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DELILLO SPECIAL ISSUE

"Gathering Facts for the End of the World": Don DeLillo's Archive of Global Turbulence

Cornelius Collins

Fordham University, US
corneliuscollins@rocketmail.com

Over his career, Don DeLillo grows to inhabit more complex and critical ideas about politics, capitalism, and strategies for opposition than the remote affect of his earlier work might suggest. As part of this project, he developed an advanced analysis of conditions under the global finance regimes gaining strength in the West. The author's papers at the Harry Ransom Center show that he arrived at this informed position through a program of independent research, his newspaper cuttings from this period vividly demonstrating reflections on the meaning of US global power. After living in Greece for a period of time and returning to New York, his investment in public intellectual debates on the meaning of "terrorism" led to a characteristic but problematic emphasis on free speech as a political issue. More recently, his work has turned to sophisticated theoretical texts for increasingly subtle ideas about globalization and its opponents.

At an early moment in the epic ride across Manhattan that makes up the narrative line of Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* (2003), two characters comment on the appeal of traveling by cab rather than their more customary private limousine. "I like taxis," says the woman, a newly married heiress to a European banking family. "I was never good at geography" and I learn things by asking the drivers where "[t]hey come from." To this affectless remark, her husband intones, "They come from horror and despair." But this is, in fact, what his wife has in mind: "Yes, exactly. One learns about the countries where unrest is occurring by riding the taxis here" (16). Finally the husband, as he takes her hand in passion, contemplates the maimed hand of their Sikh driver, which strikes him as "impressive, a serious thing, a body ruin that carried history and pain" (17).

One of the deeper ironies in this exchange is the way that its author represents an exception to its abstracted account of how "one learns" (and, as is also implied, the limited extent to which "one" is really concerned) about "unrest" and unequal access to security in the contemporary world. This is not to say that DeLillo dismisses the wisdom of cab drivers—far from it¹—but his writings make the case that one can learn a good deal about conditions in other countries by, for example, reading. All of DeLillo's fiction exudes learnedness: this quality, among others, made his work attractive to critics developing the category of literary postmodernism during the 1970s and early 1980s, the period of his emergence as a major American author. But what may not be apparent from a basic study of his books are the scale and seriousness of the research behind them. As I will discuss in this essay, a period of travel abroad was critical in spurring DeLillo's evolution as a writer of global concern, but in all phases of his career he has been a perceptive and creative reader.

This has become more widely known since the opening of the author's archive at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. There the copious research materials that DeLillo assembled reveal significant developments in his thought on a very wide range of topics over the course of four decades and counting.

¹ In a comparable moment in another novel, *Mao II*, an accomplished writer near the end of his life recalls the utterance of a driver which continues to exemplify, for him, "the uninventable poetry, inside the pain, of what people say" (DeLillo 216). The driver's line: "I was born under the old tutelage the earlier the better" (215).

But where his engagement deepens perhaps most notably is on the matter of global "unrest"—its symptoms, causes, and implications. The papers establish that DeLillo's interest in these issues intensifies, and his perspective on them shifts, in relation to the various textual milieus he engaged as he moves through different stages of his writing career. In this essay, I will sketch this trajectory with an analysis of the source materials for three examples of DeLillo's work as a novelist of global unrest—*The Names* (1982), *Mao II* (1991), and *Cosmopolis*. Specifically, these materials and their associated texts demonstrate a deepening exposure to and acceptance of critical discourses on contemporary society under global capitalism. This formation, however, was not a linear process, as I will show.

At the same time, a study of the archive also reveals numerous intriguing discrepancies between the local situations rendered in the fiction and what DeLillo evidently knew to be true from his research. Taken in sum, these often subtle fictional departures from documented reality demonstrate his abiding dedication to, even refinement of, a narrative style marked by ambiguity and distance. For DeLillo, such an aesthetic does not undermine an oppositional political stance; it does not require or produce the kind of abstracted detachment expressed by his characters, like the ones just cited. As he puts it in a 1988 interview, for DeLillo, the writer's position lies "in the margins," whence to gain a critical perspective on the "the system and [...] the structure that now, more than ever, we have to resist" (Arensberg 46). Writing and reading at the point of emergence of the West's neoliberal consensus and the era of globalization, as he developed the themes and styles of his fiction, DeLillo also put extraordinary attention toward forming a clearer understanding of that "system" and the strategies available for resisting it.

"Checking the Local Papers, Wherever I Happened to Be"²: *The Names*

Sitting down in Athens for his first major interview in 1979, DeLillo cited *Americana* (1971) as the book "closest to [his] own experience," since, it being his first novel, naturally he "drew material more directly from people and situations

² DeLillo, *The Names* 250.

"[he] knew firsthand" in writing the text (LeClair 4). Yet the same could soon be said again about *The Names*, on which DeLillo was then at work and for which, thanks to the period of travel in and around Greece that a Guggenheim fellowship was enabling, he had a replenished fund of experiential material to draw from. *The Names* has long been seen by author and readers alike as a turning point in DeLillo's writing. It has been presented both as the fruition of the author's definitive early tropes and as the inauguration of a new phase.³ DeLillo himself has reflected that he became an author "much more conscious of the discipline [he] needed, the level of concentration [he] needed" when undertaking this novel, with a "motivation" he hopes "has informed my work ever since" (Silverblatt). After finishing *The Names*, DeLillo would attest that the experience changed his perspective, in that "[t]he simple fact that [he] was confronting new landscapes and fresh languages made [him] feel almost duty bound to get it right. [He] would see and hear more clearly than [he] could in more familiar places," and he wanted to render the details with like clarity (Harris 18).

The Names, then, marks several kinds of shifts in DeLillo's fictional practice. I want to suggest, however, that the heightened sense of commitment around the work follows not from the renewed attention DeLillo bestowed at this time to such writerly issues as experience and craft, but rather from his development, as a reader, of an original, analytic perspective on the workings of the late twentieth-century global system. In the image DeLillo begins to construct with this novel, this system is an increasingly interdependent, but profoundly imbalanced, engine of ongoing catastrophe. Rising social unrest and political instability in the then-Third World runs throughout *The Names* as a source of background anxiety, though this concern is often occluded because of its mainly thematic coordination with the novel's several plots. Even the violent cult murdering selected members of the area's aged and infirm is only abstractly political: they are, at best guess, "zealots of the alphabet" (DeLillo, *Names* 75). Nonetheless, it is with this novel that DeLillo definitively takes

³ For example, it is for Mark Osteen the early DeLillo's fullest engagement with the quest plot (99), and for David Cowart, his most subtle expression of the "numinous and redemptive" properties of language (180). By contrast, *The Names* is the earliest DeLillo text adduced by Paul Maltby and Amy Hungerford in their arguments for the author's "visionary" or "mystic" strain.

up one of his mature work's chief subjects: the US-led transformation of the world into a single economy and market—the project to end history, which only later, in the 1990s, would come generally to be called globalization.

Study of his research materials makes clear that not only DeLillo's writer's eye, but also his concerns about global politics were directly roused by his experience as an American abroad, which produced in him a new self-consciousness of his country's outsized, yet often covert, role in world affairs. These are "the facts of U.S. involvement," whose extent and details were, for DeLillo as well as for his protagonist James Axton, previously hidden or ignored (*Names* 238). The abundant thematic focus in *The Names* on an increasingly global vision of disorder stems from the situation of living in and observing unfamiliar social environments whose evident decline, DeLillo found, could be connected with broader, political causes. Through his probing of the issues, he came clearly to possess a granular level of insight into the region's conflicts—detail that he often, but not always, deploys in the fiction. This understanding derives from his travel experience, but even more from his reading, as his archive reveals that during his sojourn DeLillo continuously sought after and sifted through information in an effort to comprehend local and regional conditions. And at this stage in his authorial career, the best route to such expertise was the news.

In the 1991 essay collection that marked DeLillo's entry into the academic canon, Frank Lentricchia "introduced" Don DeLillo as, among other things, a writer who clearly reads newspapers, "and to advantage" (1). Whereas conversations with the type of Western professionals who populate *The Names*—strategically glib and guarded exchanges of "[d]rink and banter" (DeLillo 220)—might appear to have been the author's primary sources of insight into the fields of global finance, security, and diplomacy, DeLillo's research materials for this novel reveal that he located most of the topical references in the text himself, pulling them from his reading of basic news sources, in addition to a smaller set of magazine features and books for general readers. Throughout his time abroad, before and while drafting the text, DeLillo clipped from local and international English-language dailies like the *Athens News and Jordan Times* dozens of reports on just the kind of political turmoil that darkens the edges of the fictional narrative: the brief, often nonspecific references

to bombings, coups, oil shortages, US asset freezes, and "very large groups of people marching on embassies and banks" (*Names* 66). From this mass of newsprint, DeLillo compiled an archive depicting Third-World societies as riven by, and containing elements broadly resistant to, the forces of global economic integration then being vigorously promoted by Western financial institutions and political agencies. This research not only sharpened the work in progress by providing a store of concrete details for the countries touched on by the narrative, but it also shaped DeLillo's perspective on globalization and its discontents for years to come.

For *The Names* (and thereafter), DeLillo's primary style of annotating his clippings was to underline select phrases. Apposite to this novel, most often highlighted are names—of Western companies and government bureaus on the one hand and, on the other, of resistance movements, like "the People's Revolutionary Struggle," who targeted "buildings housing the offices of Shell and British Petroleum" with "[t]wo home-made bombs" in August 1980.⁴ In this way, DeLillo schematized the conflicting factions: outlets of Western capital along with its clients and military support versus fledgling paramilitary organizations of Marxist and nationalist stripes. To be sure, group signifiers are potentially deceptive, just like brands, but this would not have escaped DeLillo given the novel's thematic attention to the gaps between names and things, especially in light of the ambiguity that surrounds the name of the cult.⁵ DeLillo was not simply scanning his sources for names that would sound convincingly militant to an English-language reader. Instead, he used the names as a discursive gloss on the conflict's current alignment of forces, an index to its history, and, importantly, a means for establishing an autonomous fiction, as my next example will show.

⁴ "Bomb Blasts in Athens," UPI, 22 Aug. 1980. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4. (N.B.: In DeLillo's newspaper clippings, source information is sometimes incomplete, and more so in this earlier period of his research and writing. Here, the periodical title is missing.)

⁵ Several possibilities—*Ta Onómata*, the Names, the Abecedarians—are bruited, but the cult's name, or whether it is anonymous, is never established definitively. Cowart argues that DeLillo "challenges traditional, naive ideas about referentiality in "language" without the "casual impugning of language as reality vehicle" decried by postmodernist fiction's critics (162–63).

Organized Speculation and Possible Interpretations of Known Facts

Another name DeLillo underlined is the "Revolutionary Organization of November 17"—taken, as explained in his source, from the date in 1973 when the Greek army suppressed a demonstration by Athens university students against the military junta that then ruled the country.⁶ In working this reference into his fictional text, DeLillo does something interesting: when a character mentions this group and its claim of responsibility for the murder of a police chief and his driver—an actual incident which took place in Athens on 16 January 1980—DeLillo introduces a nominal counterpart, an opposing militia to stand for what one of the chatting expatriates casually calls "the other side of the argument" (*Names* 257).⁷ In the novel, this militia—purely fictional partisans of the real colonels who led the junta, deposed in 1974—has been writing its name and slogan ("Greece is risen") on city walls as a reminder of the day in April 1967 when their champions took power: "Four twenty-one. Or twenty-one four, as they do it here" (257).⁸ Inventing a reactionary organization, "Twenty-One Four," to parallel an actual leftist group, 17N, suggests the take of a cynical outsider: six of one, half a dozen of the other, an interchangeability further connoted by the reversible name. However, this perspective is not necessarily DeLillo's, who after all did not read of any such nonexistent entity. Rather, it is that of his Western characters—some blasé, some naïve—who in their effort to maintain innocence take no position on the "argument," but promptly deflect the conversation to nonpolitical topics, "as an automatic response to talk of violence" (257).

⁶ "2nd Policeman Dies in Hospital." *Athens News* 18 Jan. 1980. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

⁷ The assassination of Pantelis Petrou, deputy chief for the riot police (MAT), on 16 Jan. 1980 was the third major action carried out by the Revolutionary Organization 17 November since its inception in 1975. DeLillo probably did not know that "17N" would reign as Greece's most prominent armed resistance movement until 2002, when its leaders were apprehended and put on trial for their crimes, which included murders of CIA and US military personnel. The group is the subject of book-length studies by Kassimeris and Lekea.

⁸ These two names bracket the period remembered in Greece as the "Regime of the Colonels": 1967 to 1974, when the junta effectively lost its legitimacy over its response to the student uprising.

By fabricating a double, DeLillo, too, avoids taking one "side of the argument," though not from a sense of innocence, I suggest, but out of loyalty to what David Cowart calls DeLillo's "authorial autonomy," or his idea that writers should maintain, or create, intellectual independence from their subjects, often through formal techniques (111). The political effect of the invention is ambiguous: read one way, positing a counterforce to 17N cancels the significance of its agenda, relegating its ideas to a generalized margin; read another, it rationalizes the positions, perhaps even the violence, of 17N by suggesting they are not alone in their resistance, that anti-Western opposition can plausibly come from all angles of the political matrix. Either way, with this subtle act of departure from his source material, DeLillo establishes a fictional space shaped both by his research on globalization and by his interest in developing an independent perspective on it.

Besides names, DeLillo mined the news for the readymade phrases of the expert, as well as for striking aural and visual language. The jargon of "daily power cuts" and "nonperforming loans" is interpolated directly from articles on austerity-burdened Turkey into Axton's report to his boss, Rowser (DeLillo, *Names* 50).⁹ That country's capital, and the coup that took place there in September 1980, is also the setting for an, on the other hand, for an unusually evocative sentence, written by Steven R. Hurst for the Associated Press, underlined by DeLillo: "Helicopters clattered above the capital in the pre-dawn hours and hundreds of troops with armored personnel carriers and tanks cleared the streets."¹⁰ Here, and in more fragmented examples, DeLillo is intrigued by images of state power massed against citizens in transparently brutal efforts to suppress demonstrative dissent—or, in the case of Turkey's military takeover, to re-establish "stability," which in the language of international politics means the capacity to secure loan

⁹ "Daily power cuts": Davison, Phil. "A Hard Winter Aggravates Economic Plight of Turks." Reuters. 23 Jan. 1980. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 3. "Nonperforming loans": Zwick, Jack, and Richard K. Goetz. "Are U.S. Banks Making Foreign Policy?" *International Herald Tribune*. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

¹⁰ Hurst, Steven R. "Turkish Military in Power; Seeks to Restore Stability." *International Herald Tribune* 13–14 Sept. 1980. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 2.

packages from Western institutions. Connecting such scenes of repression to the demands of global capital helps to unmask the violence of its regime, the way in which, as Peter Boxall explains in his reading of *The Names*, countries outside the capitalist world are prepared "for exploitation and assimilation" (89–90). On the other side, DeLillo is equally fascinated by local acts of opposition to global hegemony, as his play on 17N makes evident. Still, as Axton emits phrases, "precise figures," to Rowser, sounding much like his telex machine—"cars lined up for gasoline, daily power cuts, no water coming out of household taps, crowds of unemployed young men standing on corners, fifteen-year-old girls shot to death for politics"—it becomes clear at what level the violence of structural adjustment is most forcefully and materially felt: in the "streets of Istanbul," the source of this "data" (DeLillo, *Names* 50).

For *The Names*, DeLillo departed from his source material through subtraction as well as addition, silence as well as proliferation. For example, a potent period image of underground political violence figures heavily in the planning materials for the novel, yet disappears from the finished text: the exploding or burning car. Reports on at least four different incidents from 1980–81 are collected in DeLillo's archive.¹¹ And in a timeline he composed during the first draft, listing assassinations and bombings in Greece from January 1980 to February 1981, and matching some of these incidents with characters (probably with the idea that they would be the ones to relate the incidents in the narrative), four of nine items involve the bombing or torching of cars.¹² This image seems to have been a point of focus in the early stages of conceiving the novel, and understandably so—it is recognizably a DeLillo image, even though it appears nowhere in DeLillo's published work. As a recontextualization of Andy Warhol's several "Burning Car" paintings of 1962–63, it would indicate the mass reproducibility of technology and chaos, but also, in this novel, it would

¹¹ For example, "Americans' cars bomb targets," 7 Apr. 1981: "Six incendiary bombs were put under cars of Americans working at the Hellenikon Base [. . .] the Revolutionary Left claimed responsibility for it." *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

¹² *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 2.

emblemize the unwanted extension of American power and global capital.¹³ On a loose sheet consisting mainly of stylistically intriguing phrases from his readings on ancient civilizations—"lustral basins," for example, and "inviolable coinages"—DeLillo appended these original lines and a note:

The day after the coup in Turkey, five cars were set on fire in the motor pool of the American Embassy. This happened in Athens, not Ankara. (conversation with Eliades about US involvement with Greek military dictatorship).¹⁴

There are other versions of these sentences among the early draft materials, but the note here indicates that the lines were considered for the narrative's second scene between Axton and Andreas Eliades, the Greek whose seething resentment of US policy illuminates, but perhaps ultimately endangers, Axton, whom Eliades has confused with the American investment banker David Keller. When Keller is the target of an assassination attempt near the conclusion of the novel, Axton suspects that Eliades is the connection. The point implied by his burning car anecdote is to say that any perception of a turn by the West toward Turkey—now "stabilized," however undemocratically—will be met with reprisals by Greek nationalists like 17N. "Always in favor of the Turks. The famous tilt," says Eliades bitterly to Axton, remarking on "how the Americans choose strategy over principle every time and yet keep believing in their own innocence" (DeLillo, *Names* 236). The published version of the conversation, while dealing in the same subject and sentiments, does not contain the threatening reference to car bombs, only a vaguer warning: "the Americans [. . .] [t]hey don't know we are tired of the situation, the relationship" (237). In a sense, it is surprising that DeLillo would abandon such a representative image of violent resistance, especially since most passages developed in early sketches were indeed retained in some form, testifying to how remarkably attuned this author's ear is, even

¹³ Several works in Warhol's "Disaster" series feature the image of a burning car, although it, like the other automobile-themed images in the series, is based on the photograph of an accident, not a bombing. See McShine, 251–80, especially *White Burning Car III* (1963), 265.

¹⁴ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 2.

at protean stages of his work. But the decision to omit the image supports the formal focus of *The Names* as one of DeLillo's least spectacular novels, defined as it is instead primarily by language and sound. These elements hardly disappear from later DeLillo works, with set pieces like the mass wedding at Yankee Stadium at the start of *Mao II* ("The thousands stand and chant" (16)), but a spectacularly burning car—or a series of them woven into the narrative structure, as seems to have been contemplated—would have detracted from the sensory aesthetic of this text. Thus, the violence of the left's tactics in their campaign of resistance, whose facts DeLillo acquired in his research, are rendered more vaguely in the text, in service to the formal priorities of the novel, a silent assertion of authorial autonomy.¹⁵

De-emphasizing details of which he was clearly aware for the purposes of the fiction, however, risks suggesting to the reader that all resistance to US-led globalization is ideologically homogeneous. "They're out there hurling grenades, firing rockets. What's the point of getting excited?" says Ann Maitland, voicing the attitude of her husband toward the several once-colonized countries they have been evacuated from (DeLillo, *Names* 244). Axton jokingly asks David Keller on Keller's return from each business trip to a different location, "[a]re they killing Americans?," attesting to a lack of investment in the particulars of local conflicts (45, 95, 193). But this is a strategic deflection; Axton is after all an expert in local conditions. DeLillo made use of the *International Herald Tribune's* supplementary country guides from 1979 to 1981 to get up to speed on Greece and surrounding countries, marking many details.¹⁶ Yet he cast a wide net, and sometimes this means blurring the area of narrative focus, as with the story from Kampala, the Ugandan capital, where residents greeted liberating Tanzanian forces "with flowers and fruit and beat their own captured troops to death in the street" (DeLillo, *Names* 94). This example of the "one-sentence stories"

¹⁵ Likewise, the "clattering" helicopters over Ankara evidently struck DeLillo as potentially usable, but even with the sonic detail, helicopters' association with the war in Vietnam—cemented by Francis Ford Coppola's recent film *Apocalypse Now* (1979)—perhaps discouraged the image's inclusion. Helicopters appear in *The Names*, but only in the mind of the filmmaker Frank Volterra; for example, in the plan for his proposed film about the cult (248–49). This exclusive connection underlines the association of violence with visual spectacle, which DeLillo left to explore more fully in other works.

¹⁶ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

the expatriates draw from their business travels is taken directly from the news (94).¹⁷ But decontextualized as it is from any other discussion of postcolonial African politics, it threatens to reduce the incident to a seeming instance of non-Western brutality and unreason.¹⁸

Similar trouble emanates from the image of fishermen pounding octopuses against rocks, one of the novel's recurring visual motifs. Axton thinks he's seen the action "a dozen times" in Greece (DeLillo, *Names* 283), yet the first time he describes it in his past-tense narration (31), its rational purpose—"to make the flesh tender"—is omitted (283); men simply beat octopuses impassively on rocks for an untold period of time.¹⁹ Noted but unglossed in this way, it connects the violence of the cult, whose weapons include hammers, to the traditional practice of everyday life in the Middle East, for Axton recalls it in Lahore when he sees women there beating clothes clean (282). In fact, the textual connection begins with one DeLillo himself made, according to his travel notes, where "woman beating clothes / man beating octopus" is written on a small pad in a folder marked "India."²⁰

The comparison to the cult is not quite articulated in the novel: seeing the women, Axton tries to recall, "[w]hat else did it remind him of? Not something he'd seen. Something else, something he'd kept at the predawn edge" (283). Likewise, the reader never "sees" the cult's violence (only Frank Volterra's imaginary film of it), but the effect is to uncover a common thread of atavism tying all of the region's cultures to a more primeval realm of sense and gesture, a zone not yet fully absorbed within the contemporary. As an idea, this is hardly original; however, the examples—pounding the octopus and beating the clothes—are notably uninflected by modern

¹⁷ *International Herald Tribune* 12 Apr. 1979. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 2.

¹⁸ John McClure has located troublingly "familiar modes of mapping" the East and the West in DeLillo's work (119). Mark Osteen follows McClure's reading, but disagrees at this point, holding that DeLillo's apparent stereotypes critique "objectifying perceptions" on all sides (270).

¹⁹ I draw here on Boxall's analysis of a "narratological disjunction" between Axton the character and Axton the narrator, who tells the story from an unspecified future time (92–95).

²⁰ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 9. It is also possible that DeLillo saw and recorded both actions in India, which would mean the octopus beating was translated to Greece for the novel—a tantalizing but not fully supported possibility.

primitivism's vitality and ecstasy (or, by contrast, social Darwinism's weakness and exhaustion).²¹ Rather, the unexpected connection between the localized gestures asserts a literary space, an act of structural patterning that, just like the omission of the pattern of car bombing, partially obscures the specific local conflicts, so that the complex "offering" of language, which is the formal priority in this novel, can be contemplated from that distance (DeLillo, *Names* 331). The connection to the cult at the level of form adds significance and mystery to their aims, which likewise can be meditated on, but not solved.

DeLillo's aesthetic of ambiguity does not simply depress the political valence of the narrative. Just as the intention behind the cult's murders is left ambiguous, so too is the affiliation of the would-be assassins who fire on Axton and Keller at the novel's end. One possibility is that it could be almost anybody; the US's presence is that offensive. Likewise, the narrative of rising global risk in the novel is supported in DeLillo's archive by numerous surveys of world terrorism and features on the security and espionage industry. In one alarming report from June 1981, DeLillo underlined the sentence: "citizens of the United States, especially businessmen, remain a primary target of terrorist attacks, particularly in the Middle East."²² Such a sentence might fuel a generalized American paranoia about violence "in the Middle East," but the specificity of the type of US citizen targeted equally supports an understanding of anti-Western sentiment—if not violence—as seen from a global perspective. A 1980 *Washington Post* feature profiles a leading risk analyst, Marvin Cetron, and his work, defined as "organized speculation based on the possible interpretation of known facts."²³ This description reinforces DeLillo's structural resemblance to his writer-protagonist Axton—who finds himself "scanning the English-language newspapers for stories of assault, suicide and murder" (*Names* 250)—just as it captures all

²¹ McClure argues that it is one of DeLillo's characteristically postmodern innovations to find evidence of this "predawn"—what I am calling "atavism," what McClure calls "romance," and what Hungerford might call "mysticism"—re-emerging within the modern zones of global capital (McClure 119–20).

²² Dallos, Robert E. "CIA Revision Notes Growth, Ferocity of World Terror Incidents Since 1968." *International Herald Tribune* 19 Nov. 1979. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

²³ Kernan, Michael. "The Crystal Globe: Predicting Coups in the Data Bank." *International Herald Tribune* 16 Jan. 1980. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

levels of DeLillo's archival practice: the assiduous independent research into "known facts," the organization of these into the patterns of the novel, and the "possible interpretations" his aesthetic of ambiguity leaves room to inspire.

**"The Writer Can No Longer Shock; Only Car Bombs Shock"²⁴:
*Mao II***

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm it seems to offer for linguistic profusion, *The Names* makes visible a concern over whether the languages to which we have common recourse are adequate for fostering individual expression, or if they have become tools for what Cowart identifies as "ideological coercion" by forces of control in contemporary culture (114). Some critics have pointed to this problem as the motor impelling the narrative, in a hopeful way, toward instances of unconstrained expression, like the glossolalia heard at the Acropolis at the novel's end and the raw writing of Axton's son that serves for an epilogue.²⁵ Especially if we were to accept the cultural essentialisms insinuated by the octopus-beating motif, Eliades the Greek would seem to represent a similarly organic alternative; his aura of sincerity and gustatory philosophy impress Axton with the sense of a man with "size," "force," and "deep feelings" (DeLillo, *Names* 243). Troubling this perception, however, is the unresolved issue of whether Eliades is associated with the violent opposition being mounted against Western representatives in his country. Eliades' criticisms of US influence in Greece correspond to the views of radical resistance movements like 17N: "[f]anatically nationalistic [. . .] anti-Greek establishment, bitterly anti-American, anti-Turkey and anti-NATO" (Kassimeris 2). From DeLillo's perspective, the programmatic nature of this critique means its authenticity is already vitiated, a theme he would explore further in *Mao II*. In that novel, for example, the Reverend Moon's "workshops and training sessions" inculcate his followers with a strategically "broken English" that they are compelled to employ in sham activities they believe will help unify and redeem "the fallen world," and the novelist Bill Gray fears that even writers have been

²⁴ Notebook, *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 1. Original text struck through.

²⁵ Paul Maltby's essay is the first sustained argument for such a Romantic strain in DeLillo's work.

"incorporated," turned into "painted dummies" who speak on cues given by professional image-makers (DeLillo, *Mao II* 13, 41).

Revealed in the archive for *The Names* is DeLillo's source for his character Eliades' political language: the rhetoric of Andreas Papandreou, the socialist politician who led his party, Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), to a national majority in 1981. Among other statements DeLillo highlighted in news reports about Papandreou's campaigns was his complaint in October 1980 that "Greece has never been able to determine its own course in world affairs; it has always been a client state."²⁶ With more insight into the local political situation, it becomes evident that Eliades owes his language about "the relationship" with America and Greece's "final humiliation" to Papandreou (DeLillo, *Names* 237). But by the same token, it grows less clear whether he represents a dangerous fringe element or the emerging mainstream. Either way, for all his gravitas, the source materials demonstrate that Eliades' ideas come from outside himself, a flaw that reflects DeLillo's rather harsh objection, in a contemporaneous interview, to "the way in which people in other countries have created the myth of America, [. . .] the way they use America to relieve their own fears and guilt by blaming America automatically for anything that goes wrong" (Harris 18).²⁷

This opposition—of the mythmaking power of mass movements' (and mass culture's) externalized ideologies to the expressive potential of the individual voice—is the main theme of *Mao II*, DeLillo's next work to directly concern global politics. After two novels, *White Noise* (1985) and *Libra* (1988), reflecting most immediately on American society, *Mao II* extends the meditation on globalization and its opponents DeLillo began in *The Names*. He was, however, back in the US, and that change in situation, along with the shift in public context that came with his now much-wider acclaim as a novelist, influenced the shape of his archive and the resulting text. For *Mao II*, newspapers remain crucial to the research, yet there is a smaller range

²⁶ "Papandreou Promises a Political Question." *International Herald Tribune* Oct. 1980. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 43, Folder 4.

²⁷ It is given to Axton, naturally, to voice this complaint in the novel: "America is the world's living myth [. . .] People expect us to absorb the impact of their grievances" (114).

represented: far less sprawling in total than for *The Names*, the newspaper archive is sourced almost exclusively from *The New York Times*. This higher degree of selectivity may indicate a stronger advance conception of the work, which might account for the shorter drafting time (16 months as compared with over 2 years). A clearer plan might also be reflected in the more linear narrative structure of the finished novel, which moves through its more diverse, but more limited, range of settings (from New York to Cambridge, Mass., to London, to Athens, to Beirut) with fewer repetitions as compared with *The Names*, which sets up geographical foci in Kouros, the Mani, and Lahore, but continually circles back to Athens for further conversation with all of its characters.

But in another sense, the narrower range of news sources follows from DeLillo's position, at this stage, as an established literary professional. This notion emerges clearly from the overall palette of research materials DeLillo gathered for *Mao II*, where the basic type of newspaper articles he assimilated into an independent analysis for *The Names* is outweighed by sources that are of a high-journalistic, even literary, level. This latter category seems to have had a particularly strong impact on DeLillo's thinking at this time. In preparing to write *Mao II*, he took notes on such elite writers as Adorno, Arendt, and George Steiner, and he collected articles from prestigious magazines like *The New York Review of Books*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Granta*. Central to his reading were essays on global politics by such figures as Christopher Hitchens, Conor Cruise O'Brien, and Fouad Ajami—in other words, leading lights of public intellectual discourse at the turn of the 1990s.²⁸ These essays range from Ajami's naked cheerleading for the US air raids on Libya in 1986, to Hitchens' nuanced critique of "terrorism" as a "propaganda word," to O'Brien's disillusioned reminder that terrorists are attached to the "relative power, prestige, and privilege" that come with their affiliations as much as they are genuinely inflamed by their causes. This latter point is registered in the

²⁸ Hitchens, Christopher. "Wanton Acts of Usage." *Harper's* Sept. 1986. O'Brien, Conor Cruise. "Thinking About Terrorism." *Atlantic Monthly* June 1986. Ajami, Fouad. "How the U.S. Became a 'Demon.'" *New York Times* 19 Apr. 1986. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 3.

novel's venal characterization of the movement leader Abu Rashid, who has school-children wear his image on their shirts and claims to routinely sell off Western hostages to opposing groups when it is materially advantageous: "[l]ike drugs, like weapons, like jewelry, like a Rolex or a BMW" (DeLillo, *Mao II* 235). Likewise, DeLillo's study of the debate around how to define and respond to "terrorism" is reflected when George Haddad—this novel's Eliades figure, a Lebanese academic and self-appointed spokesman for Abu Rashid's organization—insists, to no objection from any character in the novel but rather as if in response to Hitchens, "I don't abjure that word even if it has a hundred meanings" (130).

More broadly, then, the archive suggests that DeLillo was now intellectually invested in public discourse on global politics in a manner at once more and less abstract than when he was writing *The Names*. Instead of scanning daily reports for facts and phrases to inform and flesh out a developing perspective, for *Mao II*, DeLillo was fully steeped in the sphere of complex, literate arguments and persuasive, elevated rhetoric, and he puts the terms of policy debate into play in the novel as a seeming challenge, asking with George Haddad, "isn't it the novelist, Bill, above all people, above all writers [. . .] who knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels?" (130). Thus engaging directly, but purely theoretically, with the contemporary policy establishment's primary rubric for conceptualizing global disorder—the West and its problem with terrorism—DeLillo adopts this manifestly ideological framework as a deep structure for his text, producing a novel that is, ironically given its theme, more beholden to the ideologies of its source material than *The Names*.

This is not to imply that DeLillo's success in the 1980s simply interpellated him as a bourgeois intellectual, that he no longer imaginatively transformed his reading (although his responses to his sources are harder to gauge for this novel, since the xeroxes and clippings bear generally fewer underlinings or other forms of annotation). If DeLillo was now more precisely located within civil society's "war of position," still his sources were eclectic, and his research was primarily independently guided, as before.²⁹ That is to say, Ajami, Hitchens, and O'Brien, for example,

²⁹ See Gramsci, "War of Position and War of Manoeuvre," 225–28.

hardly agree; there is among them no party line to mouth, and, in any case, the politics of DeLillo's novel could not be simply triangulated from a synthesis of their disparate views.

Still, the more rarefied, but more delimited, sphere of discourse from which DeLillo drew his ideas at this stage led him to some questionable connections. On one hand, the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci's experience as a political prisoner in Fascist Italy made the scholarly introduction to his *Prison Notebooks* a pertinent source for the novel's subplot about hostage-taking in the civil war in Lebanon.³⁰ A more contemporary perspective on the politics of terror, however, is represented in the archive by a chapter from a volume edited by Benjamin Netanyahu, then Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.³¹ Netanyahu's book, *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* (1986), is a collection of brief conference papers by Western diplomats and academics, all urging a hawkish strategy, that was published in the aftermath of the Berlin nightclub bombing that precipitated the US attack on Libya. It thus garnered considerable attention, but poor reviews in most of the journals DeLillo was following.³² Yet in his xerox, DeLillo underlined a passage—perhaps because of its obvious debt to Arendt, whose *The Origins of Totalitarianism* he also read at this time—that clearly informs the themes of his novel: "Under totalitarianism the individual is always subordinate to some higher cause [. . .] Terrorism when successful has always ended in totalitarianism."³³ These abstract pronouncements, reminiscent of lines DeLillo had himself recently written into *White Noise* and *Libra*, tar the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Soviet Union, and the Islamic Republic of Iran with the same conceptual brush, as part of Netanyahu's attempt to make "international terrorism" a central

³⁰ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 4. In his xerox, DeLillo underlined this sentence: "The greatest danger for any political prisoner is that under the impact of his new situation the very reasons for his past struggle and his present plight will come to lose their validity for him." See Hoare and Nowell Smith, at xcii.

³¹ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 3.

³² Edward Said reviewed Netanyahu's book for the *Nation*, calling the contributors—among them Jeane Kirkpatrick, Midge Decter, and other early adopters of neoconservatism—"the usual suspects" (151).

³³ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 3. See Netanyahu, at 39.

issue in the Cold War.³⁴ "Totalitarianism is the major ideological source of modern terrorism," according to his opening claim (Netanyahu 39). Given the slippage implied in *Mao II* between the figure of Mao and his putative follower Abu Rashid, DeLillo appears to have reflected seriously on this dubious equation of terrorism with totalitarianism (itself arguably a term of convenience).³⁵ Then again, as Mark Osteen has suggested, Rashid is only one of the narrative's several "Mao II"s—author figures, like the Rev. Moon, Andy Warhol, and Bill Gray, whose powerful images outshine what little they concretely signify—so in the fiction the matter is laden with characteristic ambiguity (210). Yet in Bill Gray's most heated debate with George Haddad, the novelist himself presses a similar association, positing the "single hostage" taken by Abu Rashid's group as the "setup" for a totalitarianism to come—"[t]he first tentative rehearsal for mass terror," which is carried out by "the closed state," like China during the Cultural Revolution or the Great Leap Forward (DeLillo, *Mao II* 163).

An Image "Deeper Than Politics"

The extent to which DeLillo means to follow his sources for *Mao II* in equating the terrorist with the totalitarian and the individual with the novelist, aligned along an axis of East and West, has been vigorously debated by the novel's readers.³⁶ But however the author's politics at this juncture are glossed, his decision to make Mao the icon of the terrorists in the narrative is an intriguing reassertion of authorial autonomy, seeing as there was not a Maoist faction in Lebanon's civil war. Nor were any of the war's "main combatants" even "of Marxist persuasion," as Vlatka Velcic points out

³⁴ *White Noise*: "All plots tend to move deathward" (DeLillo 26). *Libra*: "There is a tendency of plots to move towards death [. . .] The tighter the plot of a story, the more likely it will come to death" (DeLillo 221).

³⁵ Arendt herself was sensitive to how her influential exposition linking Nazism and Stalinism might be abused for propaganda in the Cold War, particularly after Stalin's death. In a preface first added to the 1966 edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she warns against subscribing totally to the "official 'counter-ideology,' anti-Communism, which [. . .] tempts us into constructing a fiction of our own" (xxvii).

³⁶ In addition to McClure's reading of the text as "politically disturbing" (145), Scanlan and Baker lodged early critical responses.

in her essay on the novel (415).³⁷ The specifically Maoist orientation of the fictional resistance movement is thus a puzzle in the text and, in light of the rise of religion to centrality in discourses on terrorism since the 1990s, a seemingly uncharacteristic lapse in prescience for this author, making the book "come across as anachronistic or dated," as Richard Hardack has suggested (387).

DeLillo signals the oddity of his invention, however, right in the novel. This occurs in a conversation between Bill Gray and his editor, Charlie Everson, who is attempting to arrange an unprecedented public appearance by Bill in support of the Swiss poet being held hostage by Abu Rashid's organization. When Charlie tells him of George Haddad's connections to "the group in Beirut," Bill first asks whether this group is "a new fundamentalist element?" (DeLillo, *Mao II* 123). When Charlie replies that, to the contrary, it is "a new communist element," Bill returns, "[a]re we surprised?" (123). To this Charlie offers a vaguely plausible analysis for the group's communist positioning, which he concludes is therefore "not unduly" surprising—a qualified yes to Bill's question (124). In this way, DeLillo provides realistic cover for his play with anachronism while at the same time making its fictionality transparent; Charlie's account sounds reasonable, but is laughably sketchy once readers know enough—that is, as much as DeLillo does—to recognize the invention: "There's a Lebanese Communist Party. There are leftist elements, I understand, aligned with Syria. The PLO has always had a Marxist component and they're active again in Lebanon" (123–24). None of these phrases explain the existence of the Maoists, who thus occupy the modified fictional space asserted for the narrative.

DeLillo's decision to feature Maoist rather than fundamentalist or even more generically communist rebels is more than a symbolic gesture on behalf of artistic

³⁷ DeLillo paid special attention to the relatively limited actions of leftist groups in the war in Lebanon. Among his clippings from this period is a report on the killing of an American in 1990. He underlined its description of the group responsible, the Lebanese National Resistance Front, as consisting of "several leftist factions aligned with Syria and [. . .] led by the Soviet-oriented Lebanese Communist Party." Hijazi, Ihsan A. "U.S. Missionary Shot to Death at Home in South Lebanon." *New York Times* 29 March 1990. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 4. His main source for perspective on the conflict at this point was not the news, but the work of the prize-winning British journalist Robert Fisk, published in the *Independent* and *Granta*.

autonomy. This is because, in contrast to the exacting terms and putatively sound science of Marxism-Leninism, the contents of Maoism have historically been more difficult for Western observers to define, and the theory can therefore appear as a comparatively empty ideological vessel. The basic question "what is Maoism?" is commonly addressed even in scholarly treatments of the topic.³⁸ In that way, Maoism is suited to, and even exemplified by, Abu Rashid's flexible principles. From within the Western tradition of dialectical reasoning, the aphoristic quotations in the *Little Red Book* appear to be reducible to mere images of language: "formulas and slogans," in the words of Bill, objects of adoration for a "cult of the book," for George (DeLillo, *Mao II* 162). The impression of contentlessness extends to the author figures who wield Mao-like authority in the novel, such as Rashid. As Osteen points out, "the vagueness of his portrayal suggests" that "he too could be replaced by somebody else"—another "Mao"—"with a stronger image or more memorable slogans" (211). This reading corresponds to Daniel Vukovich's claim that references in the text to "the Moonies, the various groups of the Lebanese civil war, the Iranian 'masses,'" and Peru's Shining Path are linked in a "chain of equivalence," with the spectral figure of Mao sitting at the top (89).³⁹

Part of the ambiguity rests on the gap between the original articulations of Maoism and their reinterpretation in contemporary culture, where DeLillo's focus lies. By the 1970s, when he began attending to terrorism as a significant phenomenon, declarations of Maoist allegiance by Western resistance movements were already an arguably clichéd gesture, a rhetorical statement meant to connote ideological extremity. However widely Maoism was (and continues to be) applied as a strategy

³⁸ See for example Connery, 97. The Communist Party of China's official translation of Maoism as "Mao Zedong Thought" hints at the risk of tautology contained in the concept, especially when it can be said, as a Chinese citizen is quoted doing in article clipped by DeLillo, that for all his genius, "Mao did not fill out his thoughts." Radin, Charles A. "From Ties to Pendants, Chairman Mao Fronts Pop-Cultural Revolution." *Austin American-Statesman* 15 May 1993: A24. *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 6.

³⁹ For Vukovich, this chain consists only of the "non-white," political figures that DeLillo associates into a "vague but powerfully looming threat" to the West, with China as the ultimate signifier of otherness (89). This version of equivalence excludes the exemplars of Western celebrity, Warhol and Bill Gray, noted by other readers, such as Osteen.

for pursuing socialism in countries of the global south, in the US, it was primarily a signifier of an increasingly errant counterculture, as in the deluded rebels observed by Joan Didion in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968).⁴⁰ Likewise, DeLillo has long been skeptical of, if at the same time fascinated by, what in his novel *Players* (1977) is called "the glamour of revolutionary violence" (8). Despite his insertion of Maoism into the fiction, DeLillo is much less interested in representing what Mao actually stood for than in contemplating his image-based aura from an aesthetic remove—a distance, however, that is compromised in *Mao II* by his discursive involvement in reigning Western political assumptions.

The distance at which Maoism is kept in the novel does not reflect disinterest by the author. DeLillo explored the topic as actively as he did all others, taking notes on *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* as well as on influential Western studies such as Robert Jay Lifton's *Revolutionary Immortality* (1968) and Richard H. Solomon's *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* (1971).⁴¹ Most apposite to the themes of the novel, however, is not Mao's thought but his circulation in images—"[p]hotocopy Mao, silk-screen Mao, wallpaper Mao, synthetic-polymer Mao" goes one, partial inventory (DeLillo, *Mao II* 21)—and the greater part of DeLillo's archive focuses on these. A numbered list of "Photographs" apparently considered for reproduction in the text includes (along with the published images of the "Moonie wedding" and the "Sheffield soccer disaster," the shot of "Salinger" at the supermarket that inspired the Bill Gray plot, and the "Gary [sic] Winograd: New Mexico" photograph described in the narrative) the iconic picture of "Mao in the Yangtze" in 1966, as well as the portrait that hangs, as DeLillo notes, "in Tiananmen Sq."⁴² Of this, on another page in the notebook, DeLillo writes, "(He even has the

⁴⁰ As Connery writes, "In the dominant version of revolutionary memory in the United States, the Sixties mass movement was badly damaged by Maoist groups such as the Progressive Labor Party or the Revolutionary Communist Party, whose furious sectarianism, and whose grim, joyless, anti-countercultural energies sapped any mass appeal that the revolutionary left could have had" (95).

⁴¹ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 6. Both George Haddad and Abu Rashid cite the Little Red Book in the novel. George: "Our god is none other than the masses of the Chinese people" (DeLillo, *Mao II* 162); Rashid: "Mao said death can be light as a feather or heavy as a mountain" (236).

⁴² *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 1.

wart on his chin)."⁴³ Perhaps it was this realist blemish that led DeLillo to omit the photographs of Mao from the published text, preferring to call them forth by verbal description, a transmediation akin to, as he muses elsewhere in the notes, "[t]he way Warhol transforms a photograph."⁴⁴ On yet another page of the notebook, DeLillo evidently quotes and elaborates on his own draft phrase, as he reviews the manuscript of his work in progress: "ms 30 'deeper meaning of Mao' – image loosed from referential frame, floating free of history. Pure aura. Religious icon. Mao's face as a monument. Not just a Chinese hero – universal icon. Religion deeper than politics."⁴⁵ With this discursive removal of Mao's image from not only the Chinese context, but also the lineage of radical thought, DeLillo positions the figure as an opaque, speechless icon, to be viewed only from the outside. This status reinforces the ideological perspective already suggested by 1980s policy discourse, where the word "terrorism" is often used strategically to brand anti-Western resistance with an essential otherness. On the other hand, the vision of Mao as a "universal icon" points to the ultimate depth of DeLillo's critique, which transcends Netanyahu's specious terrorism-totalitarianism dyad and implicates the West's capture by its own false images.

"People Will Not Die"⁴⁶: *Cosmopolis*

Thus DeLillo's knowingly counterfactual insertion of a superficial Maoism into *Mao II* is validated by this novel's formal requirements, much as his invention of a corresponding armed resistance movement and his omission of any burning car images from *The Names* supports its formal focus on the play of language and speech. The truer source of *Mao II*'s sense of anachronism, perhaps, lies in its implied stress on free expression as a defining political issue. Involved here is the role of the Salman Rushdie affair at this novel's genesis, which brought DeLillo into public life

⁴³ Ibid. The wart remains visible in Warhol's *Mao* series, which is based on the same photograph (and was adapted for the cover of the novel's first edition). See McShine 333–39.

⁴⁴ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 38, Folder 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid. In the published text, Scott Martineau asks himself, "[h]ad he ever realized the deeper meaning of Mao before he saw these pictures?" (DeLillo, *Mao II* 21).

⁴⁶ DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 104.

to lend active support to Rushdie during his period of hiding.⁴⁷ Evidence of DeLillo's nonfictional commitments bleeds through in Bill Gray's "angry" speech professing to George Haddad his affinity for continuous "internal dissent," motivated by his belief in the novel as a form of "democratic shout" (*Mao II* 159). In the 1990s, DeLillo made several public appearances and statements, some written jointly, in support of politically repressed writers like the Chinese poet Wei Jingsheng.⁴⁸ There is no gainsaying either the seriousness of this issue, then or today, or DeLillo's committed work on behalf of it in these years. Yet, as a focus of activism, it seems to risk reproducing aspects of the ideological campaign against "totalitarianism" that had until recently sustained the Cold War. It is a marker of how quickly aspects of the political context shifted that DeLillo could be tarred a "bad citizen" in one year and then seen championing the most liberal of values—freedom of speech—the next.⁴⁹

At the end of the decade, after publishing the epochal *Underworld* (1997), DeLillo recalibrated his research as he began writing the shorter works that have occupied him in the years since. For *Cosmopolis*, the novel from this period that bears most directly on the politics of globalization as depicted in *The Names* and *Mao II*, he took up new readings on familiar subjects, such as the philosophy of time, the theory of chaos, and the technology of financial trading. Correspondence included with the research materials indicates that DeLillo turned to his contacts in academia as a resource for filling gaps and providing sources. Perhaps it was one of these old friends, the cadre of critics who helped establish DeLillo's academic reputation in the 1980s, or perhaps it was a newer scholar who sent the author a xeroxed copy of the preface to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000), the bestselling work of theory commonly associated with the anti-globalization movement of the late 1990s.⁵⁰ DeLillo's packet bears no annotations, but the author did independently

⁴⁷ Margaret Scanlan's essay was one of the first and remains one of the most illuminating analyses of the novel's relation to the Rushdie affair.

⁴⁸ Some of these texts are available on Curt Gardner's "Don DeLillo's America" web site, under "Other Writing."

⁴⁹ The *Washington Post* columnist George Will made the "bad citizen" charge in 1988, in response to *Libra*; see Lentricchia for the most pungent rejoinder.

⁵⁰ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 10, Folder 2.

clip Hardt and Negri's subsequent op-ed for *The New York Times*, which they wrote to answer the question of "What the Protesters in Genoa Want."⁵¹ On his copy, DeLillo underlined their description of "an alternative globalization movement": "one that," in contrast to the actual, capitalist-dominated form, "seeks to eliminate inequalities between rich and poor and between the powerful and the powerless, and to expand the possibilities of self-determination" (Hardt and Negri). Here we see how the author's longstanding allegiance to individual expression—which, in the discourse on human rights, supports the logic of "self-determination"—changes over its political valence as the discursive and historical contexts shift. In *Mao II*, individual expression is aligned against the unfree forces of terrorism and totalitarianism, even while it is also threatened by strains of coercion within contemporary Western culture. In *Cosmopolis*, creative expression and pro-democratic sentiment would be marshaled against the destructive forces of a globally expansive capitalism that originates in the US.

There are discursive shifts, too, in the contents of the archive. DeLillo's careful notes on the demise of the hedge fund Long-Term Capital Management, for example, are complemented by hardly any punditry, in contrast to the materials for *Mao II*.⁵² Instead, there are citations from more academic titles on cyberculture and economic globalization, including the severely critical *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (1998), by the political philosopher John Gray. Reading this work prompted DeLillo to write the phrase "systematic inequalities of the free market system" in his notebook.⁵³ This phrase, with its probably unconscious redundancy, does not appear verbatim in Gray's text. Rather, it is DeLillo's response, perhaps guided by his reading of Hardt and Negri, to Gray's arguments: that the pursuit of a "global free market" by Western transnational monetary institutions "has produced economic dislocation, social chaos and political instability in hugely

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 9, Folder 7. DeLillo's main source for this subject was the journalist Roger Lowenstein's widely read account, *When Genius Failed: The Rise and Fall of Long-Term Capital Management* (2000).

⁵³ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 9, Folder 7.

different countries throughout the world;" and that "the increased interconnection of economic activity [. . .] accentuates uneven development," enhancing peripheral countries' dependent status even as it incorporates them into the world economy (Gray 18, 56).

The evidence, then, suggests that DeLillo now apprehended the conflict over globalization from a systemic perspective informed by a current critical discourse decrying what this novel's theorist figure, Vija Kinski, calls "cyber-capital[s]" visions of "technology and wealth" (*Cosmopolis* 90). These, to be realized through a globally interconnected, perfectly free market, propel societies absorbed into the "vision" forward at an impossible speed: "The more visionary the idea, the more people it leaves behind," says Kinski (90). In similar terms, Gray describes the dislocations caused by "[t]he swift waxing and waning of industries and livelihoods, the sudden shifts of production and capital, the casino of currency speculation" (7). This last factor is implicated in *Cosmopolis'* plot, which involves massive and, ultimately, disastrous risks taken by a "visionary" trader in currencies (DeLillo 19).⁵⁴ And the manic pace of economic transformation undertaken worldwide in response to the developments dictated by the international monetary regime is a constant matter of awareness, even for the characters working within the bubble of finance: "we have meaning in the world," says one of the novel's technologists. "People eat and sleep in the shadow of what we do" (14). Such assaults on "economic security for the majority of people," argues Gray, are "bound to trigger counter-movements which reject [the] constraints" imposed by the free market system, whether these counter-movements are "populist and xenophobic, fundamentalist or neo-communist" (20).

The novel prominently features one such counter-movement which, with its refashioning of the opening lines of the *Communist Manifesto* ("A SPECTER IS HAUNTING THE WORLD—THE SPECTER OF CAPITALISM" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 96)), represents itself as neo-communist. "This is what the protest is all about," says Kinski,

⁵⁴ Gray notes that he draws the idea of "casino capitalism" from two works, one by Susan Strange and one by Scott Lash and John Urry.

interpreting the semiotics of a range of creatively coordinated actions that converge to litter midtown Manhattan with the signifiers of urban resistance, including graffiti, tear gas, and—finally—“cars burning in the street” (90, 91).

Thus marked and perhaps even constituted by the shift in his research sources is DeLillo's return to the systemic perspective on global turbulence that he developed independently for *The Names*, a move to the outside of the bifurcated West/other model he inhabited for *Mao II*. In *Cosmopolis*, however, DeLillo still represents the insight he has gathered into the motives and practices of organized resistance from, characteristically, a pronounced aesthetic remove. First, the highly stylized techniques of the protesters, as “adepts of sheer rampage,” in their creativity go far beyond anything described in DeLillo's source material on their lifestyles in pieces collected from *Harper's* and the alternative culture journals *Spin* and the *Village Voice* (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 88).⁵⁵ The less realistic texture of this novel, which is pushed toward the mode of allegory by its compressed narrative form and symbolic journey structure, makes the issue of fictional inventions and omissions less germane (although the textual geography of 47th Street is closely based on field notes evidently taken by DeLillo).⁵⁶ Yet as the Times Square news ticker is appropriated for anti-capitalist slogans and an associated wave of violence against bankers broadcast on TV screens, it becomes ambiguous whether the anarchic demonstrators and their “form of street theater” represent the potential for collective resistance by the multitude or merely its image-based simulation (88).

More consequentially, the greater part of the novel takes its point of view from inside the metonymic stretch limo of global capitalism, through its main character, the currency trader Eric Packer. Packer's commentary throughout the narrative is dominated by his relentless interest in seeing matter—particularly masses like limos, skyscrapers, and phones—spiritualized, or rendered through continuously advancing technology into its more ideal form, so as to achieve identity with its “platonic replica” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 10). Through DeLillo's refined language, this fixation on

⁵⁵ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 10, Folder 3.

⁵⁶ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 9, Folder 6.

harmonizing with "the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions," sometimes acquires a beauty worth admiring (24). In one of his more unlikely traits, Packer's zeal for information goes beyond the command of numbers and into a disinterested knowledge of the arcane patterns which he believes structure the universe. He is, as his new wife recognizes, "dedicated to knowing," though she suspects he acquires information in order to "turn it into something stupendous and awful" (19). Seeing a tragic aspect to the narrative depends on seeing Packer portrayed, despite his hubris, as an earnest and independent polymath before his fall. Indeed, "[h]e mastered the steepest matters in half an afternoon," we are told, in an appropriately fabular reflection of DeLillo's own prodigious research efforts (7).

The reader journeys with Packer across the city and through several modes of artistic demonstration, violent and nonviolent, against the reductivity of visions like his. None accomplish more than distracting him momentarily from his end-game, which is with his own past and concludes, as do many DeLillo narratives, with the individual character's dissolution—here, into "the zero-oneness of the world," reflected in his wristwatch. DeLillo in fact recorded this plot idea in his early notebooks for the novel, writing: "End — He has become a crowd, entering the pixel world of the cyber future."⁵⁷

Readers of *Mao II* will recognize this potent and negative image of the crowd, to which "the future" is said to "belong" (DeLillo, *Mao II* 16). Here, however, it is associated not with the alien or other, but with the Western finance-capitalist "visions" that are driving much of the world to ruin. The fusion of perennial theme and contemporary context demonstrates how, over the first three decades of his career, as his work developed a remarkable analysis of globalization built on a base of independent research and supported by increasingly sophisticated sources, DeLillo preserved his thematic concern for the future of the individual voice while maintaining his artistically advantageous position as an informed, critical observer.

⁵⁷ *Don DeLillo Papers*, Box 9, Folder 7.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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