigned in the crowd. Oddly speaking, she seemed to know in one aspect and act in another. The influence of the image of the crowd was rather ambiguous since she accepted the assigned marriage with a man barely known to her but had intimate relationship with Scott and Bill in another dimension of life. Cognitively, she understood and knew what was instilled by the Reverend Moon and lived out the ideals of a universal and single family as shown in her interaction with the street people. Nevertheless, her personal relation with Bill and Scott manifests that Reverend Moon's ideas were not the only life doctrines that she adhered to. DeLillo takes an ethical perspective which goes against LeBon and Allport respectively, manifesting a relation marked by Levinas's notion of the unseparated separation, meaning that "[t]he same and the other at the same time maintain themselves in relationship and absolve themselves from this relation, remain absolutely separated" (1979:102-03). That is, the individual and the crowd are not necessarily incompatible or contradictory since Karen's response to the homeless crowd does not indicate the inherent and predisposed individual tendency as Allport asserts. Karen still preserved certain extend of self-awareness among Reverend Moon's worshipers. The image of the crowd and the individual making an ethical pair features in compatible incompatibility, unseparated separation.

Similar intoxication with the image of the crowd is also illustrated in the TV-watching experience which presents a more powerful imposition of the image on the individual. One is the parade under the portrait of Mao Zedong as Karen "is mesmerized by rows and rows of jogging troops and those riot guns they carry" (189).

The image incorporates her in a represented totality and unity. The other is Karen's watching the scene of Khomeini's funeral where the crowd gathered mourning over his death. "Karen felt she was among them" (189), experiencing the whole event in person. She was kind of responding to the crowd in a way she felt she was part of it. These "crowds" are marked by the sole responsibility of all the individuals to act like bricks or building blocks to "construct" the only image in every scene—the Master Moon, Mao Zedong, and Khomeini respectively. It is an identification with the collective with no personal identity assured or even cared—a duplicated identification with the same image. In face of the crowd, Karen is actually responding to a central image which structures and unifies the group as if the self is melted or blended into the images of such Big Others as the Master Moon, Mao, and Khomeini. According to McClelland, Freud thinks what binds the group together is eros and the identification with the central character features in 'regression.' It is presented as

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

Such an account about the individual's identification with the leader of the crowd is based on the erotic ties. Yet, it does not well correspond to DeLillo's presentation of Karen's immersion in the crowd since first of all Karen did not take the Master Moon or Mao or Khomeini as her own self and secondly the erotic tie is not clearly established. What is rather obvious is the absorbing and mysterious atmosphere created in the image of the crowd as the individual could temporarily rid himself or herself of the original self-recognition and embrace a bigger identity represented by the leader in which every individual merely takes a part. It is a state in which the

self is no longer an integrated and consistent being. Instead, there is the forgetting of the self in the individual. DeLillo's ethical configuration, hence, involves a preconscious part in the self's responsibility for the Other.

## **B. From the Image to the Crowd**

However, the forgetting<sup>7</sup> of the self varies in manner and extent, marking their singularity. While Karen is kind of unconscious of her self-dissolution in responding to the image of the Other, Scott is relatively sober about his reaction to the image and has his own way to interpret and react to the image. First of all, keeping a critical distance from the mass-produced image, Scott is especially fascinated with the images' liberating force from the historical or social shackles illustrated by his encounter with the image of Chairman Mao presented in various styles. With no standard or original meaning attached to it, these images promise certain kind of liberating force which is shown in the differences generated by the image-duplication. In other words, the repetitions of the image which stagnate the normal flow of designation feature in differences and thus open new possibilities as people "repeat it, repeat it, repeat it until something new enters the world"(4). In addition to the repetitive images, Scott held that the crowd was another way to "survive as a community instead of individuals trying to master every complex life" and hence regarded the Moon system as "brave and visionary" (89). Basically, both are related to the immersion of the self into the crowd of the images which are able to free the self from the crude social obligations or oppressions. He takes the haven in the

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<sup>7</sup> Here the forgetting has to be discriminated from what Nietzsche's claim of forgetting which is "the capacity to feel *unhistorically* during its duration." It is the essential element to a happy being since "*the unhistorical (forgetting) and the historical (memory) are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and a culture*" (Nietzsche 62-63). The forgetting of the self consciousness is caused by an ethical response to the crowd with which the individual hardly acts as oneself.

conflation of the repetitive images and the crowd, but his distinction lies in his choosing to get over the mediated image and strain to identify with the real person--Bill the writer. While Scott thought to himself that he was approaching the original or authentic, in reality, he treated Bill as the image he forged in his mind from reading his book, saying “[a] great man’s face shows the beauty of his work” (61) and identifies himself with the image of Bill as if his words make a crowd and Bill, as the representative image, became the authoritative leader of the crowd. Scott believes that the image, the face of the writer, tells the essential part of his works. Here, DeLillo indicates that in reading a work, it is not merely the words or the author’s ideas but, more importantly, the image of the author that counts. Reading became the self’s response to the image of the writer which would evoke greater and more profound communication with the Other at the other end of the words. The image, the face, talks louder than words. His identification with Bill is further marked by the intended eradication of the self. Amazingly, he felt he was reborn in reading Bill’s books, which disconnected him from his original dogged life and started his new life as “[h]e was in Bill’s material mesh, drawing the same air, seeing things Bill saw” (60). His identification is more vividly attested in the habit of repeating what Bill said and even saying what was in Bill’s mind. Constant repetitions reveal his taking Bill as the center or even “master” of himself. It seems that he incarnates the image of Bill. Scott’s ethical relation with Bill, starting from being one of Bill’s readers, is centered on his merging with Bill’s image by living with him and saying Bill’s words. With Scott’s example, DeLillo does not mean to revive the authorship but shows what an important role the image, the face of the author, plays in the reader-author relation. The power of the image makes more forceful imposition on the meaning-designation, paradoxically thwarting and extending what the words may designate. DeLillo makes a serious implication that image has a louder say even in

words, foreshadowing the writers' losing war to the terrorists. While the latter makes a forceful image, the former couldn't help casting doubt on the power of the words. DeLillo's anxiety over the image-interruption in the reading process would be further elaborated in the following part.

The cases of Karen and Scott demonstrate that the ethical relation takes two distinct routes: the former goes from the image to the crowd and the latter takes the other way around. Each implicates the self's response. However, although the process ostensibly risks the loss of individuality in confronting the self-dissolving crowd, DeLillo shrewdly observes possible individuality in the ethical relation.

#### **IV. Ethical Individuality**

##### **A. Responding to the Image**

DeLillo's ethical relation with the image is pivoted on the relation between the individual and the crowd. Though he recognizes the inevitable confrontation with the image as the Other, DeLillo aims to explore the individuality submerged behind the self's responsibility to the Other. In a picture of refugees in a camp, there was nothing but boys crowding together, waving urgently, and looking in the same direction. Yet, what caught the attention in the picture was a single worried adult "standing diagonally and peering in the general direction of the frame and peering over the heads and across the frame and out of the picture . . ." (147). He was and was not part of the crowd. He on the one hand was rendered a collective identity as he situated himself in the crowd but on the other marked his individuality with his extending the vision toward an unknown domain—distanciating himself from the crowd.

For Scott, as for Karen, the relation with the image, mediated or imagined, serves as a detour for them to evade the haunting Other by seemingly dissolving the

self into the image of a Big Other. Karen's constant shift from one image to another, from the personally experienced to the represented on the media, indicates the lack of certainty. Mark Osteen regards Karen as " '[t]hin-boundaried' and permeable," corresponding to what Mark Edmundson calls a "conductor, a relay point . . . for currents of forces" (Osteen 1999: 656). Yet, such reading of Karen may partially attest to DeLillo's recognition of the overwhelming imposition of the modulating force on the self without taking into account his efforts in presenting the individuality. To Karen, in *face* of the image of the Other, her life force is activated and spread to another crowd. The first example is her response to the image represented on TV, which would present audio messages to guide the audience's perception and interpretation. Trying to break the bondage between the audio and the visual, Karen chose to watch the news without sound since she meant to make up her own story with the images on TV. As applied to demarcate the meaning of the mediated image, language is rendered a prominent status in the image-circulating process. To revive the liberating power of the image by silencing the dubbing, Karen, in a way corresponding to Scott, span her own story. An expression of herself, thus, was integrated into the ethical confrontation with the image. Another example is illustrated by her taking another angle while watching Komeini's funeral on TV. DeLillo especially singles out her individual vision, narrating:

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

DeLillo emphasizes the individual response to the image instead of treating all the audience of the TV program as a unifying crowd “consuming and consumed by” the image. What especially distinguishes the individuality lies in the subtlety of the extension of the image which contributes to the self-assertion. Karen’s euphoria and devotion to the image of the crowd do not end up with a complete denial of her individuality; rather, DeLillo, as Hardack contends, portrays being in crowd as “increas[ing] one’s duality under a false guise of universality . . . . Everything in this text, from photo to answering machine to Coca Cola to Mao, is rendered a secondary, hence mass, hence foreign, source of anxiety. Anything that can echo, duplicate, or join you to the mass becomes a radically foreign body” (383). That is, the response to such a foreign body construed in the image paradoxically makes distinct the relation between the self with the Other. However, although the image did assert certain kind of unifying or self-dissolving force, one’s awareness of the crowd as the overwhelming Other also implies a space for self-assertion.

Responding to the image in a different way, Scott sets another example of marking his own individuality not by immersion himself into the crowd, but by walking out of the crowd and establishing his ethical bond in another *crowd*—the face-to-face encounter with Bill. Once, “he stood before a silk screen called *Crowd*. The image was irregular, deep streaks marking the canvas, and it seemed to him that the crowd itself, the vast mesh of people, was being riven by some fleeting media catastrophe” (21). The important message conveyed by the image of the crowd is that it does not seem to present a totality but a body brimmed with differences, arousing disquiet and anxiety, as he observed the dark side of the media which the image was endowed with—one being part of a crowd without the sense of belonging. Scott was originally distraught with life until he came to the works of Bill Gray, who served as the vital anchorage of his life. At the moment he saw Bill, he thought that

“[h]e had a life now and that’s what mattered. . . . Had to be Bill and he was coming right at me and I seemed to need oxygen” (60). Overwhelmed by Bill, he felt the need to merge with him. The moment does account for the self’s responsibility and vulnerability to the Other but does not perpetuate the overwhelmed self. Instead, he was conscious of his relation with the Other as he was not content to be merely one of the anonymous readers formed as an-other *crowd*. Scott tried to construct his own unique relation with Bill as the Other. Hence, his sense of self emerges from his approaching Bill and further intruding his real life. One thing that would particularly contribute to his singularity is his knowing Bill’s real name—Willard Shansey Jr. (143). Even though the real name makes a black hole in the image of Bill as the writer, it paradoxically provides Scott a channel to certain mystery of the writer. The name, in Scott’s perspective, resembles the ultimate code to the real being of Bill, inaccessible to anyone in the *crowd*. Scott went from Bill as the image construed in his works and words to the unknown secret of Bill’s real name. It is something which would not go public like the manuscript of the new novel, his words, or his pictures. The secret establishes his sense of self in face of the imposing and public-consumed image of Bill since Scott thought that Bill’s image and even his pseudonym were things that had been part of the public property and in turn presupposed a crowd which consisted of his readers or people who knew him. Scott chose to break away from what was accessible to the public to assert his individuality, as if “it was a small whole contentment, a way of working toward a new reality” (139). Yet, neither the ethical relation was stabilized nor his identity was determined in Scott’s personal contact with Bill and learning of his real name. DeLillo has a more tricky presentation of Scott’s ethical relation with Bill.

Ostensibly, by way of Scott’s behavior, DeLillo implies that the image of the writer is more important or more genuine than his works, conveying a sense of origin

or authority. Actually, Scott's individuality was shown in his aggressiveness in taking advantage of what was available to him about the Other to construe or sustain his individuality. That is, as Scott immersed himself in the world of a writer which was mainly Bill's incessant self-struggling with the works or the words, he remolded Bill's life by breaking into Bill's solitude, deciding on his personal affairs, and even stopping Bill from publishing his new novel to sustain his fame. To specify it, DeLillo regards the proximity to the authority or the unknown secret of the author as a paradoxical way to assert one's individuality by making Scott a parasite on Bill but actually taking hold of his life. It demonstrates the author as the Other is as vulnerable as elusive. From Scott's walking out of the *crowd* to the devoted identification with Bill in person, Scott was rummaging through the materials of the so-called original Other and construing his own sense of the self. Even after Bill was on the hostage-salvaging journey, Scott insisted on guarding Bill's things, seemingly assuming that his sense of self would be sustained by Bill's manuscripts and personal data despite his losing track of Bill's whereabouts. Under the imposing image of Bill lay Scott's vigorous straining for his individuality. Scott demonstrated a stronger intension to assert his individuality in his identification with the writer. Whatever identity is achieved, Bill's individuality in the ethical relation is forged in his response to the image of Bill as the ethical Other.

## **B. Creating the image**

Karen and Scott share certain similarity in asserting the uniqueness of the self by responding to images presented, construed and even imagined. Brita and Bill take a different angle in the world of image. They respond to the images by creating them. Brita is closely related to the world of image and complicates her ethical stance as a distinct self. As a professional photographer, she is entitled to

manipulating the perspective of the public in angling her pictures. However, with the reproduction and publication of her works, the creativity and originality invested in her work become the public property which hardly leaves anything she could really claim as her own. She has no other choice but to keep changing her topic from the street people to the secluded authors to the dictatorial terrorists. Step by step, her move toward the extreme topics indicates her being practically stuck in the world of image and her urgent need for a space of her own. Her consistent effort to battle the image-consuming world manifests her individuality in her adding something new and different to the world of image. Hence, Brita responded to the image (the person, her photographic material) before the image forged in that the image vaguely hovered in her mind before being realized with her camera. “She was the person who traveled compulsively to photograph the unknown, the untranslated, the inaccessible, the politically suspect, the hunted, the silenced” (66). As expected, little did she know what might exactly come to her sight. Nevertheless, it is not a journey divested of any sense of self consciousness. That is, she does not immerse herself in images without any reservation. Brita preserved her critical distance and was especially aware of her individuality which was the tug of war with the overwhelming Other imbedded in the images. On the one hand, her responsibility to the image as the Other was done by creating her own image in framing and angling the photographs. With her camera, she was granted the privilege to directly confront the mystifying Other and had the picture taken as the way intended. It echoes what Susan Sontag contends, “[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power” (4). The camera equips Brita with the power to reveal what could be known about her subject as if a definite meaning was imposed on raw material. On the other hand, photography, as a message without

code in Roland Barthes's terms, could never be specified in meaning; instead, the images of the photography either go beyond what is real or is being the real with its autonomy. Barthes remarks that the subversiveness of photograph occurs "not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks" (1980: 38). It means what is unexpected in photography does not lie in what is represented but in how the image *expresses* itself. The image is fraught with meanings which could not be deduced or exhausted. In addition, another facet of photography is founded on the manipulation of the mass culture in which people could consume millions of images in few seconds. The mass consumption of the image cut off her individual relation with the image strenuously forged in her photograph. Moreover, the culture marked by the dissemination of various and numerous images further deprived her of the right to justify her individuality in her works, as she found that

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

She was submerged in the images of the *mass* culture and became one member of the crowd with her individuality objectified and constantly consumed. With image, she is ethically responding to the crowd and simultaneously being one of it. Yet, it does not mean that such a photographer as Brita could only consign herself to the massive flow of image production and circulation. DeLillo demonstrates that Brita's response to the image as the Other is not so distressing as it seems. Her continuous search for the mysterious attests that, like the case of Scott, individuality does not rely

so much on what is known but on what is unknown or remains secret. Accessing certain secret is the key to the individuality of the self. Interestingly, Brita undergoes a recurrent process of searching for the unknown subject to the photographic realization to the autonomy of the photograph, accompanied by the exhaustion of the possibility of the images or imagination. Brita, shifting her target from the writers to the terrorists, lays her vision on a more and more enigmatic domain—the image of terror, Abu Rashid. He represented a world that was unknown or hadn't been appropriated by Western thinking. Brita's self-assertion in the unknown domain significantly designates DeLillo's unique strategy by basing individuality on the unknown Other as the terror of an ethical Other evokes the self's individuality.

Terror is more an intense and haunting feeling than a clear idea according to DeLillo. Its threat was cast in the early part of the novel with the release of the news about the kidnapped poet. The feeling lingered and hovered among the characters. Not until Brita came to take Rashid's photographs was the veil of terror lifted a bit. As his interaction with Brita revealed, he ruled and unified a world that was intended to counter the West. Surprisingly, it was the terror embedded in the uniformity of identification. Rashid asserted that "terror is what we use to give our people our place in the world. What used to be achieved through work, we gain through terror. Terror makes the new future possible" (235). His talk suggested terror as the resistance to the encompassing Western rationalism and culture as George Haddad, a "spokesman" of the terrorists in the novel, contended that in face of the encompassing and absorbing Western culture, "[o]nly the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him. It's confusing when they kill the innocent. But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the West understands" (157-58). DeLillo implies that the terrorists apply a language beyond the commonly-held signifying mechanism. Walter Benn

Michaels, drawing on Fukuyama's *The End of History*, claims that terror is not a threat to a political system or nation, but to the law (107). It was on the surface a kind of behavior that goes against the rules for the world order, investing or arousing incomprehensible or extreme elements in the well-structured social body. Yet, regarding terror as more than counteraction to the laws, the basis of social mechanism, DeLillo maintains that "[t]rue terror is a language and a vision. There is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to" (Simmons 679). Terror defies the regulations as well as the laws of the world by imposing extreme differences and shattering our previous recognition of what is around and even the self. The way the terrorists transformed the consciousness goes to certain extreme—erasing the self. Rashid transplanted his image onto each youngsters who worked for him, completely dissolving their individuality—"They are all children of Abu Rashid. All men one man. . . . The image of Rashid is their identity" (233). Hence, their future comes from their creation of a language comprising an image of terror and a vision beyond appropriation. And, as Brita admitted that "I'm devoting my life to a gesture. Yes, I travel. Which means there is no moment on certain days when I'm not thinking terror. They have us in their power" (40-41), her traveling and photography are not intended merely for the representation of reality, either hidden or mysterious but mean to respond to the image of terror with *language* of her own—photography. Terror acts as the ethical Other hidden behind the image of Abu Rashid. Still, she could temporarily frame and fix it up in the camera as the image of terror presupposing her responsibility proves her presence and singularity. She preserved her individuality with her witness. Her witness particularly marks itself at the moment when she abruptly took off one of Rashid's boys' hoods and snapped the picture of him. It was an act that "she does it because it seems important" (236).

Lifting the hood off the boy's head and looking into his face, Brita captured what was not allowed to go public by breaking into what is hidden but solidly there. That is, with the detailed observation of the supposedly self-dissolving boy, DeLillo shows Brita's potentiality for individuality in violating the unification of the image of terror and restoring the boy's individual identity. Being a photographer who added images to the social context, Brita has the *crowd* to face—the consuming or flattening mass culture. Nevertheless, she located the niche to assert her individuality in responding to and exposing the image of the unknown, that of terror.

While the photographer made her response by creating her own image, the writer has his own latent but zealous way to react to the image of the *crowd*. The writer, endowed with a certain extent of autonomy, presents another face of the ethical relation in terms of image; yet, the image came in different medium—the words. Writing, according to DeLillo, is a process opening oneself to the construction of the self-image as he says in an interview with Thomas LeClair, “a writer can begin to know himself through his language. He sees someone or something reflected back at him from these constructions. Over the years it's possible for a writer to shape himself as a human being through the language he uses. . . . He not only sees himself but begins to make himself or remake himself” (2005a: 7). Writing is less an automatic or authoritative process of life representation than a response to oneself as an image which is constantly being remade. That is, writing provides an access to the grasp of the writer himself who always leaves room for re-*imagi*-nation. To be more specific, it is an ethical relation with the image of the self as the Other who would never be determined. DeLillo foregrounds the writer's self-exploring or self-remaking experience which puts into question authorship as voiced by Bill

Even if I could see the need for absolute authority, my work would draw me

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

Writing was never a totalistic or unitary construct, never making an image of *the crowd*. That is, Bill as a writer is never fixed or determined by the image forged among his readers, the crowd. Similar situation occurs when Bill ambivalently reacted against his photograph which made his image concrete and determinate. Writing provides him a chance to surpass or remold himself since every writing is “a democratic shout” (159). It is more than the voice of the authoritative writer that is expressed. There would always be the voice of the Other or others involved. What DeLillo presents here somewhat corresponds to Bakhtin’s notion of polyphonic novelistic discourse. However, what marks their strike difference is DeLillo’s emphasis on writing as the ethical confrontation in which the self is simultaneously responding to the Other and groping for the self. Writing paradoxically reifies and dissolves the image of the self at the same time, since it leads the self to an ever-renewing practice in which the determinacy and dissolution of the self alternate with each other as Bill stated that “[t]he language of my books has shaped me as a man. . . . It speaks the writer’s will to live. . . . I’ve worked the sentences of this book long and hard but not long and hard enough because I no longer see myself in the language” (48). That could account for how Bill the writer would never end his revision of the manuscript—an even more significant message conveyed aside from the perfection of his work. As long as the writing continues, the self is given a say and space in the ethical relation, not devoured or dissolved in the image of the crowd. The ethical relation is a process of becoming. To better illustrate the situation, DeLillo takes Bill’s writing of another writer, the poet Jean-Claude Julien, as a more

vivid demonstration of how the writer paradoxically involves and alienates himself in the writing. On his trip to help rescue Jean-Claude captured by the terrorists as a hostage, Bill tried to write about Jean-Claude in that “a writer creates a writer as a way to reveal consciousness, increase the flow of meaning” (200). Bill blended himself into his writing by making himself as one of his characters. To live out the life of his character’s, he personally experienced and envisioned what happened to his character by consulting the doctors about what would happen to a person with lacerated liver after he was in reality struck by a car in Athens<sup>8</sup>. Bill’s individuality lies in the interpenetration of his writing and real life, both of which delicately mold each other. What is especially worth noting is Bill’s imagination of the hostage’s extreme solitude after being cut off from everything except the hooded boy who sent him the meals and tortured him with the relentless beatings. It was described as the experience of losing the sense of time<sup>9</sup>, not knowing where to anchor himself and doubting if he still existed, as stuck in the stasis in which not a single difference stirred the monotonous and repetitious existence. In that situation, the writer taken in hostage wanted badly “paper and something to write with, some way to sustain a thought, place in the world” (110). Ostensibly to the prisoner, but actually to Bill, “[t]he only way to be in the world was to write himself there. . . . Let him write ten

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<sup>8</sup> It is the same with DeLillo’s writing experience, as his inspiration of his writing of *Mao II* came from his reaction to two pictures, the mass wedding and the picture of the author of *Catcher in the Rye*. They in turn became two of the most important images in the novel in which the self was construed and dissolved.

<sup>9</sup> DeLillo presents the imprisoned poet’s gradual dissolution of the self with the loss of time. It is a depiction which conveys DeLillo’s peculiar notion of time and its relation with the sense of the self. To be more specific, DeLillo does not regard time as an objective reality which moves on. Instead, time is a sense closely related to the empirical response carried out in daily confrontations. Time is first felt in his pain after being tortured by the boy as the prisoner thought to himself, “This was part of the structure of time, how time and pain became inseparable” (108). Another example shows how the sense of time is perceived as “[t]ime moved tormentingly, carried by insects, all-knowing, if we can, it moves” (108). That is, the notion of time is based on the dynamic response to objects as well as experiential perception. Besides, a redefined concept, acts as an indicator to confirm one’s existence. His loss of the self is accompanied by time sliding away from him, as he was imprisoned and exempted from any interaction with others along with feelings for the world.

words and he would come into being once again” (204). Writing designates his ability to imagine, to think, to react, and, most importantly, to live. It is the concrete proof of his existence as a human being. Nonetheless, writing never makes a uni-lateral and linear presentation. It is an ethical relation in which the self partly dissolves and partly construes himself in the response to the Other as if writing is composed of counter forces pulling against each other. Bill thought “the pages he’d done showed an element of conflict, the wrong kind of exertion or opposition, a stress in two directions, and he realized in the end he wasn’t really thinking about the prisoner. Who is the boy . . . . It was writing that caused his life to disappear” (215). According to Mark Osteen, Bill’s writing of Jean-Claude “is actually a desperate attempt to reinvent himself, and this moment again implies that characters create their authors by providing foci for thoughts and dialogue and loci or plots” (663). Incorporating himself in the characterization not only re-forge the self-image but also blurs the previous one, demonstrating the impossibility of the monolithic authority. Hence, as writing is depicted as another ethical form of responding to the image of the self as the Other, the self turns out to be an image perpetually reformed. The image as the Other is him-self who is never a fixed entity. Besides, the constantly remade or renewed self-image redefines the ethical relation in which the self is not merely for the Other but becoming the Other as the writer would never be appropriated or taken hold of. The writer’s case relates that individuality in the ethical relation which does not perpetuate a fixed or assured identity should, more importantly, be referred to as the property of the self to express him- or herself.

## **Conclusion**

Ethically speaking, *Mao II* confirms the possibility of individuality in the world of image. First of all, DeLillo goes beyond focusing the exploration of the image on

the issue of representation or how the image was related to the real. Rather, the image is presented as the social relation, more specifically, the ethical relation, which is particularly conspicuous with the prevalence of photography considered the tool to seize and replace the real. The social life is largely composed of the represented images whose distinction from the real no longer troubles people's perception of life. The images are integrated as an essential part of life and, more significantly, the ethical relation. The ethical relation thus is marked by characters' responses to the ubiquitous images spread in life. Yet, the concern in response to the image as the Other actually focuses on the dynamic relation between the *crowd* and the individuality. That is, DeLillo's central concern of the possibility of the self consciousness is demonstrated in face of the image of the *crowd* as the overwhelming Other. In terms of the image implying the notion of the *crowd*, DeLillo brings up his subtle observation of how the self is dissolved and at the same time forges his individuality. The *crowd* derived from the image contains meanings of several kinds. The most obvious one lies in the actual body of the crowd as an image that Karen is immersed in and responds to. Another is illustrated by the imagined crowd that Scott strived to walk out of—Bill's readers. Still another crowd concerned with the image is related to the mass culture industry which Brita acutely perceives as the most threatening Other to her individuality and originality. A more delicate demonstration of the image as a *crowd* was shown by Bill's confrontation of his own photograph and, more significantly, his writing.

Starting from the gray area of Levinas's ethical relation as the disputed critique mentioned above, DeLillo on the one hand confirms that image as the ethical counterpart is what the characters could not dispense with but on the other work on the possibility of individuality which varies from one character to another. Basically speaking, their ethical individuality comes in two patterns: one is responding to the

presupposed image while the other is responding to the image by creating them. Karen and Scott belonged to the first camp. Yet, they are as similar as different from each other, since Karen *imagines* her unique vision and status by immersing herself in the image of the crowd, while Scott walks out of the crowd and conceals the real name of Bill as a means to mark his individuality from the rest of Bill's reading crowd. The other camp creates images as an ethical response. Bill wrote to respond to him-self whose images were constantly being remade. Writing becomes a process of facing and surpassing the image held by the reading crowd. Individuality was shown in the writing, that is the self-remolding process. The image of the *crowd* to Brita is derived from the mass culture which is an irresistible image-(re)producing and consuming machine. That is, her photographs are instantly consumed as the public property with which she could claim her individuality. Her individuality thus has to be achieved by approaching the unknown orbit of the world such as terrorism. As terrorism, the premier Other to the world, evokes fear, the more Brita unravels about it, the more individuality she could assert. She sets her foot in the forbidden area which had not yet been regulated, appropriated or totalized in any notion. Yet, her difference from Bill is that the individuality in her image is experiential or empirical while Bill's was *imagined* and construed in words rather than with the actual images.

In terms of *Mao II*, DeLillo points out how the world is suffused with images and, more importantly, how the images make up the social bond which is the ethical relation people could not do without. In addition to the demonstration of how the image makes the ethical Other, DeLillo gets back to his ultimate concern—the possibility of individuality. Even though the novel depicts in an age awash with images and the self's autonomy, sufficiency and integrity are considered hardly possible, DeLillo's characters still affirm the possibility of individuality. To be specific, DeLillo's observation of the image is pivoted on the ethical relation between

the *crowd* and the individual. The ubiquity of the image then connotes an overwhelming *crowd* that poses a great threat to the self. As characters are ostensibly drowning in the ethical bond with the *crowd*, their individuality is subtly revealed. However, the individuality does not presuppose or refer to a fixed identity but a becoming process in confrontation with the overwhelming Other. That is, DeLillo does not mean to rebuild the modern subject but believes that people are still granted with certain extent of individuality in revealing their own differences among the endless reproductions or repetitions of the images. Image in *Mao II* designates an ethical relation in which the self hence is marked by its constant individuality which is paradoxically elicited by the overwhelming power of the Other.