

Each of the four sections of Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991) begins with a reproduction of a photo. The opening section photo depicts the "spectacle" of mass marriage brought to one of America's most iconic spectator spots, Yankee Stadium, by a Master, we learn in the first chapter, who unburdens his Moonie followers of "free will and independent thought" (DeLillo 7). It is an eerie image and one that quite effectively cements the novel's notion that the "future belongs to the crowds" (DeLillo 16). Images and crowds, after all, dominate DeLillo's story of authors, authorship, terror, and terrorism. They permeate the pages and the lives of the characters in such a way to suggest that the world has in fact been infiltrated by images, taken over by crowds, left depersonalized and consumed to seek guidance and purpose from any authority that quells their longing—a cult Master, terrorist cell, or perpetually unfinished novel. But *Mao II* is not merely a depiction of the postmodern condition or solely a portrayal of a world devoid of reality. It is also, as Linda Hutcheon describes, "a study of representation," one that explores the way "in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self" (7). I will argue in this project that *Mao II* and DeLillo's other recent work, including *The Body Artist* (2001) and *Falling Man* (2007) seek to call attention to the various forms of authorship informing our construction of experience and to the potentially subversive and critical power of art in contemporary society—particularly images and narrative—even as he and other artists function and create within the very confines they seek to subvert.

The aim of this project is examine the role of artists in the contemporary world as they are represented in U.S. fiction and film, specifically the works of Don DeLillo, including *Mao II* (1991), *The Body Artist* (2001), and *Falling Man* (2007), along with the work of postmodern multimedia artist Miranda July. I will argue that these artists suggest that there is an artistic

evolution occurring in response to the demands of contemporary society. Given the influence of terrorism and terroristic tactics, image and media proliferation, and alienating technological advances, today's society demands art and artists find new ways to be affective and effective, to influence and subvert, to challenge and reflect. The work of Don DeLillo explores both the circumstances that trigger this change as well as the effective possibilities of artistic evolution appropriate for a society that is growing paradoxically closer together yet further apart.

Beginning with *Mao II* and continued in depth in *The Body Artist* and *Falling Man*, DeLillo investigates artistic challenges and opportunities and their relationship to the human condition in a postmodern world, making his work ripe for a literary analysis of the role of artists and the power of art in the twenty-first century. I will argue that he concludes that art, like people, must grow and adapt to understand, challenge, and respond to society's current condition.

Though his thoughts on the role of writers in a world of terrorism and image proliferation have been thoroughly and thoughtfully studied, little has been written on the subject post-9/11, particularly on *Falling Man*. Thus, a gap exists in DeLillo study. This project will analyze the author's contemporary view of writers in the twenty-first century and, just as importantly, other forms of art that may or may not be usurping the writer's role, including photography and performance art, which are prevalent mediums in his most recent work.

I will further argue that the type of artistic evolution DeLillo presents in his fiction is being embraced by postmodern artist Miranda July. Her debut film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), serves as a useful example of the contemporary role of the artist in a technology- and image-driven world. Like DeLillo, July explores both the conditions that keep us at a distance from one another along with the subtle yet powerful ways we find to connect, often discovered and nurtured through art. This is a task made easier by artists' adaptations to

the demands of contemporary society through techniques that at once embrace, subvert, tease, exalt, call attention to, and make of fun of the very real, frightening, enlightening and influential forces that govern human life in the postmodern age. July's form as well as her content informs such an analysis. Along with the film, her artistic projects include performance art, photography, music, screenwriting, short stories, and multimedia and online projects, which offer fruitful opportunities for investigation and unexplored connections to established, contemporary authors like DeLillo who have, traditionally, occupied the role of cultural informers and analysts.

My study of the society these artists are reflecting and responding to as well as close readings of the works will be aided by the postmodern theory of Linda Hutcheon and Jean Baudrillard along with a rich history of DeLillo scholarship by critics such as Mark Osteen and Leonard Wilcox. In addition, nuances of representation and analysis will be brought to light through published interviews with DeLillo and his non-fiction essays.

The final section of *Mao II* is framed, as in the beginning, by a photograph, this time one of three boys in a bunker displaying a peace (or victory) sign with their hands. Unlike the other framing section photos depicting the masses, this one is clear, and the faces of the boys are distinct. One of them is aiming something at the camera, though it is uncertain whether it is another camera or a gun. The photograph mirrors some of the questions this project seeks to explore—which is more powerful, the camera or the gun? What has more meaning, words or bombs? Do the advances of contemporary society bring us together or leave us reeling alone in the dusty plains of technology and media, lonely specs indistinguishable from the “mass”? What good is art anymore when it's processed and packaged and reproduced for consumption by a culture whose evidence of guilty intoxication lingers in a television haze?—and serves as a useful lens for an investigation into the power of art in postmodern society.

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