

NORMAN MAILER'S RECEPTION OF INHERITED SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS (1950–1960)

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In memory of Robert W. Lewis

[L]iterature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject—through the interaction of author and public.

Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (15)

I. INTRODUCTION

In his first decade as a recognized young novelist and essayist (1950–1960), Norman Mailer inherited multiple cultural worldviews. In retrospect, as a burgeoning novelist, essayist, and literary intellectual, the most consequential influences on him were non-communist Marxism, Neo-Marxist libertarian socialism, Freudianism, and neo-Freudianism, and a variety of phenomenological existential philosophies. Prior to Mailer's appearance on the scene as a novelist, essayist, and intellectual in the 1950s, these dominant theoretical domains of thought had already effected major "paradigm shifts," changing the traditional modes of thought and action. Yet Mailer's own responses to these existing theoretical and philosophical paradigms offered jagged rebellious critiques of them anew rather than a smooth uncritical acceptance of them.

In what follows, I apply a meditative, postmodern retrospective-prospective method to writers' reception of their various modes of sociocultural in-

heritance. I think of it as my adaptation of German literary theoretician Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory, and its concept of "horizons of expectation." The reception theory enables us to develop a new hermeneutics of writers' nascent encounters with their inherited sociocultural world. More specifically, it will provide us with a postmodern interpretive theory to understand Mailer's response to an array of reigning paradigms early in his career as a writer in the 1950s.

II. DIALECTICAL MODES OF RECEIVING SOCIO-CULTURAL INHERITANCE

I hope that my meditations will result in revealing some of Mailer's significant and signifying conceptual acts of acceptance or rejection of his familial, religious, socioeconomic, and cultural hand-me-downs. In his defiant acts of reception, he creates a differential calculus, as it were, between the past as "independent variable" and the present as "dependent adjustable." In other words, it makes a clearing for a nuanced temporal mediation between the diachronic paradigms, historically and sequentially developed, and the synchronic paradigms in progress, to which writers actively contribute.

The conservative writers respect traditions as the sum total of wise and successful past human endeavors. They consider the established sociocultural norms bequeathed upon them as unfringeable, a gift to the present generation as an honest, tried-and-true civilizing legacy. Consequently, the authentic conservative writer enthusiastically chooses the path conforming to time-tested accumulated wisdom of the past.

Conversely, the so-called "liberal" or "progressive" writers, who sincerely trust the desirability and inevitability of change, reject their traditional epistemology. For the progressive writer, there is no "pleasure" (*Lust* in German) in conformity to conventional values. For the progressive, such conformity is the dialectical antithesis of pleasure. It begets "unpleasure" (*Unlust*), to use the Freudian terminology. Consequently, for the progressive writer revaluation of all values as a rebellion against cultural patrimonies becomes an article of faith—intellectually, artistically, politically, and otherwise.

Accordingly, a fundamentally open-ended philosophy of progressive changes concomitantly generates its own hermeneutics and epistemology. As Neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse has put it in a somewhat different context, "It [epistemology] is the essentially human project. If man has learned

to see and know what reality *is*, he will act in accordance with truth. Epistemology is in itself ethics, and ethics is epistemology” (*One-Dimensional Man* 125).

III. MAILER’S RECEPTION OF HIS SOCIOCULTURAL INHERITANCE

In 1919, Paul Valéry began “*La crise de l’esprit*” with the following words ‘We later generations . . . we too know that we are mortal’. We too, earthlings of the twenty-first century who have not been through a world war, and who form the present-day humankind, now know that we *are capable* of self-destruction. And if in the past the possibility of such an extinction of our kind was inconceivable other than as a consequence of God’s anger—of original sin—today there is no longer any religious reference at the origin of this extreme global pessimism.

Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* (9)

And be not conformed to this world [*be nonconformists*] but be ye transformed [*metamorphose yourselves*] by the renewing your mind (Romans 12:2).

Norman O. Brown, *Apocalypse, and/or Metamorphosis* (np)

In the 1950s, Mailer faced the challenge of quintuplet predominant world-views: Anti-communism, Marxism, Non-communist Marxism, Marxist Socialism, Freudianism, Neo-Freudianism, atheistic, and religious existential philosophies. Concurrently, many intellectuals and critics were attempting to create a unified theory or gestalt of these seemingly incompatible styles of thought. My own partial list of them would primarily include the works of Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown in the United States; Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus in France; Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt in Germany; and Martin Buber in Austria (later in Israel).

Mailer’s complex reception of the aggregate of his socioeconomic and cultural heritage is so acerbically nonconformist that it often verges on visceral unconventionality. Perhaps more than anywhere else in his essays, his nonconformist, confrontational predisposition is more fully and trenchantly manifest than in his controversial essay “The White Negro: Superficial Re-

flections on the Hipster.” It appeared in the fall 1957 issue of *Dissent*, a political and cultural review (Mailer served on *Dissent*’s editorial board for more than three decades). The essay is an intense brawling and bruising Neo-Freudian and Marxist critique of the prevalent sociocultural atmosphere of the 1950s in the United States.

In the wake of WWII slaughters on battlefields, through bombings, nuclear or otherwise, and in concentration camps, Mailer detected a more sinister and dangerous internalized conformism. He began “The White Negro,” his 9000-word manifesto of a dissenting intellectual adventurer against “the years of conformity and depression” by stating:

One could hardly maintain the courage to be individual, to speak with one’s own voice, for the years in which one could complacently accept oneself as part of an elite by being a radical were forever gone. A man knew that when he dissented, he gave a note upon his life which could be called in any year of overt crisis. No wonder then that these have been the years of conformity and depression. A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve. The only courage, with rare exceptions, that we have been witness to has been the isolated courage of isolated people. (*Mind of an Outlaw* 43)

In the above passage, Mailer declares himself to be on the side of “the isolated courage of isolated people,” among whom one assumes he includes himself. Courage here becomes synonymous with bravery of the isolated and nonconformist individual who remains undefeated, thus laying the foundation for cultural rebellion. If the rebel is not merely rebelling for the sake of rebellion, he or she will find they have chosen to travel along a hard but adventurous road. Because there are few signs along the way, a sense of unsettling, unfathomable freedom with inescapable responsibilities defines their journey. In that light, “The White Negro” provides Mailer’s political and psycho-philosophical manifesto. It offers a promising emergent ground for applying our retrospective-prospective subcategory of Jesus’s reception theory to Mailer’s first decade as a writer of fiction and a fierce, defiant, groundbreaking essayist.

III. MAILER'S RECEPTION OF MARXISM

Georg Lukács, a prominent proponent of a Marxist theory of art, complained in a programmatic essay "Art and Objective Reality" as late as 1934 that Marxist aesthetics was lagging far behind the general development of Marxist theory. He regretted that Marx had broken off his manuscript without tackling the thorny problem of why he still enjoyed the Greek epic.

Wolfgang Iser, *How to Do Theory* (105)

In "The White Negro," Mailer's approach to Marx's dialectics of materialism, a branch of Aristotelian "eternal materialism," is brief, selective, and unorthodox. One cannot fail noticing that his remarks are highly nuanced, and laudatory. Mailer enthusiastically receives Marxian thought to the extent that he at once ascertains Marx's prodigious utopian imagination to be ethical as well as demonstrating philosophical virtuosity and acute scientific propensity. In a novel way, Mailer interprets Marxist theories as open and responsive to oppositional realities of the human condition, or so I think. At this juncture, Mailer's adherence to dialectics of materialism, at least theoretically, is clear and open. In particular, he appreciates Marx's formulation of socioeconomic conditions for a psychology of imagination and alienation, as does Reich.

Mailer respected the power of the corpus of Marxian thought as a feat of inventive conceptualization, dialectically formulating the magical if daunting journey of primal matter in its long, successive nonstop slog along the evolutionary road to a dazzling stage of consciousness of itself. In spite of his own mystical tendencies and religious views, Mailer had a comprehension of Marxist theory of human consciousness. He detected in Marx's dialectics of materialism an imaginative perspective that ultimately would run the gamut from the evolutionary and revolutionary to the Utopian. Mailer fully understood that in spite of its objective material origin in Marxism, human consciousness has always been and remains by definition subjective. It makes itself known to the individual as the ability to refer to himself/herself in the first person as "I." With its ever-expanding horizon, consciousness as subjectivity endows the human mind with agency. Here, agency denotes a given characteristic of the human mind: its capability to *intend* objects outside itself. As an attribute of the human mind, agency makes possible purposeful,

integrative interactions between the human life world of subjective lived experiences and the objective world it inhabits.

Mailer agreed with Marx in further placing the conscious human being within a more collective historical socioeconomic class-consciousness. After all, one always belongs to a certain class—at least initially, and remains acutely conscious of it. Furthermore, from the deep recesses of class-consciousness a sort of pre-conscious, that is pre-reflective sense of identity surfaces and endures. As Mailer must have vividly grasped, Marx formulates his significant theory of “alienation” from within the perspective established by his materialist dialectics of class-antagonism. With its obsessive intimations of marginalization concurrent with a pervasive mood of non-belonging, dispossession, and estrangement, alienation plays true havoc on the psyche of the alienated. By means of a socioeconomic process, which one might call deracination, alienation makes immigrants of those who live and work where they were born and raised. Mailer no doubt fully understood, because he had such an acute sensitivity for such complexities, this notion of deracination carries a surplus of existential meanings. Each child internalizes being born to parents with their familial culture of race, class origin, education, religion, and politics. Obviously, no child has ever been any time, anywhere in a position to choose such consequential matters at the time of conception or birth, for which just the same he or she ever after will be held essentially responsible. As Reich puts it in his own inimitable way, this time perhaps as an existentialist rather than a Freudo-Marxist:

Stop foaming at the mouth, little man! You are and always will be an immigrant and an emigrant. You immigrated into this world by pure accident and will emigrate from it without fanfare. You screech because you're afraid, mortally afraid. (*Listen, Little Man!* 49)

Now, as we know, Marx argues that the super-haves appropriate the means of production in a given society. That process also signifies they appropriate or misappropriate a society's culture—overtly or covertly. As Michel Foucault, a non-Marxist, has famously stated, “Knowledge is power”; of necessity, the reverse is true too. For every form of power creates its own corresponding knowledge or epistemology. Marx considered all forms of social, cultural, artistic, religious, educative, and political thought and ac-

tion as superstructures. He advanced the basic idea that the superstructures had their roots deep in the fundamental economic structures. He extended institutions within which they occur, such as family, community, and state. In short, what one considers being the overall epistemology of a society for Marx emerges from its economic system.

According to Marx, the only remedy for such socioeconomic injustices will be a redemptive working-class revolution or an “insurrection as resurrection,” to paraphrase Norman O. Brown’s language in a different context (*Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* 86). Such insurrections or rebellions surface from the depth of the economic relationship of human beings and are only subject to change by struggles of the disadvantaged against the excessively advantaged. The account of all of these class struggles comprises the Marxist dialectics of history. Thus, the Marxist revolution would establish a classless society, closely approximating an egalitarian utopia or paradise on earth. It is surpassingly idealized, even deific. In this sense, odd as it might sound, Marxist philosophy would appear to approximate the long prophetic tradition of the Abrahamic religions of the Middle East, their scriptures and their mystical gnostic vision of the invisible.

In “The White Negro,” Mailer unreservedly praises Marx’s major philosophical work *Das Kapital*. It is highly nuanced esteem and praise—properly measured, and equally salient to the aims of this essay. Mailer tells us, “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 tragic wastes are fitted into some gigantic synthesis of human action . . .” (*Mind of an Outlaw* 65).

I cannot assess the extent of Mailer’s knowledge of Marxism as a whole. But, clearly, his appreciation of *Capital* is genuine and knowledgeable. His articulation and appreciation of the essence of Marx’s approach to *doing* philosophy are generous but also based on sound judgment. He has something new to say in an inordinately crowded field of fervent defenders, attackers, and detractors. It partakes of a level of nuance not often seen in Marxist criticism—at least to the extent that I am familiar with it. Mailer goes on to expand on “the epic grandeur of *Das Kapital*,” which would situate it “in an even more godlike 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 of an Outlaw* 65, emphasis added).

Crediting *Capital* with *epic* grandeur and in its “godlike view of human justice and injustice” is high praise. Mailer’s admiration resonates as epiphanic in its unexpected intuitive implications. As a novelist and literary intellectual, Mailer finds the essential meaning of Marxian thought in *Capital* to be inherent in what it partakes of epic, its elements, structures, and its resultant qualities. This reflective or meditative moment in the act of reading intimates hints of revelations and insights as-yet unexplored and unknown. It is a numinous reward for attentive acts of interpretive reading, or the Tao of such reading. These glimpses turn into connotative narrative spaces that only reading as serious hermeneutic and heuristic activities can make known. I would suggest that what Mailer means by the epic grandeur of *Capital* is his own vision of Marx’s *magnum opus*. He intuitively detected in *Capital* something that had previously gone undetected in Marxist studies: considering *Capital* as epic narrative of a series of great historical struggles and heroic characters. As a novelist, Mailer’s first, last, and most consequential choice, he placed the notable power of *Capital* within a much larger realm of epic as the ur-historical-fiction. It situates Marx’s leviathan philosophical work within its largest interpretive context.

Was Mailer then a Marxist through and through? I do not believe so—certainly not in the strict orthodox and doctrinaire meaning of that substantive-adjective as we have come to know it. To me, Mailer appears not to be as interested in Marxist pragmatics or praxis and its consequent bureaucracy. He was simply attentive to Marxian dialectical thought as highly imaginative philosophical discourse. In his essay, “The Homosexual Villain” (1955), Mailer unhesitatingly tells us, “I had been a libertarian socialist for some years, and implicit in all my beliefs had been the idea that society must allow every individual his own road to discovering himself. Libertarian socialism (the first word is as important as the second is) implies inevitably that one have respect for the varieties of human experience” (*Mind of an Outlaw* 17). It is an admirably clear statement, couched in a simple precise language about Mailer’s own sociopolitical direction. It also announces the dawning age of the New Left as a political movement.

From Mailer’s standpoint as a novelist, I believe, the essential quality of *Capital* derived from having the attributes of the Greek epic. Now epic, commonly known as an ancient genre of poetic, oral narrative, with the passage of time became scriptural and handed down to us as such. As a genre, it provides creative accounts of events and legendary characters who nobly par-

ticipate in them as heroes. One needs to pay keen attention to Mailer's jubilant intertwining of the "epic grandeur" of *Capital* as being at the same time a *denotative* philosophical account of socioeconomic history, while possessing the possibility of being read *connotatively*. From that point of view, *Capital* becomes comparable to the imaginative narrative of an epic. The hermeneutics of such reading is veritably immense. For, seen in that light, *Capital* reveals common characteristics with elements of imaginative fiction, making available unlimited interweaved theoretical and practical intricacies they carry.

Mailer demonstrates an acute sensitivity and sensibility to his reading of *Capital* as an authentic philosophical work—which, if the reader chooses, might also be read as a work of imaginative fiction. Mailer's reading of *Capital* enables him to discern a connection between the two spheres commonly thought to be dichotomous: philosophy and fiction. Mailer locates the linkage between the two at the intersection of two different modes of discourse. There is philosophical discourse as an intentional exercise in conscious conceptual reflection. Then there is fictional discourse of lived experiences as they attain to the twin planes of reflection and imagination. The result is a union of ordinarily mono-referential or literal discourse of philosophy and science with the multi-referential or connotative discourse of fiction.

This merger might sound to some readers as very speculative. Yet, speculations *are* ideas, which are a part of our everyday mode of being and having. True, they do not refer to an object; they do not have the *thingness* of what *exists*—as a book does, for example, as opposed to what it contains. Ideas are non-objects a reader brings to the written text of what is *materially nonexistent, except for the reality it carries for the writer and the reader*. Nevertheless, they are *real* in the same sense that all our theories formulated in all modes of human languages such as speech or, say, mathematics are. Of course, I realize ideas often need explications, further amplification, and precision.

In his *Sociology of Marx*, the late French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre writes:

Since the end of nineteenth century, there has been a tendency to view the writing of Marx, and *Capital* especially, in terms of individual sciences; actually, it is only since his day that they have

become specialized in a system of academic compartmentalization we may be sure Marx would have opposed. (*Sociology of Marx* 22)

He further asserts, “He [Marx] explores *a totality in progress of becoming* and in its present stage of development, a totality comprising levels and aspects which are now complementary, now distinct, now contradictory” (22, emphasis added).

From the perspective of Marx’s exploration of “a totality in progress of becoming,” one might theoretically justify an unrestricted hermeneutics of this colossal philosophical treatise as an epic. The epic, too, was and remained a work in progress, constantly transforming itself with the course of time. Reading *Capital* as an ur-historical-narrative opens up an unlimited hermeneutics of this philosophical work. This reading would not be merely desirable, but ultimately it will be unsurpassable. It positions *Capital* in the midst of its philosophical narrative as well as making sense of it as an epical fictional narrative transformed by successive collective memories, imaginative additions, and subtractions as *generational receptions*. It will appreciably help our generational comprehension of Marx’s philosophy as an open totality in the process of realizing itself not only diachronically but synchronically as well rather than merely in the dogmatic and doctrinaire space and time.

With the passage of time, there must have been imaginative changes made to the epic as a genre such as additions, deletions, and embellishments of legendary circumstances and heroic deeds, which rendered it fictive. Therefore, the structures of epic correspond with generative elements of fiction. Allegorical in style, epic begins in *medias res* and requires setting (always on an expansive national scale), characters (protagonists and antagonists), plot(s), point of view, conflict, theme, suspense, resolution, climax, denouement, and so forth. Accordingly, epic and fiction unite on the plane of imagination.

I suspect that this process is the same integrative insight Mailer later extended to his *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel and the Novel as History* (1968), his account of the 1967 march on the Pentagon against the Vietnam War in Washington, D. C. It involves keenly observed characters—intellectuals, writers (with Mailer himself as a character-narrator-novelist), aca-

demics, activists, and students. As a result, it is not surprising that in 1957 Mailer might have perceived Marx's account of unfolding of the four dialectical stages of development of historical materialism based on modes of production as a gigantic imaginative work of fiction. The Asiatic (static), or primitive communism of hunter-gatherer societies, feudalism, and capitalism would make available a sequence of plots for heroic and villainous individuals and masses engaged in them as characters. It would appear plausible to any thoughtful and undogmatic, unideological reader of philosophy and fiction who reads with an open mind to make known a bit of the previously unknown.

I put forward the notion that it is in this specific sense epic as Ur-fiction potentially rises to the status of being to bring into our world hitherto *non-existent* imaginative truths that are "truer than true," as it was for Ernest Hemingway and, I would assert, for Mailer. As Hemingway in an interview remarked on the art of fiction to George Plimpton:

From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality. ("The Art of Fiction" in *Writers at Work* 239)

In the preceding long sentence, Hemingway's ideas expand rapidly and magnify in depth and scope in a simple straightforward language, as he was inclined to do. He defines the art of fiction as solidly rooted in an aggregation of lived experiences but raised to the fifth dimension of imagination at the end of centuries old Euclidean two dimensional space, Cartesian three dimensional coordinates, and Einstein's four dimensional space time. "Things" as the "stuff" of daily existence disclose to us objects through our perceptions as they enter our consciousness. Through our imaginative capabilities, the arts bestow upon this knowledge the lasting alchemical powers of magic, which surpass the finitude that characterizes "being-in-the-world as being a self and being with others," as Heidegger defines it (*Being and Time* 37).

This aggregation of experiential phenomena under the aegis of ever-present unconscious *desire to know* represents an instinctive epistemophilia. In my mind, it precedes infantile sexual instinct formulated by Freud and in time becomes whole and entire with it. Nascent, pre-genital sexuality in its most primal form presents itself as a persistent desire to discover the Other's body. At first it is the body of the mother of infancy the child desires to discover and to know, in everyday visual, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory (in breast-feeding) contacts. The mother's body is not then just another body but constitutes the whole world for the child. Later it becomes the basis of a forbidden knowledge and more often than not becomes unconscious and joins the unknown.

This desire for knowledge makes us undertake seemingly impossible forays into the dim realm of the unconscious, nonknowledge, and the impenetrable darkness of the unknowable. The power of imagination enables this union to exceed its constitutive elements so that it might be able to become godlike and *produces* a new reality as fiction rather than reproduce itself. It will then be "a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive." As such, it shall be sufficient unto itself and shall last as long as human beings inhabit the earth. It fulfills the highest possible mode of Freudian "sublimation" one can imagine.

I would assert then that Mailer's reading of *Capital* as an epic or Ur-fiction interprets philosophical discourse and happily announces the potential marriage of philosophical thought plus creative imagination. Theoretically, it is the harbinger of glad tidings. As such, one might situate Mailer squarely within contemporary interdisciplinary hermeneutics. So I would like to end this section on Mailer's reception of Marxist philosophy with a quotation from Iser. He wrote:

If as I argue, particular use determines the operational nature of fictions I feel it important to consider the need for fictions in a type of discourse different from that of literature in order to contrast fictionality in literature with its changing functions and forms in other realms of human activity. The use of fictions in philosophical discourse provides such a contrast, especially because philosophers' increased awareness of the indispensability of fictions has resulted in a radical reversal in their attitude to-

ward the fictional. (*The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, XV–XVI)

Hence, in “The White Negro” I would place Mailer’s reception of Marxist philosophy as a creative novelist and literary intellectual halfway between Hemingway the novelist and Iser the literary anthropologist and literary critic. As unusual and daunting as bringing together Hemingway and Iser might seem, I find it exceedingly helpful as an exploratory strategy. This proximity helps us to study how one might conflate two heuristic categories of work done in language.

Today, for example, one might choose to read *Jean-Paul Sartre’s Nausea* (*La Nausée*, 1938) and Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* (*L’Étranger*, 1942) either as fiction or philosophical. Some of us who teach or have taught interdisciplinary courses often do this. Much depends on our educational formation and culture of reading. We are fully aware that Sartre and Camus were philosophers, novelists, and playwrights, all at the same time. There is no contradiction in so doing.

For many readers and teachers, including me, such multidimensional readings strengthen, and indeed energize the sense of interpretive primacy in our reading. Now one can hypothesize that the act of interpretive reading gives the reader access to fictions potentially embedded in philosophy. By the same logic, the converse movement is also a possibility for any reader who wishes to pursue it.

In the interstices of “The White Negro” Mailer has left us hints on how we might profitably concurrently receive and perceive a colossal philosophical work such as *Capital* as fiction. More specifically, one might read it as a utopian fiction such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* or Plato’s *Republic*. If such reading would offer its own interpretive, emotional, cerebral epistemology, well then kudos to Marx the philosopher and Mailer the novelist. Reading Marxian philosophy as fiction is no mean task and no paltry contribution to the reader-response theory. Above all, Mailer’s imaginative reading of *Capital* introduces a generational reading that raises it to the status of interpretive art. Following this logic, generally the art of reading philosophical works imaginatively brings the reader of philosophy and literature the unlimited richness of the human mind intuitively at work in the reciprocal acts of writing and reading.

IV. MAILER'S RECEPTION OF REICH'S FREUDO-MARXISM

In the mid-1950s, Mailer was wont to challenge other worldviews by attacking them or transforming them into formulations of his own. In his essays, he made an ensemble of his own interpretations of Marxism, Freudianism, and Reich's Freudo-Marxism. Mailer was also thoroughly conversant with the works of Freudian psychoanalyst and lucid theoretician Robert M. Lindner (1914–1956), with whom he did an unfinished analysis. Lindner wrote noteworthy works such as *Prescription for Rebellion* (1952), *Rebel without a Cause* (1944), *The Fifty-Minute Hour* (1955), and *Must You Conform?* (1956). Lindner's acute psychoanalytic studies dealt with subjects such as psychopathy and sociopathy, matters of fervent interest to Mailer the novelist and essayist. Mailer must have also been aware of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955), which also foreshadows Brown's *Life against Death* (1959) and *Loves Body* (1955). He perceived them as intellectually nonconformist efforts, which deepened his own rebellious sensitivities toward received ideas as unjustifiably predetermined and fixed.

Not surprisingly, Mailer came under the influence of a more unconventional and intransigent version of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism advanced by Reich. Reich's works such as *Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1942), *Character Analysis* (1945), *The Discovery of the Orgone, Volume 1: The Function of the Orgasm* (1948), *The Sexual Revolution* (1956) and others were available to Mailer. The role "orgastic potency" plays in Reichian psychotherapy genuinely fascinated and radicalized Mailer's own rebellious intellectual vision. It became one of his primary modes of encountering and developing a comprehension of everyday life. Reichian ideas provided him with new disputative approaches to the reception of the theoretical culture of his youth as a whole, which was a defining moment in his life as a literary intellectual.

A former student of Freud, Reich was a physician and a practicing if dissident second-generation psychoanalyst. His Freudian colleagues viewed him as a wayward analyst and found his theories to be overly idiosyncratic and unsound. Reich ardently believed in his theory of "orgonomy." For him, orgonomy became the basis of a ubiquitous scientific and bio-energetic emanation of inorganic material origin. For many Freudian psychoanalysts it was a pseudoscientific notion and remains so, approximating the spirit of the alchemical yearnings of centuries past.

Reich's theory of orgonomy resulted in his construction of the Orgone Accumulator—a wooden box, which Reich claimed contributed to health and improved the quality of genital orgasm, which he reasoned was lacking in neurotics. Mailer found the Orgone Accumulator of much interest and used it, as did many of his coevals, including writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow and others.

In his introductory “General Survey” to *The Function of Orgasm*, Reich draws our attention to the distinctive and multifaceted so-called scientific foundation of his undertaking:

The subject of “sexuality” virtually cuts through all scientific fields of research. In the central phenomenon the sexual orgasm, we meet with questions deriving from the field of psychology as well as from that of physiology, from the field of biology no less than that of sociology. Natural science offers hardly another field of research that is so well equipped to exhibit the fundamental unity of everything that lives and to guard against narrow, fragmentizing specialization. (*The Function of Orgasm* 3)

Reich believed he anchored his orgastic theory in the sciences; therefore, it was widely interdisciplinary. In its all-inclusive sense, it aspired to be the epicenter of all matters psychosexual, species-wide. That is to say, all that *is* conscious of itself constitutes a *being*, in contradistinction to all that *exists* as nonconscious inorganic matter, the basic stuff of existence. In this respect, Reich remains within the realm of Marx's dialectical materialism.

Mailer, who had earned a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering sciences from Harvard, must have found Reich's seemingly interdisciplinary scientific approach to genital psychosexuality of considerable interest. Besides, the dialectical movement of Reich's orgastic theory from the specific and particular to the general and the universal manifestly marked Mailer's thinking as an intellectual and his creative work as a writer of fiction and creative nonfiction. In particular, Reich's unconventional ideas accentuated Mailer's unresolved hostility toward Freud and his goal of channeling repressed instinctual forces into creative endeavors rather than allowing them to fulfill themselves without let or hindrance, religious, social, or otherwise.

Mailer considered Freud's psychoanalytic method as regressive and reactionary. Psychoanalysis sought to blunt and to domesticate the wild, in-

domitable life-instincts in order to enhance conformity to society's norms. Mailer believed that Freud's effort to attenuate the pressures of repressed sexuality and violence was a betrayal of free play primal sexual instincts as liberating and anxiety reducing, mainly as orgasmic pleasure. Mailer's essay on Freud begins with the statement:

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. (*Mind of an Outlaw* 9)

Mailer's particular interest in the potentials of the free play of sexual and violent instincts might well be due to the connection he made between them and creative vitality. In "The White Negro," he unhesitatingly connects a highly multifaceted and spontaneously inventive and nuanced creative form of music with orgasm by stating:

For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation, it had the communication of art even where it was watered, perverted, corrupted, and almost killed, it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, "I feel this, and now you do too." (*Mind of an Outlaw* 46)

One may speculate that for Mailer as a novelist, the writing process too might have intimated something of an orgasmic pleasure rather than being a mode of Freudian *sublimation* of defense mechanism against instinctual forces.

For Reich, genital orgasm is then one of the primeval lived experiences, of being present to one another. Heidegger calls this mode of being "*Mitsein*," or "being-in-the-world as-being-with other and the self" (*Being and Time* 37, and 107). It is a primordial mode of "being-in-the-world" (*Being and Time* 37). Arts are also a way of being reciprocally present to one another by the particular medium of a specific art. It is a lived psychosomatic experience, which registers as a known-unknown, as it were, a twilight zone between

conscious intentionality and the unconscious desire and its fulfillment. Along with Reich, Mailer hypothesized that within this generalized notion of orgasmic togetherness resides a primal unifying ontological potency with enormous evolutionary implications. As both instinctual “lust” in English and “*Lust*” or pleasure in German, as in Freud’s, the “pleasure principle” (*Lustprinzip*), orgasmic union as a pleasurable procreative and creative phenomenon becomes then an exceedingly complex and consequential existential encounter between two human beings.

I would go as far as to say that Mailer was disposed to regard the Reichian formulation of genital orgasm as a moment of *pure consciousness*, that is, consciousness being merely conscious of itself as its sole object. Viewed that way, coital consciousness in general is an instantaneous negation of the exterior world, similar to Sartre’s concept of consciousness as nothingness. Mailer had a vision of coital consciousness as the possibility of an evanescent apocalyptic moment of transcendence and release from spacetime reality. This experience intimates a state of momentary oblivion in the very midst of conscious life, a mystical moment of oneness with the universe. It discloses a state of being-one-with-the-other we refer to as love. As Heidegger puts it:

Why is love beyond all measure of other human possibilities so rich and such a sweet burden for the one who has been struck by it? Because we change ourselves into that which we love, and yet remain ourselves. . . . Love transforms gratitude into faithfulness to ourselves and into an unconditional faith in the Other. . . . That the presence of the other breaks into our own life—this is what no feeling can fully encompass. Human fate gives itself to human fate, and it is the task of pure love to keep this self-surrender as vital as on the first day. (*Letters: (1925–1975) Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger* 4–5)

Mystics in all Abrahamic religions of the Middle East cherished this moment of ecstasy as *being-one-with the other*.

V. WHY WAS MAILER MORE RESPONSIVE TO REICHIANISM THAN FREUDIANISM?

As we know, Freud squarely embeds the psychoanalytic session in the realm of empathic, dialogic, and revelatory human dialogue. One human being in

distress narrates an intimate personal story, *speaking his or her mind*, and another sympathetically listens, encourages, and tries to understand and interpret what he or she hears. At its best, this revelation renders conscious the origin of neurotic suffering as repressed pre-genital desires. William Barrett observes that “the etymology of the Greek word for truth, *a-letheia*, means, literally, un-hiddenness, revelation. Truth occurs when what has been hidden is no longer so” (*Irrational Man* 215). Barrett suggests that for Heidegger this dialectic movement from hiddenness to un-hiddenness is mediated by a “revelation-light-language” (*Irrational Man* 215). In common parlance, we often call it a “talking cure.” Some insight akin to Heidegger’s notion of “revelation-light-language” originates in the hidden depths of the unconscious and rises to consciousness through the power of nonjudgmental, empathic human dialogue in psychoanalysis.

Even though Mailer was a passionate language artist, this Freudian lingual therapeutic approach to problems of the psyche did not appeal to him. He deemed it would reduce the analysand to passivity and conformity. To Mailer, the whole process seemed to boil down to the problem of sociability. It simply required adjustment to social norms, promoting quiescence and acquiescence rather than enlightenment and instinctual refusal and rebellion. Additionally, Mailer believed the Freudian theory of redirecting and reinvesting instinctual forces into other more socially accepted activities as “sublimation” too compromising, or worse, a betrayal of instinctual forces. He maintained it would be psychically too much of a compromise and subsequently a betrayal of the libido.

In contrast to Freud, Mailer strongly believed in the Reichian linkup between Marxist theory of socioeconomic justice and the pursuit of potent, unconstrained “orgastic potency” as an antidote to neurotic psychosomatic stress. Reich taught that an unrestricted orgasmic approach to matters psychosomatic was energizing and life enhancing. It safeguarded the indomitability of instinctual, life-preserving forces through orgasmic discharges. A Reichian analytic session centers itself on the psyche as such as on psychosoma, with the accent falling on the *soma* or the body. Reich focuses on attenuating the unconscious causes of physical signs of repressed sexuality. Consequently, his aim was to free and thereby increase what he designated as “bioenergy” contained in the body, which the mind inhabits.

The Reichian therapeutic session often requires undressing for “character analysis.” There is an active analysis of “body armor” to disclose the re-

pressed as certain psychosomatic “character structures.” Reich believed repressed sexuality intimates itself as complex recurrent muscular patterns of behavior. Thus, the Reichian analytical session hinges on unveiling of the semiotics of the embodied emotions as muscular and postural expressions. For Reich, then muscular tensions are correlatives of bottled-up desires of orgasmic genital sexuality. The semiotics of posture, which somatically absorbs active tensions as silent modes of comportment, stance, pattern of behavior, and attitude, seeks to speak forth of the body’s mindfulness of its perceptions, feelings, sensations, and encounters with the Other and the world it inhabits and makes its own.

Now Mailer’s own important dialectical adventures as an intellectual, intertwining Marxism, Freudianism, and Reichianism, made up a tripartite mixture of his own sweeping psychoanalytic interpretations. To place this theoretical zone more centrally within Mailer’s own intellectual contemporaries, one has to place him among Marcuse, Fromm, and Brown on the one hand and Reich on the other. In his early essays, particularly “The White Negro,” Mailer militates for what I think of as an ancestral instinctive sexual revolution in which genital sexuality or lust fulfills itself in uninhibited socio-ethical nonconformity. This is a regressive-progressive vision of the dawn of human appearance on earth. This sexual revolution promises access to Nirvana through repetitive “apocalyptic orgasm.” Perhaps Mailer’s understanding of Reich’s oeuvre derived, at least somewhat, from his being an imaginative novelist who considered “orgonomy” as a manifestation of cosmic energy. Mailer was interested in imaginative science fiction such as Arthur C. Clark’s excellent *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Clark creatively shows how universal chaos is kept at bay within certain fundamental natural structures in an apocalyptic vision of human endeavors. Such creative possibilities might have played a role in his lasting interest in Reichianism as “soft science fiction.”

VI. MAILER’S RECEPTION OF EXISTENTIALISM

Mailer read it [Walter Kaufman’s *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*] from cover to cover in December 1960, and always credited it as one of his most important influences.

J. Michael Lennon to this writer in an email (04/26/16)

There are some who would say that a man [human being] need only obey the accepted moral code of his community. But I do not think any student of anthropology could be content with this answer. Such practices as cannibalism, human sacrifice, and head hunting have died out as a result of moral protest against conventional moral opinion.

Bertrand Russell, *Authority and the Individual* (68)

The essay “The White Negro” provides Mailer with an opportunity to improvise on two challenging problematics of individual life in our time. I choose the verb “improvise” advisedly, using it in its fullest creative sense to impart a serious, highly innovative skilled jazz technique and style that, say, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and perhaps Ornette Coleman practiced. “The White Negro” possesses patterns comparable to the dialectical style of jazz improvisation: diversity within unity; freedom and essential formal boundaries; spontaneity and rhythmic, melodic, and chord progression. This essay develops through intricate surge of repetitions, combinations, and transmutations, all unfolding in mostly long stream-of-consciousness passages. These stylistic improvisational characteristics of “The White Negro” are deliberate as it celebrates and exalts jazz and the jazz musicians as artists whose lives and art coincide to make an authentic mode of *being*—highly instinctive, distinctive, open, artistically adventurous, and thereby courageous. Put differently, the jazz musician makes a Sartrean existential choice: He or she is what he or she does, pure and simple.

Among the core ideas of the essay are the phenomena of conformity and alienation. Externally, there are socioeconomic, cultural, and class distinctions. Thus, there is a weighty sense of alienation as nonbelonging. Internally, there is neurotic alienation, deriving from a psyche riven by instinctual forces and conventional ethics. It manifests itself as a suffering from the lack of a cohesive psychosomatic life. On the one hand, there are the ineradicably powerful compulsive forces of Eros as life instincts. On the other, there is the totalizing strength of internalized dos and don'ts as the sum total of learned socio-ethical mores as inviolable, and Thanatos as death instinct. From this Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, the modern individual remains a divided, troubled being. A tragic battle of discordant forces always rages on in the mind, beyond the likelihood of peace. In our everyday life,

we experience not only the antithetical problematics of Eros vs. Thanatos but also their baffling unholy alliance as a reedy dirge-like blues of the lived experience of alienation from our world and ourselves. As Robert Lindner reminds us:

The plight of modern man is pitiful. Ever since his beginnings he has been seeking knowledge of himself in the conviction that only by knowing the animal his mirror shows him will he escape his fate of extinction and survive to realize a high human destiny. Now with this knowledge in his grasp, he finds it being misunderstood, or conscientiously misapplied. If ever there was a cosmic tragedy, this is it. (*Prescription for Rebellion* 3)

Mailer finds a way out of this aporetic dichotomy between the hegemonic determinism of obsessive-compulsive urges of Eros and Thanatos. He does so through the instrumentality of an emerging, mostly speculative rebel in the mid-1950s American society. As drawn by Mailer, this non-conformist rebel frees himself from all traditional and dogmatic boundaries. Partly as a creature of Mailer's own fundamental inclinations as novelist and his inclinations toward a combination of Marx, Reich, and growing existential theories, the hipster as a rebel par excellence is born. He is a mixture of Mailer's desires, defiant intellectual vision and imagination. Primarily, however, he is a creature of language unfolding in its unlimited creative expanses.

Mailer reminds us of a post-World War II period in the 1950s when

For the first time in civilized history, perhaps for the first time in all of history, we have been forced to live with the suppressed knowledge that the smallest facets of our personality or the most minor projection of our ideas, or indeed the absence of ideas and the absence of personality could mean equally well that we might still be doomed to die. . . . (*Mind of an Outlaw* 42)

Mailer conjures an unthinkable moment in the primeval struggle between Eros and Thanatos that total nuclear annihilation becomes a probability. There is a dreadful intimation everywhere of total obliteration of the organic, the conscious, and a return to the inorganic and nonconscious be-

fore the slow dawning of life on the dark, barren earth. However, according to Mailer, one need not entirely abandon, because it is in the midst of

[T]his bleak scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist—the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State as *l'univers concentrationnaire*, or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled . . . if the fate of twentieth century man is to live with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. In short, whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself.” (*Mind of an Outlaw* 43)

For the hipster, the internalized societal imperatives are the enemy to conquer and render inoperative at any cost, which requires a commensurate courage, which would be enormous. To be an authentic existential hero, the hipster must then appropriate his own death and integrate it in his consciousness as the inevitable temporal finitude. He has to live everyday as if it were the final stage of his *being* on earth. That is what Heidegger refers to as “being-toward-death,” a “potentiality-of-being not-to-be-bypassed” (*Being and Time* 236). One might say the hipster primarily belongs to Heidegger’s school of existential thought. The hipster’s forthright and courageous lived experience of the ubiquitous possibility of death in the midst of life distinguishes him from his antithesis, the conformist, and inauthentic “square.” Courage ennobles Mailer’s mythical hipster whom he admires so and praises so for his nobility as a newly discovered twentieth-century existential hero. One assumes that the hipster would never think that *one dies* someday but, rather, *I shall die*.

From this position, the concurrent existential appropriation of life and death sets one free to pursue anew the search for authentic mysteries of being as acts of un-concealment of the hitherto concealed. By definition, Mailer’s nonconformist hipster is a generational type. The future generations of hip-

sters in every society need to reflect upon their own lived experiences and reevaluate all “societal imperatives” in the light of their new mode of reception as interoperation and critique. Mailer significantly enlarges his notion of the hipster by declaring:

To be an existentialist, one must be able to feel oneself—one must know one’s desires, one’s rages, one’s anguish, one must be aware of the character of one’s frustration and know what would satisfy it. . . . To be a real existentialist (Sartre admittedly to the contrary) one must be religious, one must have one’s sense of the “purpose”. . . . (*Mind of an Outlaw* 46)

Such revaluations involve exceedingly bold undertakings. Mailer recognizes the enormity of these world-changing and world-remaking responsibilities and the courage they require. Nevertheless, he deems it indispensable and encourages it because, as he writes, “in a bad world there is no love nor mercy nor charity nor justice unless a man can keep his courage” (*Mind of an Outlaw* 45). The hipster, therefore, defines himself as the personification of a visceral activist against inherited sociocultural norms. For the hipster these norms serve as the underlying structures of a “bad world.”

Mailer further endows his existentialist hipster with the prototypical characteristics of the anarchist with overall Neo-Marxist or libertarian socialist penchants as well. In his rebellion, the hipster shares affinities with the anarchist, a rebel par excellence. His at least partially fictive characteristics evidence much that the French anarchist philosopher Daniel Guérin (1904–1908) attributes to the anarchist. In his *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (*L'anarchisme: de la doctrine à l'action*), Guérin writes:

Anarchism can be described first and foremost as a visceral revolt. The anarchist is above all a man in revolt. He rejects society as a whole along with its guardians. Max Stirner declared that the anarchist frees himself of all that is sacred, and carries out a vast operation of deconsecration. These “vagabonds of the intellect,” these “bad characters,” “refuse to treat as intangible truths things that give respite and consolation to thousands and instead leap over the barriers of tradition to indulge

without restraint the fantasies of their impudent critique. (*Anarchism* 13)

Further, Guerin adds, “The explosive statements which an anarchist would not disavow were voiced by Balzac through the character Vautrin, a powerful by Balzac incarnation of social protest—half rebel, half criminal” (*Anarchism* 14). Mailer also detects both psychopathy and defiant intelligence in the hipster. He writes, “The unstated essence of Hip, its psychopathic brilliance, quivers with the knowledge that new kinds of victories increase one’s power for new kinds of perception” (*Mind of the Outlaw* 44).

Mailer is still not quite satisfied with this already overdetermined characterization of the hipster. The hipster as anarchist is a Reichian too, Mailer style, which situates him outside of the realm of Freudian psychoanalysis. The hipster is, by definition, beyond the endless emotional clashes of the three spheres of the psyche posited by Freud: the id, ego, and super-ego. He is therefore immune to pressures from the super-ego as internalized social and communal norms of dos and don’ts without any compunction. Nevertheless, Mailer reminds us that

the hipster has shifted the focus of his desire from immediate gratification toward that wider passion for future power which is the mark of civilized man. Yet with an irreducible difference. For Hip is the sophistication of the wise primitive in a giant jungle, and so its appeal is still beyond the civilized man. (*Mind of an Outlaw* 48)

Thus, the hipster is not an obsessive-compulsive psychopath. He just appropriates the energy of such an obsessive-compulsive personality. However, I would point out that the hipster as a “philosophical psychopath” and “wise primitive” advances a visceral primitivism that short-circuits any consciously chosen intellectual predisposition. Consequently, sophisticated or not, his ancestral primitivism diminishes his philosophical proclivities to hedonism. As Friedrich Nietzsche has it, “A man recovers best from his exceptional nature—his intellectuality—by giving his animal instincts a chance” (*Twilight of the Idols* 1).

Additionally, Mailer bestows upon the hipster a Reichian “orgastic” dimension that amplifies his appetitive. The hipster is in perpetual pursuit of orgasmic apocalyptic Nirvana. Mailer states:

At bottom, the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. Orgasm is his therapy—he knows at the seed of his being that good orgasm opens his possibilities and bad orgasm imprisons him. (*Mind of an Outlaw* 53)

Clearly, the hipster’s orgasmic paroxysmal intensities fail to carry a hint of the ecstasy that ideally unites two human beings, beyond their evident disparities. Ideally, “apocalyptic orgasm” should reside in simultaneous fulfillment of desires as raw, corporeal, and visceral as well as magical and sacral union of two beings, usually condemned to existential aloneness. One remembers Robert Jordan and the young Spanish girl Maria in Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, making love in the midst of a country torn apart by a civil war, united as one with each other and with the Earth’s rotation around its own axis and its orbital rotations around the sun. Here the orgasmic coincides with the yearnings for cosmic oneness attributed to love by all the mystic traditions of the Abrahamic religions of the Middle East. Perhaps Mailer might have agreed with designating this uncommon numinous love as Tao of orgasmic union. Such union would be the gnostic principle of the birth of the human race from *nonexistence* to *existence*.

VII. CONCLUSION

After all is said and done, one would have to admit that Mailer as an intellectual had the zeal of a passionate, old-fashioned American pioneer. All his life he actively moved toward new epistemological horizons. Along with the French philosopher and anthropologist Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Mailer might have said, “I have done everything to know what is knowable and I have looked for that which is unformulable in my depths. I myself am in a world I recognize as profoundly inaccessible to me: in all the ties that I thought to bind it with, I still don’t know what I can

conquer, and I remain in a kind of despair" (*The Unfinished System of Non-knowledge* 113).

Consequently, Mailer as a young novelist, essayist, and literary intellectual received his staid, inherited sociocultural legacy by radically, critically assessing it. He strongly challenged the preconceived, expected, and accepted sociocultural and literary norms. He advanced the notion of engaging in sustained, courageous, transgressive limit-experiences with the dark, unfathomable side of human existence. It resulted in a formulation of his determined, exploratory styles of thought and writing, then and later. Mailer was in the grips of an insatiable epistemophilia of prodigious dimensions. Perhaps his true love was the transcendent as-yet-unknown rising to the surface from the dark depths of the mysterious and perhaps the unknowable.

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