

MAKING MASCULINITY AND
UNMAKING JEWISHNESS:
NORMAN MAILER'S VOICE IN
WILD 90 AND *BEYOND THE LAW*

S A R A J O C O H E N

NORMAN MAILER'S SIZABLE FBI FILE BEGINS WITH HIS VOICE. The 165 pages of Mailer's 171-page file available to the public cover fifteen years of observation and surveillance, and include materials ranging from endless notes tracking Mailer's passport applications and international travel, to FBI agents' reviews of Miami and the Siege of Chicago (with meticulous notes about each mention of the FBI), and even a letter from a high school teacher asking J. Edgar Hoover for permission to teach *The Naked and the Dead*.¹ The file begins, however, with a clipping from *The Washington Post*, a June 6, 1962, George Sokolsky column called "These Days," that moved J. Edgar Hoover to leave a note for his staff reading, "Let me have memo on Mailer" (United States Federal Bureau of Investigation). Sokolsky's article responds to an *Esquire* piece Mailer wrote about then first lady Jackie Kennedy that describes Mrs. Kennedy's voice as "a quiet parody of the sort of voice one hears on the radio late at night, dropped softly into the ear by girls who sell soft mattresses, depilatories, or creams to brighten the skin" (qtd. in Sokolsky A15). Sokolsky takes offense at Mailer's mockery of Mrs. Kennedy and scrutiny of her voice, responding, "[A] person's voice is what it is. I never heard Norman Mailer's voice but whatever the Lord gave him, baritone or tenor, soprano or bass, it is what it is and he can thank the good Lord that he does not suffer from cerebral palsy or some such thing" (A15). Mailer's voice, however, much like his persona, is not at all God-given and never "is what it is." Rather, Mailer's

voice is a deliberate construction pieced together from bits of others' voices in order to mask the adenoidal voice of his childhood.

Mailer reflects briefly upon his voice in his chronicle of the October 1967 March on the Pentagon, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History*, written in the third person with himself as its main character. Part IV of *Armies* begins with an apology from Mailer for bringing the story of the March on the Pentagon to a climax and then launching into a diversion about his relationship to film and the cameras following him through the melee of the march. Mailer writes of his relationship to film: "he had on screen in this first documentary a fatal taint, a last remaining speck of the one personality he found absolutely insupportable—the nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn. Something in his adenoids gave it away—he had the softness of a man early accustomed to mother-love" (*Armies* 152). For Mailer, the paradoxical experience of *seeing* his voice undermines the masculinities he works to materialize in his career as a writer and public intellectual, which he goes on to enumerate: "warrior, presumptive general, ex-political candidate, embattled aging enfant terrible of the literary world, wise father of six children, radical intellectual, existential philosopher, hard-working author, champion of obscenity, husband of four battling sweet wives, amiable bar drinker, and much exaggerated street fighter, party giver, hostess insulter." As a result of feeling outed on film as a "nice Jewish boy," "accustomed to mother love," our presumptive general and champion of obscenity vows to "[stay] away from further documentaries of himself" (*Armies* 152).

The problem of Mailer's voice is intimately connected with both sexuality and masculinity. The adenoids, after all, are located in the nose, a stereotypical marker of Jewish otherness and degeneracy. We do not need Sander Gilman to tell us, although he does in the chapter of *The Jew's Body* entitled "The Jewish Nose," that the Jewish nose is the locus of redirected anxiety about the Jewish penis—both are body parts that develop and take shape at puberty—the latter of which is a threat to national purity through its potential to increase the Jewish population. The adenoidal voice signals a kind of impotence for Mailer, revealing him as accustomed to mother love, and functions as "the acoustic mirror in which the male subject hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble" (Silverman 81). The infantile babble here, the mother tongue of the mother's voice, is Yiddish.² Kaja Silverman writes that the voice of the mother resonates in the male subject and that "the male subject frequently 'refines' his 'own' voice by projecting onto the

mother's voice all that is unassimilable to the paternal position" (81). Mailer is a case study in this relationship to the maternal voice; when Mailer first sees himself on film, he hears the adenoidal, Jewish, maternal voice within himself. Because the paternal position Mailer strives to create is distinctly not Jewish, or, at least one that allies itself with Jewishness without performing it, the mother's voice becomes unassimilable (or in his words, "unsupportable") to his identity. Thus, while Mailer asserts that he will "[stay] away from further documentaries of himself," he returns to film as both actor and director in order to refine his voice by expunging its maternal layers.

Norman Mailer's film career, often dismissed as vulgar and/or irrelevant, was short but intense; he directed four films, two of which were released in 1968, *Wild 90* and *Beyond the Law*, one in 1970, *Maidstone*, and, after a long break, *Tough Guys Don't Dance* was released in 1987.³ Mailer's first three films were largely influenced by John Cassavetes, although Mailer predictably argues that his mastery of what he calls "existential acting" makes him a much better filmmaker than Cassavetes ("Interview"). In his essay, "Some Dirt in the Talk," Mailer defines existential acting by addressing each of the terms that comprise the phrase. He notes that existentialism and acting exist at two opposite "poles," writing, "*If existentialism is ultimately concerned with the attractions of the unknown, acting is one of the surviving rituals of invocation, repetition, and ceremony—of propitiation to the gods*" ("Some Dirt" 104).⁴ His theory of existential acting, then, strives to collapse these two poles, freeing acting from repetition and ceremony, and liberating his actors (and himself) from the propitiation of the gods. Existential acting, he argues, works because in our daily lives we always pretend, lie, and act, and works by more effectively representing the chaos and "complexity of our century" than mainstream Hollywood cinema ("Some Dirt" 90, 108). Unsurprisingly, from the man who gave us the genre-bending history as novel/novel as history, the true life novel, and the novel biography,⁵ existential acting collapses the cinema and the outside world, documentary and fiction, acting and existentialism, and masculinity and performance, the last of which Mailer explicitly connects, writing: "There is hardly a guy alive who is not an actor to the hilt—for the simplest of reasons. He cannot be tough all the time. . . [s]o he acts to fill the gaps" ("Some Dirt" 90-1). Thus, armed with the theory and methodology of existential acting, Mailer returns to the cinema as a filmmaker for the same reason he considers turning away from it after his

experience in the above passage: at the same time the camera exposes one's frailties and the identities one attempts to disguise, it bolsters the masquerade of masculinity by imprinting its performance in celluloid. The same voice that undermines Mailer's masculinity becomes his primary means of constructing it.

In his first documentary Mailer sees "something in his adenoids" in a moment of slippage that renders the aural a visual prop. The experience of seeing his voice disrupts Mailer's viewing experience by first troubling the traditional assumption that film is a visual medium, and then forcing Mailer to confront himself as both image and sound. Mladen Dolar provides a means of understanding the revolutionary and revelatory potential of sound, in the form of the voice, in relation to both identity and film, as he writes:

[T]he visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character and a lack of distance. The voice is elusive, always changing, becoming, elapsing, with unclear contours, as opposed to the relative permanence, solidity, durability of the seen. (79)

Here the visible is associated with stability, permanence, and distinctiveness—terms that are crucial to our understanding of cinema, but that mirror the ways we come to understand ourselves as selves. In film, the visible is assumed to guarantee presence, an assumption that stems from, among other things, the historical and philosophical privileging of the visual as a primary quality, and the problem of the voiceovers and voice-offs of sound film—which are often disembodied, absent, and coming from beyond the grave or before birth. Because the visual has historically been the privileged epistemological order through which we understand both film and identity, by focusing on sound, which is dynamic and playful, we can begin to dismantle both identity and film.⁶ As Mailer sees his voice, witnessing his insides (in the form of his adenoids) undermining his outsides, the visual and audible come together, undoing the binary oppositions between seeing and hearing, insides and outsides.

Dolar contrasts the visible to the audible, arguing that the latter is associated with a lack of distance, a lack of distance perhaps best embodied by the uterine envelope created by the mother's voice. This lack of distance with

regard to the sound of the voice stems from the fact that the voice is simultaneously sent and delivered, thus folding back on itself and troubling the boundaries between self and other. This lack of distance is also precisely what Mailer experiences when he sees himself in his first documentary, at once spoken and heard. While Christian Metz dismisses seeing oneself on screen as an impossibility,⁷ feminist film theory calls attention to the discomfort that comes from not being granted the distance that the visible demands. In "Film and the Masquerade," Mary Anne Doane argues that the female spectator goes largely untheorized because the historical "imbrication of the cinematic image and the representation of the woman" leaves her too close to the image (76). Doane theorizes that in order to achieve the distance necessary to watch and appreciate film, female spectators assume a metaphorical feminine mask, which "in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance" (81). Doane then briefly considers why men do not have to masquerade as more masculine spectators, writing, "The very fact that we can speak of a woman 'using' her sex or 'using' her body for particular gains is highly significant—it is not that a man cannot use his body in this way but that he doesn't have to" (82).

But using his body for particular gains is precisely what Mailer does, as exemplified in Diane Arbus's 1963 photograph of Mailer. If, as Mailer quipped, "Giving a camera to Diane Arbus is like giving a hand grenade to a baby," this hand grenade caught an image that exemplifies how Mailer flaunts his masculinity by holding it at a distance (qtd. in Hagberg 211). In this photograph, we see Mailer is in his standard three-piece suit, sprawled out in a writerly looking high-backed chair. His right hand looks as though clasping an invisible cigarette, or pen, or as if gesturing to emphasize a point. His forehead is wrinkled in thought, and his blue eyes glow even in black and white. While his clothing, his chair, his furrowed brow, and his mouth, slightly agape in apparent mid-sentence, add up to an image we would expect of a great writer, his posture suggests otherwise; immediately, our attention is drawn to Mailer's crotch. Thus, this image reveals both Mailer's efforts to underscore his masculinity, placing his crotch front and center, and the vulnerability of this masculinity—in this moment, we wouldn't need a grenade to cause Mailer a great deal of pain; a swift kick would suffice. The simultaneous power and vulnerability of Mailer's crotch underscores his efforts to use the visibility of his body to counteract the invisibility of his voice, and his

hidden adenoids. We see Mailer engaged in a manly masquerade, as his proximity to the image allows him to manipulate it.

So male spectators need to masquerade as well—especially male spectators who find themselves closer to the image than they would like. The Jewish male is one such figure, as a result of a history of anti-Semitic visual representations of Jews in both scientific and popular media. Sander Gilman argues that such visual representations are internalized by contemporary Jewish-American writers, registering most prominently in repeated anxiety about sounding too Jewish (10–37). Mailer's anxiety about his adenoids is decisively Jewish, both because the adenoids are located in the nose and because they give the Jewish voice its stereotypical nasal quality. Mailer's attempt to work through this anxiety in his films is twofold. First, he gets on the other side of the camera in order to see rather than be seen, and when he is seen (as actor), it is under his own direction. Second, Mailer employs his voice in order to intervene, destabilize, and distance himself from the power of the image.

Wild 90, as it repeatedly calls attention to issues of seeing and visibility, provides the best examples of Mailer's effort to seize control of his visual representation in order to produce a record of his masculinity. Mailer accomplishes this task not only by "writing,"⁸ editing, and directing the film, but also, by playing a boxer in league with mafiosi, who have the police under their control. In this film the Maf Boys, three men who spend the film holed up in a Brooklyn warehouse, watch over the New York Police Department, a position emphasized by their location many stories above the city street. The NYPD, however, asserts that the Maf Boys would not have lived past thirteen had the Irish and Jewish cops not been watching out for them—so a network of interlaced looks, and interlaced ethnicities, emerges. But perhaps the most striking look is Mailer's own. As a character known as "the Prince," Mailer is perpetually at the mirror, greasing up his hair and combing out its kinky curls. This position is crucial to Mailer's management of his visual representation: from the mirror, much as in his position as director, Mailer can see both himself and the actors behind him; he can also control his image, making sure his mane and signature sneer are exactly as he wants them to appear. The metaphorical significance of Mailer's mirror scenes almost goes without saying—at these times we are treated to moments of silence rare in his film (or writing, or political) career in which Mailer uses the visuality of film to construct and maintain the visibility of identity, to reg-

ister his transformation here from nice Jewish boy to badass boxer. Despite this love affair with his image, Mailer shatters the filmic mirror when, at the conclusion of *Wild 90*, the Prince demands to speak to the audience, breaking the fourth wall, and informing the audience that the CIA⁹ is watching all of us. He then goes on to tell us, in his garbled, drunken voice that his favorite author is Norman Mailer—presumably, because he is both his creator and a substantial part of his self.

Mailer's appearance, particularly in the mirror scenes of *Wild 90*, is crucial to his efforts to make masculinity and unmake Jewishness, two concepts at odds because of the internalization of a long history of popular representations and stereotypes of the weak Jew. While Mailer combats this weakness in part through his tough guy exterior—carefully cultivated through hard-drinking, hard-talking, and hard-fighting in an effort to make himself out as a latter-day Hemingway—Mailer's voice registers this construction as well. In the notes taken during my first screenings of *Beyond the Law* and *Wild 90*, I repeatedly try to describe the voice of the characters he portrays. In my notes on *Beyond the Law*, I wrote that the poor sound quality of the film combines with Mailer's voice to create the effect of almost incomprehensible yelling from Lt. Francis Xavier Pope for an hour and twenty-four minutes. My notes on Mailer's gangster voice as the Prince of *Wild 90* remark that his accent makes him sound like a cross between Marlon Brando and Fred Flintstone with marbles in his mouth. In my second viewing, I crossed out this assessment, and wrote that he sounded more like Bert Lahr's Cowardly Lion from the *Wizard of Oz*. I am not alone in trying to describe Mailer's voice. Michael Mewshaw describes Mailer's voice as "the Irish brogue of a whiskey priest" coming from the body of a man who "looked about as threatening as a teddy bear" (14), and Jane O'Reilly notes that "words rumble and bubble and jump out, in a variety of accents: New York, faintly southern, all g's dropped (as in 'Ah'm talkin') when he is particularly shy" (198).¹⁰ More recently, in an article about the 2007 New York Mailer retrospective, A.O. Scott describes Mailer's voice as a "rapid, forceful stream of half-baked nostrums and brilliant *aperçus* delivered in that inimitable accent, an audible palimpsest of Mr. Mailer's Brooklyn childhood, his Ivy League education and his World War II combat service in an Army unit composed mainly of Texans and Southerners."

All of this is to say that the voices of Mailer's characters (including the character "Norman Mailer," who becomes a formal entity in *The Armies of*

the Night, but who was roaming the streets of America and Europe at least since the publication of *The Naked and the Dead*) are a response to the anxiety of sounding too Jewish. The adenoidal voice Mailer hears in his first documentary, the unsure voice of the Brooklyn Jew, transforms into a cacophony of accents—Southern, Irish, Italian, Brooklyn—which together make Mailer’s voice the voice of immigrant America. Paul Breines writes that discursive constructions of Jewish weakness arise from and refer to the rootlessness of the Diaspora (195). For Breines, tough Jewishness is a performance on the part of secular Jews that is largely associated with Zionism, and its creation first of tough Jewish pioneers, and then, after Israel’s victory in the Six Day War, of tough Israeli soldiers (195). Mailer, however, described his relationship to Judaism in this way: “I am a Jew out of loyalty to the underdog. I would never say I was not a Jew, but I took no strength from the fact” (qtd. in Dearborn 14). With this in mind, Mailer’s voice is a tough Jewish voice, but one that revises Breines’ toughness by drawing strength from a composite of immigrant voices, rooted, if at all, in American soil rather than Israeli. Mailer brings these immigrant voices together to construct a hybrid masculinity that is not only part white Negro and part tough Jew, but that is also comprised of Italian-American, Irish-American, Southern, and Texan parts, among others. Thus, Mailer simultaneously makes and unmakes Jewish masculinity by borrowing from other masculinities in the process of making himself into a palimpsest.

Mailer’s essay, “The White Negro,” is the site most often returned to in order to discuss his contribution to the theories of tough Jewish discourse and of masculinity.¹¹ This essay, which argues that the hipster’s existential, psychopathic masculinity is particularly well-suited for the Cold War political climate, is infamous not only because it espouses Reichian connections between sex and violence, but also because it argues that “the Negro,” who “relinquish[es] the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body,” provides a model for how to live violently and sexually (Mailer, “The White Negro” 341). Both because of and despite its racist enlistment of African-American men, Mailer’s essay celebrates and identifies with black masculinity as a means of embracing otherness without admitting Jewishness. With its repeated references to the figure of “the psychopath,” who “murders—if he has the courage,” however, Mailer’s essay is also about criminality, which is a crucial source of his on-screen tough Jewish persona (347). While this persona borrows its style and hipness from African Americans, it

almost literally ventriloquizes through the voices of Irish Americans and Italian Americans, particularly those of Hollywood cops and crooks.

Forging a criminal enterprise, and/or performing criminal masculinity, is a traditional means of assimilation for immigrant populations in America, which for the second wave of European immigrants begins with the Irish in the 1850s, and is then passed on to Italian and Jewish immigrants two generations later.¹² While criminality provided immigrant gangsters with increased notoriety and power, immigrant groups who became police officers saw a similar rise in status—and much like criminals, in part because it was hoped that they could infiltrate the criminal scenes of their brethren, it was the Irish who were cops first, followed by Italians and Jews (Fried xv). While this history suggests discrete ethnic groups who cross paths but not cultures, cinematic representations of the outlaw capitalism of mobsters often star Jewish immigrants in the role of Italian immigrants, and thus demonstrate ethnic crossings similar to those in Mailer's films. The results register in the voice; in *Little Caesar* (1931) Edward G. Robinson, né Emanuel Goldenberg, stars as the adenoidal Cesar Enrico Bandello, and in *Scarface* (1932), Paul Muni, né Meshilem Meier Weisenfreund, stars as Antonio Camonte whose Italian accent has a near Yiddish lilt.

In a 1965 letter to William F. Buckley, a man whose mid-century faux British accent made his voice almost as strange and remarkable as Mailer's,¹³ Mailer hands the crown of "most hated man in American life" over to Buckley. The letter responds to Buckley's recent speech before the Holy Name Society, an annual gathering of Catholic police officers, in which Buckley criticized the news media for overemphasizing police brutality during the recent civil rights marches in Selma, Alabama (Tanenhouse). When the *Herald Tribune* and civil rights activists caught wind of these remarks, and the rumors that the assembled police officers laughed and applauded upon hearing them, a media frenzy ensued which elicited a letter from Mailer, weighing in on Buckley's speech by clarifying his own relationship to the boys in blue:

I'm not the cop-hater I'm reputed to be, and in fact police fascinate me. But this is because I think their natures are very complex, not simple at all, and what I would object to . . . is that you made a one-for-one correspondence between the need to maintain law and order and the nature of the men who would main-

tain it. The policeman has I think an extraordinarily tortured psyche. He is perhaps more tortured than the criminal. ("In the Ring")

Perhaps as a result of their tortured psyches, Mailer repeatedly turns to cops and crooks as the focus of and source of conflict in his oeuvre. For Mailer, cops are men in power who are repeatedly outwitted by clever, hypermasculine, criminals: think Stephen Rojack and Gary Gilmore, the respective heroes of *An American Dream* and *The Executioner's Song*, who commit numerous crimes in single volumes, and the Norman Mailer of *The Armies of the Night*, arrested by U.S. Marshalls for crossing a police line at the Pentagon. There is also the Norman Mailer who stabbed his second wife, and the one who nearly lost an eye after fighting a group of hoodlums who insinuated that his dog was a "faggot" (Hitchens). Mailer, as his art and life suggest, sees the tension between cops and criminals as one that is inside of everyone. In a discussion of *Beyond the Law* in an interview with Gilles Boulenger, Mailer reveals that the film "had a notion at the core of it that worked—which is that everybody has a cop or a criminal in them" and that, "when you put people together—one playing a cop and one playing a crook—you get the dynamism that comes from the fact that every cop in real life has a potential criminal in him and every criminal in real life, or almost every criminal in real life, has a potential cop within their soul ("Interview")."

Mailer sees the conflict between cops and crooks as one that inhabits the film set as well. In "A Course on Film-Making," he describes cameramen and union grips, who "usually dress like cops off duty and are built like cops (with the same heavy meat in the shoulders, same bellies oiled in beer), which is not surprising for they are also in surveillance upon a criminal activity: people are forging emotions under bright lights... [l]ike cops they see through every fake move and hardly care" (133). Here the crew, who are equated with cops, are set up in opposition to the actors whom they put under surveillance and, more indirectly, to the director, who for Mailer is always an outlaw resisting the tyranny of the image, striving to disrupt the conventions of polite cinema through a refusal to use a script, and insisting upon including as much verbal and auditory obscenity as humanly possible. Thus, even when Mailer plays a cop in *Beyond the Law*, this portrayal becomes an effort similar to that of the director whose film tramples upon respectability. Mailer's Lieutenant Pope inhabits the body of the cop in order

to mock him and to illustrate a psyche more tortured than that of the criminal.

In *Beyond the Law*, as Mailer takes on the role of a cop, anxieties about Jewishness, being seen, and the voice come together. *Beyond the Law* tells the story of one night in a police precinct in which a number of criminals are interrogated, ranging from a motorcycle gang, to a man who murdered his wife with an axe, to the members of a sadomasochistic whipping club. The film takes us back and forth between the precinct, where we see the cops in action, and a bar, where we see the cops off-duty, having drinks. Toward the film's conclusion, these spaces intersect as Lieutenant Pope brings one of the women from the whipping club, a stunning Syrian woman named Lee Ray Rogers, to the bar. Rogers' tripartite name, cobbled together from pieces of Lee Harvey Oswald and James Earl Ray,¹⁴ suggests that she too will be an assassin of sorts, or at least that she will bring the little death of orgasm to Lieutenant Pope. Just before Rogers arrives, Pope (Mailer's Irish-American cop, whose rank and name suggest that he is only slightly less than the Bishop of Rome) and Mickey Berk (Mickey Knox's Jewish-American cop, feminized through a last name that is cockney rhyming slang for cunt)¹⁵ have a heart to heart in the men's room in which Pope remarks, "I used to have no respect for the Jewish cops until the Israelis showed the Arabs where to go. And then I said to myself, maybe Berk has more than even I thought." Pope then mutters under his breath for a couple of minutes, and quietly says to himself, "The Irish never won a war."

Once Rogers arrives, Pope asks the other officers to leave them alone. An intimate conversation follows, during which the two imagine an S & M scene and Pope refers to his penis as "the avenger." A difficult to obtain "blue" version of the film exists in which we presumably see Pope's avenger in action. For our purposes, however, it is even more striking to see him *voicing* his potency and sexuality; while Mailer's voice revealed him as soft in his first documentary, Pope tells us here that he is hard. Pope expresses the ethnic crossing that facilitates his hardness in this conversation as well, as he tells Rogers, "You bring out the Italian in me." Ultimately, Pope's blonde wife arrives at the bar, cramping his style, and commands him to end this conversation. Thus the film concludes with Pope at the nexus of several ethnicities: pitted against an Arab dominatrix and an emasculating *shiksa*, the Irish Pope arms himself with an Italian libido, and metaphorically whips out his

avenger in the name of both the Jews, who showed the Arabs where to go, and the Irish who never won a war.

In "A Course in Filmmaking," Mailer argues that after the advent of sound, film started to mimic theater, and that the work of film should be to get away from this mimicry in order to accomplish things that can only be accomplished on film. As films that are uniquely filmic, Mailer gives the example of *The Maltese Falcon*, but also of the Marx Brothers' films, in which the brothers "stampeded over every line of a script and tore off in enough directions to leave concepts fluttering like ticker tape on the mysterious nature of the movie art" ("Course" 129). The Marx brothers are important ancestors in Mailer's filmic genealogy, in part because they too are Jews who remix ethnicity on film, as Chico becomes Italian and Zeppo becomes the brothers' WASPy foil. And like Mailer's films, much of the chaos and anarchy that unfurls in the Marx Brothers' films stems from sound, in the form of elaborate musical numbers, Groucho's wordplay, Chico's Italian accent and piano playing, Harpo's horn-honking, and even his silence. For both the Marx Brothers and Mailer, the work of cinema is to unravel itself, to make and unmake a universe in the same space, to challenge conventions. Where the Marx brothers wreak havoc, for example, upon the university in *Horsefeathers*, and upon dictatorship in *Duck Soup*, Mailer wreaks havoc upon language and good taste as he attempts to create the film with the most "repetitive pervasive obscenity of any film ever made" with *Wild 90*, and upon both his own voice and the human ear drum with the perpetual yelling of Lt. Pope in *Beyond the Law*. Mailer even tells us, "*Wild 90* seems close to nothing so much as the Marx Brothers doing improvisations on *Little Caesar* with the addition of a free run of obscenity equal to *Naked Lunch* or *Why Are We in Vietnam?*" ("Some Dirt" 90). It is as though Mailer sees *Wild 90* as an almost unimaginable supplement to the Marx Brothers' oeuvre—a vision of what their tough Jewish contribution to cinema would look like had they ever assumed the roles of mafiosi.

In Mailer's universe, the borders between Mailer and his characters are always fragile. He tells us in the Boulenger interview that in the making of *Beyond the Law* he would torture the actors playing the crooks, who were all friends of his, by interrogating them about things they had done in their real lives.¹⁶ In his writing and his introductory remarks included on the French DVDs of his films, Mailer repeatedly tells us that the goal of existential acting is to create a fictional documentary ("A Course" 107, 109). Here is an ex-

ample, taken from his discussion of the successes and failures of *cinéma vérité* in “A Course on Filmmaking”: “It was as if there was a law that a person could not be himself in front of a camera unless he pretended to be someone other than himself. By that logic, *cinéma vérité* would work if it photographed a performer in the midst of his performance” (147). Mailer’s films elaborate upon his ideas about existential filmmaking: it is only in the act of performing as a character (Lieutenant Pope) that the actor reveals himself (Norman Mailer). Pope/Mailer’s sarcastic comment about not respecting the Jews until they showed the Arabs their military might is a line almost directly out of Breines’ *Tough Jews*, or vice versa, Pope/Mailer’s comment is part of the discourse surrounding the 1968 war that inspired *Tough Jews*. Either way, with this line, Mailer introduces himself into the lineage of tough Jews—but with his own spin. When Pope tells us that Lee Ray Rogers brings out the Italian in him, he speaks for Mailer as well. Because Jewish masculinity for Mailer is always borrowed from and channeled through other ethnic masculinities, Pope’s words are as good as Mailer’s saying that Rogers brings out the Jew in him, and Mailer’s (via Pope’s) tough Jew is always already fighting, whether he is pushing Arabs out of Palestine or fighting to defend his dog’s honor. Thus, much as Mailer helped to unmake cinema as he made it, Mailer makes Jewishness as he unmakes it—masculinity unravels as the film does the same, moving from real to reel.

NOTES

1. In a letter dated March 18, 1964, also included in Mailer’s file, Hoover wrote back telling the teacher that this request was beyond his area of jurisdiction because the FBI “neither makes evaluations nor draws conclusions as to the character of integrity of any organization, publication, or individual,” and because Hoover has made it a habit “not to comment on any material not prepared by the FBI.”
2. Mary V. Dearborn writes that Mailer picked up Yiddish at home from his parents, “enough so that many years later, in Germany, he was able to ask for directions in this language and be understood” (14).
3. Mailer was also featured in several documentaries during these years, including Dick Fontaine’s *Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?* (1968) and *Norman Mailer vs. Fun City U.S.A.* (1970); the former is a filmic companion to *Armies*, documenting Mailer’s actions during the March on the Pentagon, and the latter produces a record of Mailer’s 1969 New York City mayoral campaign. Mailer was also documented in Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker’s *Town*

Bloody Hall, a film of the 1971 debate between Mailer and Germaine Greer about women's liberation at Town Hall in New York City.

4. It is quite possible that Mailer is thinking in part of Kenneth Anger here, the word "invocation" invoking Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), as well as the ritual and ceremony of highly-stylized films like *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965) and *Scorpio Rising* (1964). Incidentally, in the Boulenger interview, a copy of Anger's book *Hollywood Babylon* can be seen on the bookshelf over Mailer's shoulder, almost like a cartoon devil egging him on.
5. *The Armies of the Night*, *The Executioner's Song*, and *Marilyn*, respectively.
6. At this point in time, there is, of course, a well-established tradition of discussing sound and the voice on film—Pascal Bonitzer's "The Silences of the Voice" (1975), Christian Metz's "Aural Objects" (1980), Mary Anne Doane's "The Voice in the Cinema" (1980), Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema* (1982), and Silverman's *Acoustic Mirror* (1988), just to name a few. It seems important for our purposes, however, to rehash the stakes of this discussion, especially in relation to deconstructing/reconstructing/constructing Mailer's masculinity.
7. In *Imaginary Signifier*, Metz writes that "there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in [the screen]: the spectator's own body" (45).
8. The word "writing" is in quotes in this sentence because while Mailer is given credit for writing the film, for example on the *Internet Movie Database*, existential acting relies on improvisation and thus has no script, per se.
9. Mailer had a strong distaste for the CIA, an organization that he saw as the paragon of both surveillance culture and WASP culture. Mailer's 1300-plus-page novel *Harlot's Ghost* provides an extended though indirect glimpse into his dislike for the CIA and is almost agonizing to read because its narrator, Harry Hubbard, is a boring, WASPy, CIA agent. It's also worth noting that Hubbard refers to the one Jewish agent in the CIA, Reed Arnold Rosen, as "adenoidal" (61).
10. Salman Rushdie describes Bert Lahr's lion voice as strikingly similar words, "all elongated vowel sounds (*Put 'em uuuuuuuup*)," and the Cowardly Lion's personality as one that sounds a lot like Mailer's: "transparent bravado and huge, operatic, tail-tugging, blubbing terror" (48).
11. See Levine and Damon. Damon pithily writes that "The White Negro" "claims to be about how the white man envies the Black man's sexuality and thus tries to emulate his style, but [its] subtext is about how the Jewish man envies and wants to emulate the gentile man's sexuality, but can't say so" (149).
12. A classic example appears in Sergio Leone's 1984 Jewish gangster film, *Once Upon a Time in America*—which stars the perpetually ethnicity-crossing Robert De Niro and for which Mailer flew to Rome in 1976 to work on the screenplay (Mewshaw 14). For a recent example, see Stern's *The Frozen Rabbi*, a comic whirlwind tour through the history of American Jewry that follows one family from the Russian Pale to Memphis, Tennessee, with a stop in New York, where one family member, Ruby "Kid" Karp, becomes a notorious gangster.
13. Buckley is also both WASPy and a former CIA agent. See William F. Buckley, Jr., "Who Did What?"

14. The name also refers to Republican luminary and soon to be Nixon Administration Secretary of State William P. Rogers, who would go on to negotiate an Arab-Israeli peace treaty in 1973.
15. See also entry for “Berk” on *LondonSlang.com*: “*Rhyming Slang*, short for ‘Berkshire Hunt’, meaning ‘cunt’. Most people go around calling people ‘berks’ for years not realising that it is slang for one of the strongest swear words in the English language.” See also: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=berk>
16. The best example of this existential interrogation occurs as Mailer’s Lieutenant Pope interrogates Peter Rosoff, whom Mailer asserts was a closeted homosexual, accusing him of soliciting sex in a subway men’s room (“Interview”).

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