What Is a Terrorist?

Contemporary Authorship, the Unabomber, and DeLillo's "Mao II"

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> "You're not the hermit, the woodsman-writer, you're not the crank with a native vision. You're the hunted man."
>
> —Don DeLillo, Moo *II*

Authorship, as it appears in Don DeLillo's rumination on the topic in *Mao II,* resembles strongly another of the novel's main concerns, terrorism. "Terrorism," Douglas S. Derrer writes in *We Are All the Target* (subtitled *A Handbook of Terrorist Avoidance and Hostage Survival)* "is a powerful tool for the powerless" (108). DeLillo, in Mao II, attempts to contend with this increasingly unavoidable form of cultural power and also raises the question: can writing, once itself a powerful tool for the powerless, hold on to this function, at least partially? Or has the former role of the author necessarily been ceded to the terrorist, whose impact, as David E. Long points out, "is more psychological than physical," since a very small proportion of people are ever directly influenced by terrorist acts (I). This essay will examine how DeLillo's effort to come to terms with authorship in Mao // has been echoed, since its publication, by the cultural reception of the United States terrorist who has come closest to being treated as an author: the "Unabomber."

Like authorship, terrorism is more closely defined by the way certain actions are interpreted than by the nature of the actions themselves. In Moo *II,* DeLillo not only shows himself to be highly perceptive about such actions and such interpretations, but also appears to anticipate, remarkably, an event that became very real to Americans five years after the novel was published: the capture of Theodore Kaczynski, the man later convicted of being the Unabomber. Obviously, I do not mean to suggest that DeLillo literally predicted the future when writing Mao *II,* but the degree to which the events that unfolded in the media after Kaczynski's apprehension correspond to ideas discussed in DeLillo's novel is remarkable. As this paper will outline, DeLillo was deeply engaged with currents of thought and action that (in many cases) only became fully exposed when the Unabomber became associated with a face and a name. In other words, the story DeLillo wrote as Mao // and the way in which the Kaczynski story was presented to the public touch upon many of the same trends and points of thought. By investigating the connection between these two stories, we can observe a phenomenon related not only to the expanding presence of terrorism upon the American cultural mindset, but also to the way that the idea of "authorship" in the United States has become complicated by factors that both DeLillo's characters and commentators upon the Unabomber case associate with terrorism.

The first bombing associated with the figure now known as the Unabomber occurred in 1979, but the Unabomber only became really famous when he attempted to get published. The demand of "FC" (the terrorist "group" that claimed responsibility for the Unabomb attacks) that a 35,000-word article appear in a national publication captured the attention of Americans often too jaded to follow other news. The article, titled "Industrial Society and Its Future" but almost always referred to as the "Unabomber Manifesto," may not have gotten many careful readers, but it did attain widespread

dissemination in 1995 in the *Washington Post,* then on the Internet and, soon after, in various book editions. As we will see, the author of the article managed to get published, but he certainly did not achieve a positive or even neutral forum in which his critique of industry and technology could be heard.

The frustrated pursuit of a receptive readership is what most directly connects the story of the Unabomber and the events portrayed in DeLillo's novel. DeLillo's Mao II, as Douglas Keesey writes, "expresses its author's mid-career doubts about the effectiveness of fiction in a world largely given over to the electronic media" (177). The protagonist of Mao *II,* Bill Gray, worries that the traditional role of authors is giving way to that of terrorists. With the appearance of the "Unabomber Manifesto," readers of Mao *II may* be left with a question: does the Unabomber play the role of the terrorist who threatens Bill Gray's authorial voice, or is his struggle to be heard itself evidence of the decline of the individual voice, an anxiety articulated by Gray?

When he wrote Mao II, DeLillo was responding to a discourse that was already beginning to emerge about the connection between authorship and terrorism, two deeply problematic ways of achieving a voice. In particular, Mao II responds to the plight of Salman Rushdie, who in 1989 was forced to go into hiding when Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini sentenced him to death for his treatment of Islam in *The Satanic Verses.* DeLillo began writing Mao II soon after Rushdie, fearing assassination, removed himself from public life. Just as Bill Gray in Mao *II* plans to give a reading in support of a writer taken hostage in Beirut, DeLillo read in support of Rushdie in New York City. DeLillo has said of the connection between his novel and Rushdie's situation: "It's the connection between the writer as the champion of the self, and those forces that are threatened by this. Such totalitarian movements can be seen in miniature in the very kind of situation Rushdie is in. He's a hostage" (qtd. in Passaro 77).

The Rushdie connection implies a clear opposition between author and terrorist, an opposition that Bill Gray articulates: "Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated" (DeLillo, Mao *II* 41). But, as we will see, DeLillo's novel complicates the distinction that Gray wants to make between these two roles. Conventionally, the early criticism on Mao // has assumed that DeLillo's point is to lament the decline of the author. Keesey summarizes Bill Gray's task as writing "to keep alive the possibility of another kind of language, one combining personal voices in a democratic shout, private identity within public community" (186). Keesey, however, does not contend with the question of how and when DeLillo's ideas intersect with Gray's. Instead, Keesey almost exclusively interprets Gray's views as if they were DeLillo's; his analysis of Mao // ends: "As he dies, Bill is still trying to wake up and

write a sentence like this. He is struggling to return—and to return us—to individual consciousness" (193).

Other critics have problematized the connection between Gray and DeLillo, but only to a limited extent. Silvia Caporale Bizzini writes, "I am not going to go back to [Gray's] idea of the universal intellectual—although I think that DeLillo from time to time does consider yielding to the temptation" (105). In perhaps the most nuanced discussion of the DeLillo/Gray relation that has been published, Peter Baker sees DeLillo as struggling with questions that also plague Gray. In particular, Baker focuses upon the "death of the author" discussed by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, but suggests that DeLillo is taking on these issues on a higher plane. Whereas Gray, at first figuratively and then literally, dies as an author, unable to do anything but surrender to the trends of mass media and commodification, DeLillo at least puts forward a work that challenges, if it cannot escape, these forces. Baker argues: "The self-image of the novelist as 'artist' would seem to require viewing the novel as just another commodity, even a refined and highly valuable one, as demeaning to the artistic integrity of the work. DeLillo not only faces this question; [...] he begins to burrow inside it" (par. 12). DeLillo is presented by Baker as always a half-step ahead of Gray, but as an author who shares the concerns voiced by his character. As Baker reads him, DeLillo, unlike Gray, can see that his attempt to preserve an isolated yet influential voice is "doomed" (par. 34), but seems to sympathize with Gray's quixotic agenda.

These critics tend to see the author and the terrorist as figures in nearly direct opposition, even if they are shown by DeLillo to be staking similar claims upon the national consciousness. Bizzini writes, "If the writer has lost the power to influence the social fabric with his work, then the terrorist has learnt to use the society of spectacle and images in his favour" (III). The author and the terrorist are combatants in a zero-sum game. As Keesey puts it, "While writers* words have been deprived of their personal impact, terrorist groups have effectively demanded mass obedience to their leader's will" (189). While Baker sees DeLillo as "bravely" making a connection between Bill Gray and terrorist Abu Rashid in the novel, he contends that "DeLillo's imagined portrait of the 'terrorist' half of the equation reveals some of his—perhaps necessary, maybe even inevitable—limitations as both a Westerner and an American" (par. 23). Ultimately, while he approves of DeLillo's complex engagement with the question of contemporary authorship, Baker concludes: "Where Mao *II* falls short, in my view, is in its imaginative representation of the figure of the terrorist" (par. 34). Baker believes that DeLillo presents a false binary between liberal humanist and foreign terrorist, failing to expose sufficiently the contingency of this opposition upon an exclusively western perspective.

None of these critics sufficiently explains the extent to which, or the reasons why, DeLillo actually posits the ideas of "terrorist" and "author" to be distinct. For Gray, the distinction is relatively simple: terrorists are infringing on the territory once held by authors. He says, "What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and

thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous" (157). It is true that DeLillo himself has articulated a similar point of view. In an interview with Vince Passaro, he states, "True 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" (77). Based on statements like these, it is easy to imagine that DeLillo, like Gray, sees the continual and escalating commodification of American fiction as leaving no place for the apolitical novelist. Excessive commodification forces the author to surrender to the terrorist. For Bill Gray, it ends the ability of the individual consciousness to influence the "mass" mind: "The more books they publish, the weaker we become. The secret force that drives the industry is the compulsion to make writers harmless" (47). Only the weight of the "crowds" dreaded by Gray and, seemingly, by DeLillo can influence the other, intersecting crowds that Gray once had written to. "The future belongs to crowds" (16), and the terrorist, whom Gray consistently associates with faceless mass movements, can participate more easily than the novelist in this system.

DeLillo offers plenty of room, however, to question the degree to which Gray, or any other novelist, can participate in a genuinely original act of "authorship," suitably free of confining, extrinsic discourses. "They take a time-honored event and repeat it, repeat it, repeat it until something new enters the world," Karen Janney's father ruminates as she participates in a mass wedding ceremony (4). The statement is revealing of DeLillo's vision of authorship: it describes not only the strange mass-movement phenomenon devised by a figure like Sun Myung Moon, who later in the novel represents the same phenomenon as that of the terrorist. DeLillo shows that Bill Gray and any other author participates in just this same process. Thus the author is connected to the mass movement and to the terrorist not just in the focus of their attention but actually in the methods they use, the way they shape consciousness in a manner that DeLillo describes as linguistic.

Keesey's analysis of Karen is revealing: "Reverend Moon may stage a pretense of intimacy between Karen and the Korean groom she knows almost nothing about, but Karen's deprogrammers are equally hypocritical in feigning a personal connection with her and a concern for her well-being" (183). What Keesey neglects to note here is that his description applies equally well to what Bill does as a novelist. The simulation of a personal connection—the pretense of intimacy—is precisely what Bill strives to achieve in his writing, and this effect is no more nor less real than the effect that her family or the Unification Church has upon Karen. Bill's assistant (and Karen's lover) Scott Martineau describes this effect when he mentions his first encounter with Bill's fiction: "That book was about me somehow. I had to read slowly to keep from jumping out of my skin. I saw myself. It was my book. Something about the way I think and feel. He caught the back-and- forthness. The way things fit almost anywhere and nothing gets completely forgotten" (51).

Scott's reaction to this reading act—he abandons the rest of his life and locates Bill in a successful attempt to become his assistant— parallels Karen's participation in

the Unification "cult." Perhaps, because it is so easy to see Gray, in his reclusiveness, as a figure based on esteemed American authors like J. D. Salinger, Thomas Pynchon, and DeLillo himself—the figures with and about whom critics try to establish interconnections—Gray's ideas have been examined just as if he were a "real," living author, and the subversion of these ideas by other characters, especially Karen, has largely been ignored. Critics have barely begun to explore the possibility that authors DeLillo and Gray are having a debate, and have totally ignored the dialogue in the novel between Bill's and Karen's views.

Bill, as he sees himself, is the voice of the individual consciousness competing with the discursive mass of materialist culture. The world, as he sees it, is accurate to an extent that is almost uncanny: "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). This consciousness seems to be rooted in Bill's special command of the English language. At the same time, as he points out here, this very consciousness limits Bill's agency—his perceptiveness does not allow the author to do anything with it. The same kind of perceptiveness about cultural structures is associated by DeLillo with Karen, who is not a writer but who is the other primary interpreter of cultural phenomena in Mao *II*.[1] As Scott says, "She's smart about people. Looks right through us. Watches TV and knows what people are going to say next" (65). Karen, like Bill, has a sense of language that allows her to make mostly accurate conclusions about the world. She does not, however, have the cultural power that Bill does, that allows people to regard a real-life location as "a Bill Gray place. It really is" (83).

In other words, Bill may be fooling himself when he believes that his cultural perceptiveness renders him an "author," that is, someone clearly set apart from the rest of the population by his command over discourse. Even though Bill claims to regard the novel as a "democratic shout," his explanation of this concept reveals his view that some vague facility—one's "voice" or "talent"—enables some people and not others to participate in the system of authorship: "Some nameless drudge, some desperado with barely a nurtured dream can sit down and find his voice and luck out and do it. Something so angelic it makes your jaw hang open. The spray of talent, the spray of ideas. One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next" (159). The invocation of the "nameless drudge" seems at first to mean that virtually anyone can be an author. But Gray's emphasis on the uniqueness of the achievement indicates that a special

[1] The character of the photographer, Brita Nilsson, might also be said to fit this description, although Brita's current project of photographing writers seems—at least as she describes it—like a compulsive attempt to catalogue rather than to interpret. Note that she has given up photojournalism due to the unavoidable tendency of her photos to turn "horror, reality, [and] misery" into something "pretty" (DeLillo, Mao *II* 24). Though we cannot take her entirely at her word—inevitably, her author-photographs too must be acts of interpretation—I do not have space here to develop fully the interpretive dimensions of her work.

quality exists within the drudge that makes "him" a consciousness that is isolated from the rest of the culture. Even though Bill cannot define the quality inherent in authors very precisely, he seems to be convinced that it exists in some people.

In fact, Bill Gray is part of a social consciousness, not an individual one. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the kind of situation in which Bill is immersed in this way:

> Signs can arise only on *interindividual territory.* It is a territory that cannot be called "natural" in the direct sense of the word: signs do not arise between any two members of the species *Homo sapiens.* It is essential that the two individuals be *organized socially,* that they compose a group (a social unit); only then can the medium of signs take shape between them. The individual consciousness not only cannot be used to explain anything, but, on the contrary, is itself in need of explanation from the vantage point of the social, ideological medium. (12)

The importance of recognizing Bill's writing as taking place in "interindividual territory" is that it questions Bill's belief that, as an author, he is doing something isolated from the rest of the culture, that he is protecting (or trying to protect) a territory from the invasion of mass movements and "terrorists." Not only is Bill's published writing intended to shape the consciousness of masses, it is itself influenced by repeating masses of narrative. George Haddad, the intermediary between Bill and the terrorists led by Abu Rashid, tries to explain this interactivity to him: "Of course rote. We memorize works that serve as guides to conducting a struggle. [...] Children memorize parts of stories their parents tell them. They want the same story again and again. Don't change a word or they get terribly upset. This is the unchanged narrative every culture needs in order to survive" (162).

It is Karen, however, who most frequently suggests in Mao *II* that acts of "authorship" correspond to all other social acts, that authorship itself is, at once, a paradigm for society and just another element within it. Karen's resistance to the shaping of herself by family dynamics parallels Bill's resistance to being shaped as an author by commercial demands. She thinks her family's attempt to deprogram her is "the logical brutal extension of parent-child, locked in a room and forced to listen to rote harangues" (79). At the same time, Karen insists on defending the way she has been shaped by surrounding forces—she refuses to concede that her involvement in the Unification Church was a negative experience for her—just as Bill relishes his unexamined involvement in the profession of authorship. Bill's identity is tied up in being an "author," although other characters call this into question, such as Bill's daughter in this passage:

> "We don't think your behavior had anything to do with writing. We think the Mythical Father used writing as an excuse for just about everything. That's how we analyze the matter, Daddy. We think writing was never the

> burden and the sorrow you made it out to be but as a matter of fact was your convenient crutch and your convenient alibi for every possible failure to be decent." (114)

In part, this analysis is on-target—Bill *has* used his status as an author as an explanation or excuse for all of his actions—but on the other hand, DeLillo shows that Bill's acts ore all tied in with acts of authorship. His use of language really does determine who he is to a great degree, which is why he "feels totally and horribly exposed" when his writing is published (53).

What's left out is that the same situation is true for all of DeLillo's characters; it is presumably true for each of the faceless crowd members that haunts DeLillo's book. No one has a unique command over language, though everyone sees the world through a seemingly unique consciousness, which covers up the degree to which this "consciousness" is determined by the history of endlessly repeating cultural narratives. No one owns language, but everyone is subsumed within language in the postmodern world presented by DeLillo. We see this most frequently in DeLillo's representation of Karen, who feels startled when she realizes that her sojourns among the homeless of New York have been noticed. Her observations become frightening— seem dangerous— only when she realizes that she, too, is a participant in the narrative that she has been shaping. "[S]he felt for the first time since coming here that they could see her, that she wasn't concealed by the desperation of the place. This wasn't a public park but some life- and-death terrain where everything is measured for its worth. She realized they *saw* her. This was a shock" (151). Karen's realization mirrors Bill's discomfort at being published, at revealing himself to the audience that had, until then, been revealing itself to him.

The most important difference between Bill and Karen is that Karen, while recognizing that what she perceives as her consciousness cannot be shared with others, also knows that her perceptions are not shaped by her mind alone, but that she has been conditioned to think the way she does by narrative forces that are largely outside her, currents in which she takes part but which cannot be subsumed within her. It is not a matter of trying to share something inside herself with others; Karen and the crowds she sees on the streets or on television are all part of a larger system which connects them but which is also limited—which cannot provide the depth of connection that she or Bill or anyone else might want it to. She is not an "author" as Bill would define one because she does not try to control narrative. In discussing its "death," Barthes describes the author in this way: "To assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to close writing" (53). Karen is adept at reading her surroundings, but she does not hold the cultural power that Bill once did to set boundaries around what words and events can mean.

As Foucault points out, however, a belief in the capacity of an author to set the boundaries of meaning has not been abandoned by western readers. In "What Is an Author?" Foucault writes, "Our culture has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or

writing, as something designed to ward off death. Writing has become linked to sacrifice, even to the sacrifice of life; it is now a voluntary effacement which does not need to be represented in books, since it is brought about in the writer's very existence" (264). This statement suggests a central concern of Bill Gray's: that, as an author, he has become an icon, and readers' perceptions about his life now overshadow the ideas put forward by his fiction. His assistant Scott regards Bill's mystique as a positive factor: "Bill gets bigger as his distance from the scene disappears" (52); "Book and writer are now inseparable" (68). But Bill knows that, when he became an icon, the brightness of his image detracted from the power of his words. Paradoxically, Bill's continued exile intensifies the diminishment of his authorial power, but by emerging into the public arena once again, he would only accomplish a further diminishment, as readers became aware that his words could no longer live up to the image they have held. As Scott points out, if Bill were to publish his current manuscript, "it would be the end of Bill as a myth, a force" (52).

This is the death of the author as experienced by Bill: the condensation of his writings into a single image, the quick shift of his complex, focused narratives into just another narrative in a stream of millions. He is, in Foucault's words, "a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, it is because, in reality, we make him function in the exact opposite fashion" (274). Foucault's "author-function" is what enabled Bill once to believe that he was shaping consciousness—the limiting of meaning described in this passage is precisely what Bill was doing when he became esteemed as a novelist. At the same time, as the end of Foucault's statement suggests, the same system that exalted Bill also chains him. By seeming to create meaning—by assigning boundaries around language—Bill has captured the attention of a mass audience, but he has also, inevitably, encountered the limit of his words' power to affect his audience.

It is this quandary that provokes Bill to claim that terrorists are taking over the ground that novelists once held. Terrorists, he believes, now have the power actually to change people's actions; this is their violence, their ability to be dangerous. As Bill's editor, Charlie Everson, says,

> You have a twisted sense of the writer's place in society. You think the writer belongs at the far margin, doing dangerous things. In Central America, writers carry guns. They have to. And this has always been your idea of the way it ought to be. The state should want to kill all writers. Every government, every group that holds power or aspires to power should feel so threatened by writers that they hunt them down, everywhere. (DeLillo, Mao *II* 97)

Bill, as Everson notes, has "lived out the vision," in part by remaining a recluse (97). Like a terrorist, Bill's project as he sees it depends upon his ability to remain

hidden; exposure, in his mind, would have the same negative consequence as being arrested has in the mind of the terrorist. Frequently, he is compared to a terrorist: a photographer, taken to his home for an unprecedented photo shoot, remarks, "I feel as if I'm being taken to see some terrorist chief at his secret retreat in the mountains," and his assistant replies, "Tell Bill. He'll love that" (27). Bill relishes the idea that his words carry the dangerous, even violent power of terrorism.

At the same time, Bill sees acts of terrorism as something very distinct from his work as an author. In a nicely deconstructive moment in Moo *II,* Bill ruminates on the poet/hostage in Beirut:

> When you inflict punishment on someone who is not guilty, when you fill rooms with innocent victims, you begin to empty the world of meaning and erect a separate mental state, the mind consuming what's outside itself, replacing real things with plots and fictions. One fiction taking the world narrowly into itself, the other fiction pushing out toward the social order, trying to unfold into it. (200)

A close look at this statement reveals the degree to which authorship and terrorism have been confused in the world DeLillo presents: does fiction of the type Bill writes take "the world narrowly into itself"? Is terrorism a fiction that pushes "out toward the social order"? Or is it the other way around? In fact, DeLillo shows, in a complex argument emerging throughout *Mao II,* that a distinction between terrorism and authorship can no longer be made as clearly as it once was.

DeLillo's Bill Gray associates terrorism almost always with crowds. In frequent allusions, Chairman Mao, of whom the book is a partial namesake, represents the blend of individual consciousness and mass influence that seems to frighten and captivate Bill simultaneously. Says George, the terrorists' intermediary, "There are different ways in which words are sacred. The precious line of poetry often sits in ignorance of conditions surrounding it. Poor people, young people, anything can be written on them. Mao said this. And he wrote and he wrote. He became the history of China written on the masses. And his words became immortal. Studied, repeated, memorized by an entire nation" (161). To a large extent, this is just what Bill dreams his fiction will do, as George is aware when he attempts to flatter him: "You could have been a Maoist, Bill. [...] You would have written what the culture needed in order to see itself. And you would have seen the need for an absolute being, a way out of weakness and confusion" (163).

Pulling together a wide-ranging but consistent assortment of comments in Mao //, one can formulate a definition of authorship as Bill Gray sees it. An author, according to this definition, speaks for no one but himself but is in touch with the currents of the culture, speaks at once to timeless truths and to contemporary politics, is dangerous and yet does not actually hurt or kill anyone. An author, ideally, is influential but never commercial. His writings are instantly familiar, but he is not known except through his

writings. Somehow, at once, Bill Gray's author represents the individual consciousness and the mass mind. Not only are Bill's standards of authorship too high to be achieved by anyone, they are in fact inconsistent; they deconstruct themselves. This, as I see it, is much of DeLillo's point

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Within the year of Theodore Kaczynski's capture, Warner Books published *Mad Genius,* a paperback account of what it termed (in the subtitle) the Unabomber "Odyssey" written by journalists from *Time* magazine. In a statement that echoes DeLillo's novel, Lance Morrow writes in the introduction to this book, "As that successful paranoid Mao Zedong once advised, 'Let a hundred flowers bloom. Let a hundred schools of thought contend'" (2). Morrow's point is that a "multicultural supermarket of bad guys" has caused contemporary American culture to be marked by paranoia. As Morrow sees it, this is both because many of the "available enemies," from feminists to fundamentalist Christians, engage in paranoia, and because the proliferation of enemies has made most Americans, regardless of affiliation, feel paranoid: "Paranoia may come in either tribal or private form" (2). The Unabomber, in this scheme, is seen as a paranoid who spreads his paranoia to others. The depiction of the Unabomber in the American media (of which Mad *Genius* is representative) is in many ways a response to the polyphony that Morrow sees in contemporary culture. It is an attempt to contend with the chaos perceived as inherent in the presence of many discourses, to invoke, in Foucault's words, "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning" (274).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Unabomber himself, in the "Manifesto," is deeply engaged with the problem of acquiring a voice that can be heard amid the noise of contemporary culture. In particular, of course, the "Manifesto" is a response to the noise of technology. But the Unabomber also tries to make a statement, in his writings as well as his actions, about how the individual actor can make a difference. In a harsh condemnation of "leftists," for instance, he writes: "Art forms that appeal to modern leftish intellectuals tend to focus on sordidness, defeat, and despair, or else they take an orgiastic tone, throwing off rational control as if there were no hope of accomplishing anything through rational calculation and all that was left was to immerse oneself in the sensations of the moment" ("Industrial" 187). In other words, for the author of this statement, it is imperative to believe that "art" can overcome "despair," that an individual's works, through reason, can make a difference in the world.

Reason, however, has necessarily given way to violence in the Unabomber's view; and this change has come about because of the proliferation of discourses:

> Anyone who has a little money can have something printed, or can distribute it on the Internet or in some such way, but what he has to say will be swamped by the vast volume of material put out by the media, hence it will have no practical effect. To make an impression on society with words

is therefore almost impossible for most individuals and small groups. [...] In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we've had to kill people. ("Industrial" 212)

To a startling extent, then, the Unabomber's thoughts on the acquisition of a cultural voice parallel Bill Gray's: the priority that, both believe, once was given to the rational, culturally valuable voice no longer exists, and so the only option for the consciousness that wishes to be heard is violence. The common ground between the Unabomber and Bill Gray is that both believe that words can no longer be influential in the way that direct action is. Both believe in the importance of words, but the Unabomber, unlike Gray, thinks (based on the above passage) that *acts of* violence might be able to draw spectators' attention back to the words themselves; Gray, when he decides to confront the terrorists himself at the end of /Mao II, seems to have abandoned words altogether. Perhaps this explains why Gray, unlike the Unabomber, is unwilling to advocate or to use actual violence: Gray's ultimate decision is to sacrifice himself (emphasizing both the power and the destruction of individual consciousness) to bring about results, and does not constitute a mere attempt to intensify his language. By the end of Mao *II* Bill has abandoned his pursuit of authorship. The Unabomber, in contrast, differs from the "author" discussed in DeLillo's novel only in his use of literal, rather than figurative, violence.

Before elaborating the implications of this statement, it may be necessary to explore the Unabomber's relationship to the role of "terrorist" as understood by Bill and others. The Unabomber, as I have already suggested, is the violent actor whom Bill sees as a threat to authorship, the "bomb-maker" whose exploits draw attention away from more thoughtful statements. His reclusiveness corresponds to the facelessness of the terrorist threat in Bill's mind. Yet, as I also have tried to suggest, the Unabomber in many ways is Bill; that is, the Unabomber occupies the spot that Bill alternately occupies, fears he can no longer occupy, and, finally, chooses not to occupy. The Unabomber—both as he represents himself in writing and as he has been represented by the media—stands for individual consciousness. As much as anything, this implies what the Unabomber is not: he is not a group (regardless of his use of "we" and of his association of himself with the group "FC," which the FBI and, consequently, the media never pursued). And he is not foreign:[2] nearly from the start, the perpetrator of the bombs was assumed to be an American.

Certainly, the Unabomber fits the definition of a terrorist as one who uses "fear-inducing violence for a political purpose" (Wright 4), which seems like a commonsensical approach. Yet the Unabomber is, as we will see, very much an author, which may

[2] As Baker astutely argues, the use of the word "terrorist" in the United States has exclusively been in a foreign context: "American domestic lawlessness, whether it be Randall Terry and the murderous 'Operation Rescue' or David Koresh and his armed-to-the-teeth suicidal followers, is *never* referred to as terrorism in the American media" (par. 22). This situation has changed somewhat, however, since the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. I have found no occasion upon which the Unabomber has been described in the media as a "terrorist."

simply mean that his words have attracted almost as much attention as his actions. Or rather, his words and his actions—his language and his life outside of language—have been rendered inseparable, so that his "Manifesto" isn't dismissed in the same way that the verbal statements of foreign terrorists are, while at the same time his comments don't exactly receive an "attentive" reading, either. The reception of the Unabomber's words and actions illustrate a paradox in American culture, one with which DeLillo is deeply engaged in Mao *II.* Those who have written about the Unabomber in the American press have found themselves unable to treat their subject as just another terrorist, while at the same time remaining, for obvious and not-so-obvious reasons, unwilling to admit that they are in fact treating him as just another author.

A few terms might be introduced here to suggest the distance between the terms "author" and "terrorist" as they tend to be used in American culture:

author	*terrorist*
local	foreign
individualist	group-oriented
cultural (i.e., responsive to general trends)	political (i.e., produces specific demands)
words	actions
isolated from crowds	hidden within crowds

These oppositions are present in Mao *II;* some misreadings of the novel have occurred, in my view, when DeLillo is seen as endorsing them. These oppositions also illustrate a key point in interpreting the media reaction to the Unabomber, particularly as it manifested itself once a proper name—Theodore Kaczynski—became attached to this identity. Kaczynski, as portrayed in the media, blurs the lines between each of the oppositions, as (I would suggest) DeLillo does in Mao //. Kaczynski is an American, but the media found ways to portray him subtly as foreign, for instance, by showing him to be unpatriotic, by defining him as a quasi-expatriate in Montana, and by focusing attention on his Polish name. He represented, for reporters, the consummate rugged individualist, but was also duly placed into perspective as representative of various oppositional discourses (the anti-technological Luddites, the Berkeley faculty of which he was once a part, and Montana survivalists). He has been used to comment upon trends in both culture and more narrow forms of politics. And, of course, his provenance is both words and actions.

In sum, the representation of Kaczynski shows that the distinction between authorship and terrorism is increasingly untenable, even among mainstream observers who, presumably, have not all immersed themselves in deconstructive theory. For this reason, his treatment in the media illustrates an attempt to reckon with a paradox. How can we hold on to the illusion that one can speak for oneself, while also retaining a semblance of control and thus avoiding the chaos inherent in "the proliferation of meaning"? The answer to this question is, perhaps, the key assertion of DeLillo's novel:

the paradox vanishes when we realize that assigning authorship to any actor no longer constitutes a threat. Because we now assume that no individual labeled "author" carries any significant cultural power, commentators on the Unabomber case have simply written about Kaczynski as they might write about any other author.

In *Mad Genius,* Kaczynski is consistently defined in comparison to other writers. Early on, the reader is offered insight into Kaczynski's childhood by way of a description of "his vacation reading: *Romping Through Mathematics from Addition to Calculus"* (Gibbs, et al. 25). Allusions to Kaczynski's reading habits are not just presented to emphasize his propensity toward strangeness: firmly canonical texts, as well as lesser-known contemporary works, dot Kaczynski's reading list as presented in Mad *Genius.* In large part, these are put forward with the pretense of offering insight into Kaczynski's mind as the putative author of the "Unabomber Manifesto": "In the end, the most pertinent source for his manifesto may not be Ellul or Mumford but Dostoyevsky and his *Notes from Underground,* with its wretched narrator who despises the claims of rationality but feels their sheer weight pressing in upon him. [...] Anyone looking for models of the Unabomber's mind may do well to start there" (117). Such allusions to literature pervade Mad *Genius,* placed there ostensibly "[fjor those interested in Kaczynski's intellectual life" (137). In my view, discussions of Kaczynski as an intertextual creature are not offered simply to give the reader insight into the Unabomber's mind (though the expectation that there is desire for such insight is itself interesting). Nor are the allusions simply a way of connecting Kaczynski more firmly with the Unabomber, whose "Manifesto" is supposed to bear the imprint of Kaczynski's readings. Most importantly, the use of authors as referents in Mad *Genius* works to control the meaning of the Unabomber, to ensure that the interpretation offered by the journalists who wrote the book takes precedence over the Unabomber's own words (which are appended at the end of the book). The motif of intertextuality in Mad *Genius* is, in the end, just one more example of the critic's emergence as equal or greater in importance to the author—the very phenomenon to which Barthes pointed in "The Death of the Author."

The interpretation of Kaczynski's sources offered by Mad *Genius,* in fact, may be spurious ones if we believe Serge F. Kovaleski's account offered by the FBI, and published in the *Washington Post* in July 1996, that the Unabomber's primary source was Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent.* The *Post* story goes to great lengths to strengthen the connection between Kaczynski and Conrad, pointing out that Kaczynski read Conrad's works "about a dozen times" (Kovaleski Al) and that his full name, Theodore John Kaczynski, seems to echo Conrad's given name, Teodore Jozef Konrad Korzeniowski (A6). Though presenting some striking similarities between Conrad's novel and Kaczynski's life, Kovaleski rather surreptitiously confuses exactly which characters Kaczynski is supposed to parallel. In the single newspaper story, Kaczynski is tied to Conrad's representation of three separate characters—Steevie, "the Professor," and Verloc—although a casual reader of the story who has not also read Conrad's novel will not be likely to notice how fluid these connections are.

Moreover, Kovaleski pays most of his attention to connections between Kaczynski's life and Conrad's novel, only providing a rudimentary comparison between the anti-technological theme of the Unabomber "Manifesto" and a similar current in *The Secret Agent.* Apparently, we are to believe that Kaczynski not only bought into Conrad's rather oblique discussion of the dangers of science (reading the novel, one does not get a strong sense that the author believed in the complaints of his anarchist characters), but that he also went so far as to model minute details of his life, idiosyncratically, upon actions by an assortment of characters. Thus, Kaczynski, "grossly unkempt, [. . .] lived for a time off turnips he grew behind his cabin. One of the anarchists in the novel lived on a diet of raw carrots" (Kovaleski Al). Surely there is no point to this comparison, if not as part of a larger scheme to place the man believed to be the Unabomber firmly in authorial relation to the "Manifesto" as narrative, the realm of the conventionally (and reassuringly) understandable.

Neither the Unabomber, author of a "Manifesto," nor Don DeLillo, author of Mao II, ultimately can escape being contained within narratives—certain structures that determine how a text can be used, what it can mean—that problematize the ability of the individual voice to rise up above others. This is not necessarily a new or a bad state of affairs: DeLillo, for example, leaves plenty of room to question Bill Gray's idea of why his voice should carry elite status, or how accurate his authorial sensitivity is in the first place.[3] A final current that I want to touch upon in *Mao II,* which often goes unnoticed, is the room DeLillo gives us to question his own authorial voice. As already noted, DeLillo cannot be successfully read as synonymous with Gray. The distance DeLillo seeks to place between himself and his character comes through especially strongly near the middle of the novel, when we are told by the narrator that "Bill was not a list-making novelist" (140). In

case the reader misses the implied contrast with the list-making DeLillo, a few pages later the narrator inserts five words that evoke his 1984 novel *White Noise,* but which would never find a place in a novel of Bill's: "Sony, Mita, Kirin, Magno, Midori" (DeLillo, Moo *II* 148).

The point is not just that DeLillo distances himself from his character: what is remarkable is that he concedes his own voice to be just one more narrative among others, a concession that has allowed readers to assume that Bill's voice is the one that DeLillo is trying to echo. The authorial experiments DeLillo performs in Moo *II*—such as his frequent attempts to parallel actual speech patterns—aren't attempts to bring himself closer to an "authentic" voice, it seems to me, so much as a way of pointing out the narrative baggage we readers already must carry in order to make sense out of comments like, "All that driving, you must be really" (32). When "Bill laughed in a certain way" (164), the reader must recognize that DeLillo is not, in

[3] Conrad, for the record, contends with the problem of attaining a voice in *The Secret Agent,* especially in a public arena where "ready-made phrases" are available to explain and thus dismiss almost any action. See, especially, Verloc's encounter with Mr. Vladimir in chapter 2.

fact, revealing something new to the reader—what does "a certain way" of laughing sound like?—and also must note the force, the self-conscious attempt at certainty, that preserves the illusion of genuine communication. (I become convinced of DeLillo's own self-consciousness about this process each time it strikes me how much alike all of his characters' speech patterns sound.)

In short, DeLillo points out the degree to which the binaries by which authorship is defined—especially the binary between individual and mass consciousness—are untenable. DeLillo cannot be maintained as a coherent voice distinct from all the rest of the dialogues in culture any more than can the Unabomber. Of course, DeLillo has received a more positive reception than the Unabomber, and indeed more than most published authors: two blurbs appearing on Mao *II* specifically discuss DeLillo's anticipated entry into the canon. DeLillo has been seen, in Frank Lentricchia's words, as "represent[ing] a rare achievement in American literature—the perfect weave of novelistic imagination and cultural criticism" (qtd. in Passaro 76). Flattering as such a statement might be for DeLillo, in the end he shows that holding these two concepts together is too much to ask of anyone.

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What Is a Terrorist?
Contemporary Authorship, the Unabomber, and DeLillo's "Mao II"

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 45, number 3, Fall 1999.
Purdue Research Foundation by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

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