

CONCEPTUALIZING LIVED
EXPERIENCE:
MAILER AS AN INTELLECTUAL

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If a writer really wants to be serious he has to become an intellectual, and yet nothing is harder.

—Norman Mailer, qtd. in *Norman Mailer a Double Life* (128)

This need for redemption on the part of past epochs who have directed their expectations to us is reminiscent of the figure familiar in both the Jewish and Protestant mysticism of man's responsibility for the fate of a God who, in the act of creation, relinquished his omnipotence in favor of human freedom, putting us on an equal footing with himself.

—Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical
Discourse of Modernity* (14)

INTRODUCTION

My intention in this essay is twofold. To begin with, I would like to provide a brief account of what being an intellectual has signified for nearly two centuries. Then I will articulate how Mailer as an intellectual raises day-to-day experiences in the lifeworld to conceptual and symbolic levels. This articulation shall constitute the framework for an intellectual within the parameters of an existential phenomenology, as I understand it. Ultimately, I believe, this proposed intuitive process will constitute an intellectual methodology and its inherent discourse, which in turn endows our world with *theoretical*

and *symbolic* dimensions of universality. I see these dimensions evolve at the intersection of our human subjective-objective lived experiences in the interstices of the lifeworld we inhabit. In this fashion, the lifeworld distinguishes itself from naïve realism and solipsism by absorbing both within itself in an intellectual vision of human existence. This somewhat modified definition of the so-called “classical intellectual” will allow me to explore how Norman Mailer partakes of his own intricate existential phenomenology as the framework of his own endeavors as an intellectual in various subtle and complex ways.

My definitional search should make apparent how Mailer raised his concrete particular experiences by his educational formation and exceptional imagination onto the plane of intellectual discourse. This intellectual transformation of his lived instinctual experiences enabled Mailer to establish strategies to offer heuristic and hermeneutic approaches to his work as a writer. Such strategies led to Mailer’s highly novel and distinctive responses to problems of yearning to open up an unlimited space of acquiring knowledge.

Consequently, in his essays and in his fiction, Mailer’s practices reveal his idiosyncratic imaginative vision as a primal but unusually intellectual vision of the lifeworld. His imagination often propels itself forward by seemingly raw instinctual energies, seeking explosive fulfillment of sexual desires that constitute the powerful if repressed unconscious forces of the id for Freud. In this regard, in spite of his progressive modernist time-consciousness, one might call Mailer’s sense of time as an essayist and novelist regressive-progressive. Here again, Mailer remains faithful to his significant intellectual pattern of dialectical integration of opposites, which here weds the determinacy of the instincts and the progressive indeterminacy of creative imagination within the framework of the “mind of an outlaw.”

I would say that Mailer’s creative vision of the human existence surfaces from the depth of the lifeworld. Hence, his theoretical concerns issue forth from an experiential perspective of the lifeworld. My proposed definition of Mailer as intellectual derives from the ability of our consciousness to double on itself as it were and offer its constituting intended objects of the lifeworld in their absence as conceptual and symbolic images.

In this sense, concepts and symbols will make evident Mailer’s immersion in the specificity and particularity of objects of our perception on the one hand and the subjective conceptual and symbolic generality of concepts on

the other. Mailer goes beyond the subject-object dichotomies toward a Hegelian dialectical synthesis of opposites. Conceptualized everyday lived experiences enable him to establish a constant and consistent exploratory and interpretive approach to being an intellectual. Inevitably, the intellectual enterprise so perceived makes its way to Mailer's idiosyncratic response to problems of knowing as an open-ended adventure in initiating a creative epistemology in his writings. As an approach, it holds the promise of divulging how Mailer understood being simultaneously a writer of fiction and an intellectual essayist and journalist, who functioned as a passionate sociocultural and politically interventionist intellectual. I should think a specific mode of human existence would emerge from within the interstices of such a study. It would make manifest Mailer's intellectual manner of embracing our lifeworld as a boundless series of existential modalities of having, doing, and being.

Lastly, I shall provide an example of Mailer's intellectual practice by discussing his brief theoretical article on Sigmund Freud. The "Freud" essay appears in the recent publication of a selection of Mailer's essays, *Mind of an Outlaw*, adroitly chosen and edited by Mailer scholar Phillip Sipiora. In spite of its brevity, I think of "Freud" as an apocryphon, a form of Jewish and early Christian secret writing, where the concealed text was perhaps more significant than the unconcealed one, because it would be given over to silence, a kind of unsurpassable mystical language in its own right. I trust it will help make known how Mailer in the early stages of his career as an essayist applied his intellectual formation. I hope this conceptual or intellectual formation along with his hyperactive strength of imagination will make manifest the later tactics, techniques, and devices that he employed to practice the art of the essay as well as the novel. I believe that my analysis of "Freud" will also show how Mailer skillfully transforms himself into a public intellectual as he deals with subjects of simultaneous interest to specialists in certain disciplines as well as the public in general.

AN EXCURSUS: THE ORIGIN AND DEFINITION OF THE INTELLECTUAL

In the study of the intellectual proposed in the preceding sections, the immediate difficulty is an etymological one, because the intellectual has become a word that has gathered many layers of significations. One needs to peel off its aggregation of political, historical, sociopolitical, and geographic deposits of meanings and connotations. Generally, since the middle of the

nineteenth century various societies and cultures have recognized the presence of distinct types of distinguishable individuals emerging among them. They have collectively characterized these individuals as intellectuals. I would say then that intellectuals primarily deal conceptually or theoretically with the perceptual images of objects of our consciousness in unlimited experiences of our lifeworld. In other words, the intellectual moves from the primary concrete and objective given of human consciousness to the secondary theoretical sphere of concepts. Therefore, there is in intellectual discourses a continuous movement from the actual and particular to the ever-expanding plane of the abstract, general, and universal. This movement does so based on how intellectuals, individually and collectively obtain a body of knowledge in their chosen field, say, in various expanses of philosophy, mathematics, natural and social sciences, and humanities.

Accorded high status, position, and agency, most intellectuals gain commensurate measures of power resulting from theory and practice of knowledge they have gained. However, this exercise of power does not always produce its effects unchallenged. The intellectual's exercise of power is often difficult or attenuated, because it is subject to controversy, debate, and contestation by the so-called conservative elite in the existing established institutions and their economic and sociocultural structures. Conservatives are often even fiercely antagonistic toward progressive intellectuals who threaten their advantages in a given society, and refuse to accept their role except as employees in what Jean-Paul Sartre has referred to as "technicians of practical knowledge" (*Between Existentialism and Marxism* 286). As a result, in our contemporary society conservative critics vociferously challenge the legitimacy and status of intellectuals. Toward the end of his life, I believe that Mailer experienced this noticeable attenuation of the intellectuals' effectiveness in the United States.

Now the salient question for those who engage in intellectual activities would be whose interest does their *knowledge as power* serve, as Michel Foucault formulated it? In answering this question, I am greatly indebted to Jean-Paul Sartre's compelling views in his magisterial long essay "In Defense of Intellectuals" in *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (228–285). Following Sartre's overall reflections on this subject, it would appear to me that the problematic of the intellectual's validity in exercising the universality of his or her knowledge as power moves along two divergent practices. Each of them imposes certain demands, responsibilities, and obligations on the in-

tellectual, which are often inordinately exigent. The first demands the intellectual to admit his or her specific debt and allegiance to the ruling power elite in a given society. As a class, they have created the institutions of higher learning, which provide the intellectual's culture of educational formation, as it was true, say, in Mailer's case with his Harvard education. Thus, the ruling elite insist that the intellectual support their inherited, conventional, normative value system. Resonating in a number of economic and socio-cultural registers in the conventional system requires that the intellectual recognize this obligation and repay it by fully supporting it.

Evidently, this is the position that a doctrinaire "conservative" might take toward an intellectual. The ideal intellectual for such a conservative would be a man or woman of knowledge who might adapt and therefore become an educated, content, salaried employee. Thus, such an employee's mode of conceptualization, symbolic articulation, and ideology tends to relate unswervingly to the established power. The "technicians of practical knowledge," as specialists and experts, might consequently belong to all fields. They might hold positions of responsibility and in humanities social sciences as academics, writers, and scholars; and in sciences as physicians, clinicians, mathematicians, architects, researchers, consultants, and so forth. From this perspective, there cannot be a true working class intellectual, the dockworker conservative social philosopher Eric Hoffer, for example, notwithstanding.

In stark contrast to the stunted intellectual as technicians of practical knowledge, one might argue, as Sartre does, that what constitutes the foundation of an intellectual's epistemological formation is originally always and everywhere inherently *conceptual and symbolic*. As suggested in the preceding sections, the intellectual's formation begins with the desire to seek an interminable universal epistemology. This continual conceptual possibility materializes at the site where the concrete and the particular appear in consciousness as perceptual images and obtain their power-thrust toward the conceptual, symbolic images of universal concerns. The ensemble of these perceptual concrete images transformed into their conceptual immaterial counterparts set in motion a series of reflections. However, not being at all an essentialist view of the world, these conceptual and symbolic reconstructions of our world lead to disclosures of theoretical knowledge of our world as it constantly evolves, never forgetting its point of departure in reality of perceived particular objects. In their most complete form, these theoretical disclosures achieve universal status, as is, say, true of the concept of gravity

in physics, or mathematical proof of the existence of black holes in astronomy or an artistic or literary works such as Shakespeare's plays in their totality. In each case, they make available to us perfect examples of the Hegelian formulation of concrete-particular-universal.

Consequently, many thinkers and critics assert that such conceptual and symbolic, epistemic acts initiate their wholeness and fulfillment as a genuine *universal practice*. Such acts simultaneously anchor themselves at the crossroads of theoretical and practical knowledge as they comprehensively work toward the worldwide common good. This definition of the intellectual unveils to us the limitless dimension of the intellectual as the possessor of conceptual-symbolic knowledge in its intrinsic universality. Of necessity, such an intellectual always consciously and fully participates in matters sociopolitical and intervenes publicly on the side of universal transformative freedom and betterment for all.

Accordingly, such an engaged or committed intellectual inevitably reveals a durable cultural, socio-political contestatory, interventionist dimension to it. It is of interest to mention that Sartre's definition of the intellectual shapes up somewhere between existentialism and Marxism. However, they radically diverge on the centrality of the individual's total existential freedom of choice on the one hand and the predetermined dialectic of history and its collectivism on the other. It is in this light that I shall study Mailer as a practicing intellectual. However, there is sufficient evidence that Mailer reversed Sartre's evolution from existentialism to a Marxism modified by his own existentialism.

AN ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL DEFINITION OF THE INTELLECTUAL

If you are going to be a writer, sooner or later you write about everything—the places you went—the people who double-crossed you—how the weather was—the ladies you fucked—your wins and your losses—and those funny times when you mistakenly thought the world was made for you.

Ernest Hemingway, qtd. by A. E. Hotchner in
The Good Life According to Hemingway (19)

Now, it might be helpful to offer briefly my own approach to defining Mailer as an intellectual informed by existential phenomenology, which derives

from my own culture of reading. I must do so for the simple reason that it has both influenced and illuminated my own view of Mailer as an exceptional but complex, often contradictory, and controversial intellectual. From this perspective, what follows is the prospect of intellectual articulation of the dialectical synthesis of the intellectual and the instinctive that unfolds within the lifeworld as the sum total of often opaque and contradictory lived experiences in Mailer's work.

Typically, on the conceptual plane, this synthesis makes itself intelligible as a yearning for knowledge through linguistics and language arts, and the language of mathematics and the sciences with their own well-developed lexicon and syntax as numbers, formulas, and eventually significations of maximal importance in more advanced forms such as differential calculus. One might call it a maximalist view of intellectuality as intentional conceptual acts, enlivened by instinctual forces. From this vantage point, a clearing appears for articulating the Hegelian dialectical process of progressing from particular to the universal through our lived experiences transformed into lexical, syntactic, and semantic grammar, linguistics, and language arts in the humanities. Similar universalizing processes of our experiences occur in the language of mathematics and the sciences with their own well-developed lexicon of numbers, syntactic formulas, and eventually significations of maximal importance.

I would suggest that aggregates of such a search for conceptual and symbolic images based on the concreteness and particularity of lived experience constitute the core of Norman Mailer's work as a man, writer, and intellectual. At his best, Mailer uses conceptual images to generate potentially unending zone(s) of freedom for theoretically interpretive acts. A byproduct of this mode of conceptual thinking frequently transforms an intellectual into a polymath. He or she does so to the chagrin of conservative critics and analysts who see them exclusively as dangerous meddlers, thorny incompetent dilettantes or worst, charlatans. However, they bring an invaluable interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, interpretive articulateness to our comprehension of different fields of knowledge. And I place Mailer and Gore Vidal among them. Consequently, the intellectual can legitimately deal with vital matters not only in the humanities but also in social, political, economic, and physical and life sciences. The interpretive element of intellectual activities brings forth new knowledge, which at its most fully realized mode makes manifest a measure of special incandescent primacy. One perceives it

as the presence of a quality of conceptual light, which makes imaginative vision possible, in its broadest sense. Perhaps one can call it the ambient glow of compelling love of knowledge at its most intense, which unites the knower and the known. Nevertheless, with all due respect to Sartre, which in my case is immense, my view of the intellectual, which clearly would include Mailer, somewhat differs from Sartre's. From my point of view, intellectual commitment does not necessarily always imply constant active political engagement or militancy on the side of freedom and justice as it does for Sartre, as undoubtedly admirable as such commitment might be.

**MAILER AS INTELLECTUAL, INTUITIVE ADVENTURER IN
CONCEPTUALIZING THE LIFEWORLD**

Early and late, Mailer gravitated to incompatibles.

J. Michael Lennon, *Norman Mailer: A Double Life* (7)

In order to write about life, first you must live it!

Ernest Hemingway, qtd. by A. E. Hotchner in
The Good Life According to Hemingway (12)

Now it is essential to situate Mailer precisely in the spectrum between the so-called "conservative anti-intellectualism" of, for example, Paul Johnson in his *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre, Chomsky*, and my modified, Sartre-inspired existential phenomenology of the concept of the engaged or committed public intellectual—which Johnson so bitterly disparaged. Clearly, it is futile to try finding any resemblance between Mailer the essayist-journalist and a conservative critic such as Johnson. It would be also difficult, perhaps even impossible, to find commonalities between on the one hand a conservative Catholic thinker and writer such as Mailer's friend-and-foe William F. Buckley, and or on the other the linguist and progressive intellectual like the formidable Noam Chomsky.

So, locating Mailer within conventional definitions of the intellectual is problematic. It is so because Mailer transgresses the parameters of a comprehensive series of commonly agreed-upon and recognized boundaries sanctioned as intransgressible or the law. Furthermore, in the context of Mailer's consciousness of Jewish Law (*halakhah*), the implications of it will be prodigious and consequential. So Mailer as an intellectual "outlaw" often exhibits a boundless *transgressive mind* at work. His mind is wont to go beyond the

generally approved *and* specifically prohibited. His intellect stretches over expanses of the forbidden and taboo in a never-ending search for truth of his lived experiences as a fearsome tangled web of good and evil. Sometimes it might even give the impression of the pathological, but it always mainly marks strong, creative, and groundbreaking modes of thought and action purposes.

At first glance, based on some of his comments, one is tempted to think that Mailer intellectually wishes to be an inheritor of Karl Marx's mode of thought, albeit in a general sort of way. In the essay "The White Negro" (1957), he could write a long, effective, lyrical, and reverential sentence such as the following about Marx's *Das Kapital*:

It is almost beyond the imagination to conceive of a work in which the drama of human energy is engaged, and a theory of its social currents and dissipations, its imprisonments, expressions, and its tragic wastes are fitted into some gigantic synthesis of human action where the body of Marxist thought, and particularly the epic grandeur of *Das Kapital* (that first of the major psychologies to approach the mystery of social cruelty so simply and practically as to say that we are a collective body of humans whose life-energy is wasted, displaced, and procedurally stolen as it passes from one of us to another)—where particularly the epic grandeur of *Das Kapital* would find its place to an even more god-like view of human justice and injustice, in some more excruciating vision of those intimate and institutional processes which lead to our creations and disasters, our growth, our attrition, and our rebellion. (*Mind* 65)

I would pronounce this a *charismatic* sentence, in the multiple significations and nuances of this adjective. It is an elegiac ode to social justice, which almost possesses a touch of Joycean or Faulknerian syntactic exuberance and opulence. Just the same, its unusual appeal on lexical and syntactic planes is pure Mailer at his best. It partakes of theory and remains impressively so, but it is also lyrical, and persuasive, ending authoritatively in semantic configurations and associations in the reader's mind. Mailer finds concepts of justice and injustice to be rooted in stolen human life-energy.

Mailer deftly connects his sentence with the psychological "mystery of

social cruelty” in its economic as well as social implications of it in a hugely affecting and consequential way. It is reminiscent of Eric Fromm’s efforts to bring together Marxist economic alienation and psychosocial alienation. Exhibiting a certain brilliance and impassioned resonance Mailer produces in one sentence an example of his own best theoretical writing. Since life-energy is the essence of life, the notion of stolen life-energy hints at a lived experience of death in the midst of life, a criminal if not indeed an evil theft. In a word, Mailer’s view of Marxism acquires an ontological dimension, which is objectively persuasive conceptually and moving emotionally—whether one is for or against Marxism as a theory.

Two years later, in 1959, Mailer begins his essay “From Surplus Value to Mass Media” with a reference to *Das Kapital*, perhaps to show again a conceptual continuity and general theoretical solidarity with Marxism:

No one can work his way through *Das Kapital* without etching on his mind forever the knowledge that profit must come from loss—the lost energy of one human being paying for the comfort of another; if the process has become ten times more subtle, complex, and untraceable in the modern economy, and conceivably a hundred times more resistant to the careful analysis of the isolated radical, it is perhaps now necessary that some of us be so brash as to cut a trail of speculation across subjects as vast as the title of this piece. (*Mind* 66)

The preceding is another striking long sentence, which intends to go to the heart of a fundamental and seemingly intractable socioeconomic unfairness. Again, Mailer underlines the theme of the loss of one human being’s life-energy for the luxury of another. He sees in this a mode of ontological loss, the archetype of a sort of an institutionalized and legitimized callousness toward human existence. Mailer asserts that an isolated radical can no longer *speculatively* study and analyze this form of socioeconomic unreasonable and unethical greed. He suggests it is “perhaps now necessary that some of us be so brash as to cut a trail of speculation across subjects as vast as the title of this piece,” an impetuous task that would ostensibly transform whoever undertakes it into a neo-Marxist intellectual. One might ask, is it not sufficient now to conclude that a brash bourgeois novelist, essayist and

journalist such as Mailer himself was already a genuine and a very articulate Marxist intellectual? It would at least *appear* so.

Yet I am inclined neither to modify this conclusion nor to abandon it altogether. It would seem to me Mailer's Marxist tendencies are more problematic than they would be manifest at first glance. Hence, I am hesitant to consider Mailer as a Marxist intellectual, pure and simple. An intellectual, yes; but a Marxist, I am not so certain. , Why, one might ask? I would answer for the simple reason that one cannot place Mailer on the roster of intellectuals of direct Marxist heritage in spite of his appreciation of Marx's philosophical and theoretical mastery. That list would legitimately include such as the Hungarian György Lukács (1885–1975), the Italian Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), the French Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) and Louis Althusser (1918–1990), and the German-American philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), who was Mailer's contemporary, and French philosopher Alain Badiou (1937–), just to mention a few names. They are all radically different from Mailer. For them, being a Marxist theoretician and intellectual was a fulltime, lifelong, exigent, and sole activity. Rightly or wrongly, for them it was a demanding, all-consuming adherence. It required a theoretical purity that was exclusionary and discarded all other activities and modes of thought. Additionally, their intellectual militancy sequestered them—or so it would seem to me.

As early as 1955, in his essay "What I Think of Artistic Freedom," Mailer writes, "For years I have been alternately attracted to Marxism and anarchism, and in the tension between the two I suppose I have found the themes for my novels" (*Mind* 21). And he is off travelling along the long hard road of Hegelian dialectic, choosing to veer off the well-charted and explicit Marxist dialectic of materialism and its corresponding dialectic of history. This sporadic journeying back and forth between Marxism and anarchism or between revolutionary Marxist determinism of matters socioeconomic and preoccupations with ethical considerations such as individual freedom and self-determination as individual sovereignty defy restrictions. It takes Mailer from Marx to Mikhail Bakunin. On the way back, it places him in a general sort of way within the dialectical province of existential-Marxism in expounded by in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1, Theory of Practical Ensembles* (*Critique de la raison dialectique Tome I: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* 1960). At that juncture, Mailer always exercises the freedom to remain an exception rather than the rule.

Thus in Mailer's mind, the Marxist dialectic discloses a new combinatory historical dialectic ethics and the moral exigencies of anarchism as a politi-

cal philosophy dealing with freedom as well as socioeconomic inequalities. He had the genius of integrating in his mind two polar approaches to revolutionary change. Regardless of their shared concern for socioeconomic justice, I believe Marxism and anarchism are extreme opposites in theory and practice. There is the dogmatism and preordained rigid demands of orthodox Marxist philosophy as dialectics of matter, socioeconomic discourses, and tactical revolutionary analyses. At the other extreme, there is the insistence on undogmatic, self-governing anti-statist anarchist philosophy embedded in revolutionary acts within the more inward looking ethical concerns about liberty and justice. Mailer believed he had dialectically synthesized the two contrasting, revolutionary ideas, at least for himself. This dialectical synthesis would enable him to initiate a dialogue between Marxism and anarchism. This dialectical reconciliatory dialogue gave the spirited themes of his novels and essays and organized his worldview in its mutable totality. His worldview now surfaces from the depth of his new relentlessly changing dialectics, establishing shifting horizons we associate with Mailer in matters philosophical, psychological, and sociopolitical. Even in his religious thought, Mailer held close to Manicheanism, a heritage of Zoroastrianism, as well as agnostic Judo-Christian beliefs in irreconcilable dualities of supernatural forces. Darkness and light and the Devil and the Good Lord would play signifying roles in his eschatology. In the war between good and evil, Mailer believed human commitment to forces of good should determinedly strengthen the divine.

Freely chosen human action as liberating is what attracts Mailer to anarchism, which deems most governmental and organizational power as imposing illegitimate dictatorial restraints on the citizens of a given country and therefore defies such restrictions, by violence if need be. Total individual freedom as liberty and responsibility therefore becomes its primary goal. Incidentally, this is precisely where libertarianism and anarchism asymptotically brush against each other. With responsibility added to such individual autonomy, it approximates the uneasy marriage of existentialism and Marxism as a new form of libertarian socialism, maximizing individual freedom as the grantor of liberation for all. Sartre supported libertarian socialism as a specific school of political thought emerging in the middle ground between existentialism and Marxism. For Mailer, this new imaginative vision of “alternating” between orthodox Marxism and anarchism declares an uneasy and *contingent* adherence captious to both. I qualify Mailer’s condi-

tional and provisional adherence to Marxism *and* anarchy is maximally subtle and nuanced, because it finds its way into his novels by an ensemble of interpretive conceptual strategies and fictional techniques, particularly in his early works *Naked and the Dead*, *Barbary Shore*, and *The Deer Park*. These strategies and techniques would be of much interest to Mailer's theory of fiction. Their detections and elaborations would make a fine subject for dissertations by young scholars.

Mailer tells us, "The genius of Marx was that *he was a mystic as well as a rationalist*, and the intellectual deterioration of Socialism, not to mention the mental petrification of Stalinism, comes from denying the mystical element in Marxism and championing the rational" (*Mind of An Outlaw*, 23: emphasis added). I find it an audacious and judicious theoretical sentence, which in turn makes manifest young Mailer's own virtuoso intellectual performance at his thoughtful *and* brashest best. He engages in speculative thinking that places Marx at the intersections of rationalism and mysticism. It also underlines Mailer's proclivities toward performing as an enchanting dialectician. He conjoins two philosophical schools of thought that are seemingly unequivocally antithetical.

It would appear to me that Mailer in his essays ceaselessly is seeking to acquire modes of never-ending transformative knowledge. His mixture of curiosity and love of knowledge empower him to set up an interpretive epistemology (hermeneutics) and linguistic solutions (heuristics), which he intends to be transformational and redemptive. Marxism is only acceptable to Mailer the novelist to the extent it can induce effective change in the human condition to make it more just. However, it can only do so if it acquires powers of such as Mailer attributes to mysticism, which can liberate the power accorded to intuition and creative imagination in a just society as it moves in the mode of Hegelian dialectic from the concrete and particular to the general, universal, and the infinite. Lennon tells us Mailer became "fascinated by the mysticism of the Hasidim. In the early in 1960s, he wrote six columns for *Commentary*, reflecting on folk stories collected by Martin Buber that centered on the Hasidim's dialectic, which Mailer said, 'placed madness next to practicality, illumination side by side with duty, and arrogance in bed with humility'" (*Norman Mailer: A Double Life* 7).

I should think it reasonable to suspect that in referring to Marx as a mystic Mailer was aware of the Hasidic mysticism belief in dialectical polarities as well as the Kabbalistic concept of "*Ein Sof*" (no limit or end, pure transcen-

dence). *Ein Sof* demarcates the transcendent horizon of human life, which includes the unknown and the unknowable. Is it possible that Mailer speculated that Marx too had been aware of the Kabbalistic concept of *Ein Sof*. Why not? After all, is it not conceivable that the concept of *Ein Sof* inspired Marx's utopian concept of a future "worker's paradise," integrating the heaven and the earth in freedom from economic injustice? Moreover, from Mailer's viewpoint, couldn't *Ein Sof* also be the ground of possibility of emergence and a clearing of ethical socialism? My answer is yes. I believe Mailer theoretically extended his worldview to the day-today experiences of the lifeworld with his prolific activities as a novelist, essayist, journalist, sociopolitical commentator, provocateur, and interventionist as a public intellectual.

Mailer blames the intellectual decline of socialism in general and specifically the reification of creative forces of thought and imagination in Stalinism on putting the emphasis conclusively on rationalist element in Marx's philosophical thought at the expense of its conceptual transcendence as mysticism—all that is beyond merely rational intelligibility. Here, one might understand mysticism as openness to the infinite hiddenness of existence or mysteries beyond what our senses ordinary reveal. This openness and the revelations it might make to those whose minds are open to it are what the French phenomenology designates as *disponibilité* or availability to the visibility and comprehension of the invisible mysteries in lived experiences of the arts, politics, economics, religion, and sexuality. Mailer accurately detected the loss of life-energy of ideas, intuition, imagination, and creativity in Stalinism and by extension all authoritarian systems.

J. Michael Lennon quotes Mailer as saying that to his first wife Beatrice (Bea) Silverman "any concept of absolutes or static custom is absurd" (*Norman Mailer: A Double Life*, 44). I tend to think he might have said the same thing about himself. Thus, present to all his ideas were always their opposites. Contradictions in the lifeworld forced Mailer *to think against himself*, as it did for Sartre. They deepened their intellectual interests by against their own dogmatic ideas. For both, it became a modality of finding a way out of stultifying obsessions with constant vexing problem of shoring up what they had already thought and written. So embracing a synthesis of contradictory, conflicting, incompatible new ideas and lived experiences prevented them from being stuck in repetitive ideas and practices; therefore, they remained free to be always on the move as writers and intellectuals and evolve.

On the whole I would propose that one might refer to Mailer not so much as a self-proclaimed and contradictory Marxist-anarchist but rather as a Hegelian dialectician of extreme opposites as the placenta providing nutrient and eliminating waste of his fetal new ideas. For the sake of further clarity, allow me to add that the dialectics of materialism affirms evolution of matter becomes aware of itself through the mediation of human consciousness. In this vision of existence, a certain mode of determinate materiality of all that exist rules supreme. However, Mailer sets forth a hermeneutic of historical dialectic as being open-ended by drawing from what was for him a type of Marxist mysticism again an improbable but interesting Mailerian synthesis. In practice, for Mailer the dialectic of history is applicable to the spheres of economy, politics, sociology, and cultural demystification, but it is human consciousness that effects changes as transcendence rather than preordained historical materialism. Therefore, I would argue, that for Mailer the historical processes were collective human choices, which give his ideas a Sartrean existential framework. Mailer comprehends the necessity of historical change, but it has to fulfill itself through freedom of choice through human acts of creative imagination.

II

CIVILIZATION CONTRA INSTINCTS: MAILER'S "FREUD" (CIRCA MID-1950s)

Freud had no flair for the mystical.

Norman Mailer, "Freud," in *Mind of an Outlaw* (10)

Freud's youth, that is to say, from the age of four, was that of an immigrant, a resident alien. And psychoanalysis is first and foremost a psychology of, and for, immigrants (people who can never quite settle); not a Jewish science, as Freud feared, but an immigrant science for a world in which, for political and economic reasons, there were to be more and more immigrants.

Adam Phillips, *Becoming Freud* (30–31)

In the new Eden (was there already one? I doubt it) there'll be no forbidden tree, All trees trees of life.

Father Ernesto Cardenal, "Cantiga 15;
Nostalgia for Paradise" in *Cosmic Canticle* (139)

**PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FREUD'S STATUS AS A
LOWER-MIDDLE-EUROPEAN JEW IN VIENNA**

The premise of Mailer's brief essay "Freud" is a short but also radical critique of Freudian psychoanalytic rationale of becoming aware of instinctual forces in order to control them through the psychical divisions of conscious ego and unconscious super-ego. This goal would eventually realize itself through the processes of sophisticated sublimation and acculturation, which would safeguard the sum total of human social developments as civilization. Mailer deems the core of Freudian psychoanalytic concept of management of rebellious primal instinctual forces as a remedial measure for neurosis, which would also be tantamount to a betrayal and inevitable surrender to societal conventions at the expense of the libido or life-enhancing primeval energies. He asserts that this psychoanalytic reconciliation with societal norms requires the subjugation of all transgressive instincts to ever-increasing rational restrictions of seeking pleasure and barring the transcendent fulfillment of desires within the realm of lived experiences.

As a modernist writer, Mailer shared the modernism's time-consciousness as future-oriented; that is to say, he was progressive. Surprisingly, there was something deeply atavistic in Mailer's thinking on returning to Darwin's theory of evolution and the role played by sovereign untrammelled instinctual forces in it. He dreamed of bursting energetic dawns, spectacular twilights, and wild dark orgiastic ancient evenings of human history. In this regard, in spite of his modernism one might call Mailer's time-consciousness simultaneously regressive-progressive, which follows his pattern of challenging dialectical integration of opposites.

It is entirely true that Freud did seek to come to grips with the unconscious obsessive-compulsive power of instincts—particularly the sexual instincts, which he designated as libido or Eros. He did so by putting in motion dialogic, associative techniques of analysis to bring about attendant conscious awareness of them. He believed the conscious realization of unconscious instinctual demands would reduce the individual's unmanageable antisocial obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behavior. A new narrative would then emerge and replace the neurotic one. The new narrative would have a new lexicon, syntax, and semantics, maintaining, strengthening, and furthering the development of the individual within the dominant and pervasive values of civilization. Nevertheless, from Mailer's thoroughly non-

compliant viewpoint as an intellectual novelist and essayist, Freud's psychoanalytic position was too compliant and conservative. Mailer writes:

For Freud it was unthinkable not to have a civilization—no matter what price must be paid in individual suffering, in neurosis, in the alienation of man from his instincts, the alternative—a return to barbarism, to the primitive, was simply beyond the cultural shaping of Freud's life. As a lower-middle-class European Jew who rose in bourgeois society, he was not only the mirror but finally the essence of German culture. (*Mind* 9)

French phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur found in Marxist analysis and Freudian psychoanalysis the basis of what he designated as “hermeneutics of suspicion.” Marxist analysis searches for the *true* origin of an individual's characteristics in his or her economic class background. Psychoanalysis does so by exploring the individual's unconscious as the repository of forbidden and consequently suppressed desires. It is of much interest that Mailer chooses to combine the two and apply Marxist analysis as hermeneutic suspicion to the Father of psychoanalysis Sigmund (in German victory, protection) Schlomo (peaceful in Hebrew) Freud (peace in German) himself. As his first, middle and last name suggest, Freud was a *victorious peacemaker*. Mailer, however, essentially sees Freud in his youth as belonging to a lower-middle-class Jewish family, cautiously and dutifully entering and rising in the German bourgeois culture of his time in Vienna. I must confess that I had never seen Freud in this light. Personally, I have never thought of Freud as a timid, adherent soul. To the contrary, as the Father of psychoanalysis, he continuously symbolizes for me a revolutionary thinker and theorist, opening up enormous vistas to the mysteries and vagaries of a dynamic unconscious. The Freudian concept of the unconscious opened the deterministic hegemony of rational consciousness to the *indeterminacy* of the unconscious and the vast terrains of dreams and their interpretations. He did for the psychology of subjective experiences what Albert Einstein did for physics. No matter how one looks at it, it is a maximally revolutionary theoretical adventure. Generation after generation has found a courageous thinker in Freud, who bravely follows the logic of his groundbreaking thought on the controversial domain of the mysterious unconscious and its indirect but forceful effects on our lives.

FREUD AS AN IMMIGRANT IN VIENNESE SOCIETY

Still, after all is said and done, it is of considerable interest to point out that contemporary psychoanalysts—such as Adam Phillips—would agree with Mailer’s perspective on Freud. Nearly seven decades after Mailer’s statements about the fundamental conservative characteristics of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Phillips observes that

Indeed to be a Jew of Freud’s class and aspiration involved these divided allegiances; the all-too identifiable Jew and the Viennese citizen had to coexist. Jewish modernity, the historian Leora Batnitzky writes, involved “the dissolution of the political agency of the corporate Jewish community and the concurrent shift of political agency to the individual Jew who became a citizen of modern nation-state.” Once outside the so-called corporate Jewish community, with its separate, more inward-looking culture, the Jew was a citizen for whom citizenship was radically unfamiliar. This was the threshold that Freud—who was to radically redescribe the whole notion of agency—was living in his twenties. (*Becoming Freud* 57–58)

Phillips shares Mailer’s analysis on an important personal aspect of Freud’s theory and practice of psychoanalysis. In the “Freud” essay, Mailer considers the Freudian psychoanalytic concept of acculturation to pose a grave danger to human instinctive forces, which he asserts to be essential in motivating and invigorating unlimited human imaginative endeavors. He writes, that “Freud was not born to become a respected young neurologist in Viennese medical society; it took the application of his early ambition, the subjugation of a good part of his more rebellious instincts, to acquire the training, the habits, and the manners of a Viennese doctor” (*Mind* 9–10).

The concept of psychoanalytic status quo was not what Mailer was seeking. His creative instincts chose exceptionality over normality and the norm. He believed the instincts invigorate the individual’s audacious lived experiences and essentially enliven the human lifeworld while the status-quo discourages and finally deadens our senilities and sensibilities. Therefore, ego consciousness has to make a prodigious effort to accommodate the rebel’s perilous desires such as uncontrolled lust and violence. It would have to do so with much malleability and tolerance to blunt retribution from a threat-

ened super-ego, which often would cause psychic disequilibrium and neurosis. To a certain extent, that is also the goal of Freudian psychoanalysis, or so I think.

Mailer was aware that the expansion of self-consciousness recognizes and makes a place for instincts would be a relentless psychic necessity. He sought an ego-consciousness that approximated the id, where the instincts reside in the unconscious as desires unfulfilled. Because a desire satisfied is no longer a desire; that is to say, desire is a fundamental lack, in the Lacanian meaning of the word. Thus, the id constitutes unsatisfied and ultimately insatiable desires, which makes itself known and felt as repetition compulsion. Mailer criticizes Freud for his conservatism, even careerism, in spite of Freud's groundbreaking discovery of the unconscious, which determinate reality and the surreptitious role in introducing something akin to advances in quantum theory. Freud's theory of the unconscious subverts our epistemological narrative of the supremacy of consciously perceived reality as determinate and predictable. Yet Mailer fears that Freudian psychoanalysis is an attempt to counteract, or worse, to *neuter* our primal instincts to strengthen further social and cultural controls on individual human psyche. He tells us that Freud's conservative rationalism, ethicism, and conventionalism brought us the "gloomy *ethics* of psychoanalysis" (*Mind* 10, emphasis added). Mailer fears the outcome of such "melancholy ethics" to be the waning of human instinctual dynamism of Eros as libidinal vitality of uninhibited sexual drive, aggression, and violence. He tells us that the outcome of such "war upon instincts which was the progressive rationale of the nineteenth century, the—for so long it seemed victorious—achievements of the Victorian period, was blown beyond recognition in the concentration camps and the atomic bomb" (*Mind* 11).

Mailer concludes that individual or sociocultural attempts to block indomitable instinctual life forces residing in the id do not make them fade into the twilight of the psyche. Just the opposite happens: it makes them to reappear allied with the death drive, often masquerading as the false bloody sunrise of a new day that is essentially an existential tragedy. As such, he believes it does incalculable damage to the human lifeworld. Mailer asks that one comprehend this seemingly incomprehensible concept of the death drive interlinking opposite instincts connected with Eros and Thanatos. Ever the superb dialectician, Mailer suggests a dialectical synthesis in which forces of progressive, violent creation should find equal status in a co-existential

synthesis in Freudian concept of sublimation and acculturation as social cohesion. If this exigent psychic cohabitation can realize itself through courageous freedom of instinctual creativity, an acceptable mixture of creative visions and dreams along with tolerable nightmares will develop. This synthesis will then be the proof of the triumph of plasticity of an all-surpassing Nietzschean human mind. If not, there will be apocalyptic chaos and night, either for a particular individual and a society, or in our atomic age for the human race as whole, ushering in a mindboggling post-human world.

FREUD AND THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

The human subject that Freud will describe in psychoanalysis will be a person with little autonomy, subjected to forces he can for the most part neither control nor understand. A figure traumatized by sociability.

Adam Philips, *Becoming Freud* (30–31)

For Mailer, what infused Freudian psychoanalysis with conservative or reactionary penchants was Freud's attentiveness to the necessity of maintaining the integrity of civilization. For Freud, civilization represented the history of human cooperative social achievements in their totality in any given society. Accordingly, he wished to be an integral and essential part of it. Hence, for Mailer the aim of Freudian psychoanalysis was to tame and finally reconcile in a variety of theoretical methods and practical techniques the insubordinate instinctive thoughts and actions of individuals. But in this reconciliation between neurotic symptoms and strong instinctual impulses, something was lost. From Mailer's viewpoint, psychoanalysis sided with the fragmented societal and cultural norms against the desires of the estranged rebellious, individuals residing within its fold as *aliens* to change their society. The Freudian psychoanalyst as an "alienist," to use the old designation, helps to illuminate the mental state of the alienated, the resident alien as immigrant to come to grips with his or her profound sense of alienation. However, this sense of alterity, a received perception of nonbelonging made one's own does not involve any societal transformation as it does in Marxism. In successful cases, this ostensible feeling of nonbelonging and the desire to fit in somehow and belong finds strategies to work out a practicable compromise problems if not an ultimate and definitive cure.

Freudian psychoanalysis was a serious attempt to find a language that would enable the alienated neurotic individual to enter into a viable conciliatory dialogue with the unconscious his or her other half. In short, psychoanalysis attempted to enable the *immigrant* to live mindfully in the fullness of Zen here-and-now rather than the nostalgia of then-and-there. In the widest signification of being-here-and now, the individual found the promise of repatriation with the seemingly irrecoverable lost country infancy and its irreversible temporality as the past. Psychoanalysis would achieve this resolution by enabling the analysand to regain access to repressed wishes unconscious and instinctual motivations responsible for his or her Otherness in society. At its best, psychoanalysis was a twofold, simultaneous dialogic enterprise: one between the analyst and the analysand and the other the dialogue between the analysand and the weird or eerie language of his or her unconscious. If effective, this twin dialogue would result in establishing a truce between the beleaguered ego, caught as it is in the psychic sphere of joint oppositional forces of superego—as inherited body of conventional morality, and the beleaguered and the unconscious with its instinctual disruptive energies. Freud deemed it necessary to offer us these structural divisions of the psyche as emerging sites of new narratives, whose language would reveal to us the dynamics of our own psyche. Inherently, these endless new narratives would also include the existence and disclosures of enmeshing primal life and death instincts and the necessity of acculturation and sublimation of the instinctual to protect civilization against its destruction.

Nevertheless, Mailer perceived all these foundational structural divisions of the psyche as means of coercive psychical determinism. He pointed out Freud's failure to be a transcendental philosopher, that is, a revolutionary mystic in his psychical concept of alienation as Marx was about the worker's alienation from the product of his or her labor. Mailer wrote, "Mysticism has the nasty faculty of joining one's public and private life, it presents as its ultimate threat the subordination of reason to instinct, even as society rules instinct by reason" (*Mind* 11). Mailer further argues: "Society was sick, Freud could see it, but out of necessity the answer for him was to redefine the nature of man in such a way as to keep society intact and Freud in his study and consulting room" (*Mind* 10).

Mailer's statement might sound harsh and unfair. Just the same, nearly

half a century after his statement, English psychoanalyst Adam Phillips in a long but perceptive sentence points out:

Indeed Freud's writing between 1898 and 1905, as it exposed repressed, forbidden forms of sociability—the buried-alive lives of modern people, the inexorability of their ambitions and their sexuality—created a panic that psychoanalysis, beginning with Freud, could only recover from, ironically, through repressing the discoveries of psychoanalysis itself. It would need something as strong as a putative as a Death Instinct—first mooted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920—and a daemonic repetition compulsion to counter and condemn the extravagant vital energies, the sexual energies Freud was finding in his most disturbed patients. *So much aliveness in modern individuals—and in psychoanalysis itself—required its antidote.* On the one hand there was neurosis, but on the other hand there could be psychoanalysis especially in its overinstitutionalized forms. (*Becoming Freud* 147, emphasis added)

Evidently, Phillips historically situates Freudian psychoanalysis within the desire for law (*halakhah*) that informs Jewish communities in diaspora with its roots in the corpus of Written and Oral civil and religious law inherited from the Written and Oral Torah. Indeed Phillips asserts, “After 1906 it became increasingly clear that psychoanalysis, ironically, was to be a profession more obsessed by enforcing its own rules of theory and practice than by wondering what rules are being used for. In the traditional Jewish way, desire for the law would trump all other desires” (*Becoming Freud* 147-48). Alternatively, as Mailer put it “*pure* psychoanalysis was austere, unrelenting” (10 *Mind*).

III

MAILER AS A PSYCHOLOGICALLY VISCERAL AND APPETITIVE WRITER

If one believes in a dynamic unconscious, as I do, it would be compelling to ask, what was at the core of Mailer's unconscious opposition to Freudian psychoanalysis as being for him intolerably reactionary? I would suggest that Mailer was a *visceral* writer and intellectual. Now this statement might appear contradictory, particularly in relation to Mailer's intellectuality, which

ordinarily refers to a vibrant, rigorous nonvisceral conceptual thinking. Hence, it requires some explanation. Here, I am inclined to draw from the erudite and extremely probing work of neuropsychologists Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull on the brain, the mind, and the connections they make between neurology and subjective lived experience as the basis of Freudian psychoanalysis. I view what they say as informative in what I put forward on Mailer's unconscious reaction to Freudian psychoanalysis.

Solms and Turnbull write, "the operation of viscera is of critical importance for understanding the 'inner world' in the psychological sense too (i.e., the world of subjective experience)" (*The Brain and the Inner World* 28). From this viewpoint, the viscera inextricably unite body and mind, or psyche and soma. This integrative operation is of significance because "it forms the basis of our basic emotions or 'drives' (as Freud called them)" (*The Brain and the Inner World* 28). Thus, from a neuropsychanalytic perspective, the psyche *embodies* itself through an exhaustively multifaceted relationship to the brain as a body organ that is aware of itself.

In the light of the preceding definition of viscera, one might call Mailer a visceral writer. To the extent that he founded his understanding of the inner and outer world in his "gut" reactions, as the colloquial expression has it, the adjective visceral suits Mailer's personality, or so it would seem to me. He was indeed visceral both intellectually as well as creatively. It gave his imaginative vision at once a certain intuitive energy, wholeness, and the openness to unending lived experiences. To put it in more psychoanalytic language, his comprehension of himself, the other, and the enviroing world was *psychosomatic*. Here, by psychosomatic I am not referring to its pejorative designation as a syndrome of psychophysical disorders and ailments. I am using the substantive psychosoma and the adjective psychosomatic to indicate precisely an inseparable, interactive oneness of mind and body in its largest active meaning. It would thus cancel the mind-body dichotomy altogether and endow the body its rightful place as the corporeal expression of our psyche. This unitive concept makes human inner experiences more abundantly whole and entire in their connection with the outer world. Within this framework, the psychosomatic approach delineates primal biological process involving perceptions, emotions, and cognitions and so on. It offers us a sort of expanded de facto visceral biopsychology, in which the biology and physiology of our psyche keeps its transcending structure intact and extends to the materiality of our body.

This unitive psychosomatic or visceral perception constitutes a vast intricacy, because it derives its compulsive vitality from instincts. Solms and Turnbull tell us that the appetitive and seeking type of individuals thrive on this visceral perception. Once again, I would place Mailer high within the combination of internally connected *visceral* and *appetitive* category. Solms and Turnbull call it the “Seeking system” with a “LUST subsystem,” as neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp designates it.

The authors closely associate “SEEKING system” with the terms ‘curiosity,’ ‘interest,’ and “expectancy.” “This system provides arousal and energy that activates our interest in the world around” (*The Brain and the Inner World* 115). They add that the SEEKING system and Lust subsystem also “promote exploratory behavior” (119). They further add, “The Lust subsystem has a longer history as being called a ‘pleasure,’ ‘reward,’ or ‘reinforcement’ system,” which “produce orgasmic feelings” (*The Brain and the Inner World* 119). The authors state, “The SEEKING and LUST subsystems are designed to promote learning, and they motivate us to acquire the skills that are necessary to meet our inner needs in the outside world” (*The Brain and the Inner World* 121). The SEEKING system also motivates violent contact sports such as boxing, football and the martial arts while the Lust subsystem stimulates seeking uninhibited orgasmic pleasure, addiction to alcohol, methamphetamines and other recreational drugs such as heroin, marijuana and so on.

For a considerably long time, I have maintained, pace Freud, that a primal drive for knowledge precedes or at least coincides with sexual drive as lust. Lust organizes a particular and basic corporeal and orgasmic search for knowledge and pleasure as curiosity. Its source lies in the initial infantile desire of getting to know the mother’s body through tactile, visual, aural, olfactory, and gustatory (through breastfeeding) senses. The Bible amply recognizes it as “carnal knowledge,” which as Freud has so admirably shown makes an immense conscious and unconscious epistemology available to us as infantile sensations that affect later stages of our sexuality. It takes groping of the mother’s body to exploring the mysteries of one’s own body in its relation to the other’s body. Carnal knowledge ushers in discovering erotic pleasures that, never totally satisfied, persist. It might also initiate encounters with unexpected mysteries of love that go beyond carnal oneness with the other, which to a twilit awareness of cosmic connection with the universe in its infinity, which delight mystics such as Mailer. The embodied psyche in sexuality in the lifeworld can become a part of a surpassing presence

to the cosmic world that lies beyond discursive knowledge, beloved by the mystics, and sought by Mailer with his mystic tendencies as a modern writer.

Along with Mailer, high on the list of visceral, appetitive writers who fall within SEEKING system and Lust subsystem with a Nietzschean will to power, I would put D. H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Miller, Jim Harrison, and the Francophone Belgian writer Georges Simenon, just to mention a few that readily come to mind. In various extents, they all chose their primal raw instincts of sexuality and violence to fulfill their explosively real and sublimated sexual desires beyond the normative standards of Freudian psychoanalysis. Similar to Mailer, in this regard, in spite of their progressive modernist time-consciousness, they all shared an atavistic desire for the primeval instinctive life. It would provide an antidote to what Mailer tells us “we feel [as] anxiety because we are driven by unconscious impulses which are socially unacceptable” and that we feel dread as “a repetition of infantile helplessness” (*Mind* 12). They all remain faithful to a fundamental pattern of dialectical integration of opposites, which weds the determinacy of the instincts and the progressive indeterminacy of the creative imagination within the liberating framework of the “mind of an outlaw.”

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