

their moans, their baying at the moon, their scents. Odor had much more to do with sex than language—at least until deodorants came on the scene. But before the advent of whiff-deadness, any combination of strong genital odor mixed with perfume was pretty damned aphrodisiacal, yessir, all through every royal court of Europe. The notion that language was developed to facilitate sex couldn't be sillier.

JBM: Or a sense of time developed through menstruation.

NM: There I can see a certain kind of point. Menstruation certainly proved to women, at least, that they were altogether different from men. They had to have a different code.

JBM: Well, they would go off alone when it was happening.

You don't want the smell of blood in the air to make you prey.

NM: Absolutely right. I hadn't thought of that either.

JBM: Good. This other question—do women control men? For one, do you think so?

NM: Completely.

JBM: I'm glad you agree.

NM: Before women's liberation came along, men used to have perhaps 25% or 35% purchase on control in a marriage. The woman had the remaining 65 or 75%. Now with women's liberation, it's 95%.

JBM: Wow!

NM: I could be wrong, maybe it's only 85%.

JBM: Is this why men are forever at a loss in regard to the eternal

[???] dominance of women?

NM: Well, women are closer to the universe. Closer to creation

than we are. So, they have deeper instincts.

JBM: They create life, we destroy life.

NM: Oh, let's not get into that. Women have killed as many men

in subtle ways, for subtle reasons as men have abused and killed

women in more overt fashion.

JBM: I'm not saying one is more vicious than the other. I'm

saying, traditionally, men have gone to war and women have

raised the children. That's changing. Women are going to war and we've seen what happens at Abu Ghraib.

NM: Oh, that poor pregnant girl. . .

JBM: I feel for her—I do.

NM: You do?

JBM: Yes, she was in the wrong place with the wrong guys, feeling the wrong pressures and now she's all alone.

NM: She really was—just think how wild the parties are getting all over America. The key factor at Abu Ghraib was, "Hey, none of you at home are going to believe this until you see our pictures."

And the photograph taking that was not called for—as well as the photos that were called for—after all, they were also using the

photos to blackmail the prisoners. But the security was also delighted to send these photos home to their friends. Just think of the kind of party that's going on back in America under the cover of "We're a good Christian nation."

JBM: The more Christian someone is, the more they have crazy sexual stuff in the closet.

NM: You know, I love this country with all its faults, but one of its huge faults is we're the bullshit kingdom of all time. We've found a way to process bullshit so its aroma is not always apparent.

JBM: What do you think of the gender roles of men and women now that women are expected to raise a family and be successful in the workplace.

NM: For me, any notion that males are superior to females or females superior to males is, I'd say, comparing dogs to cats. In my mind, it's a hopeless argument. Men are so fundamentally different from women.

I still have to say that the desire for power in women that's revealed itself in the last 35 years is not attractive. The power they used to have was vastly more subtle. And vastly more attractive. It used to be fun to realize a woman was smarter than you. In the course of living one's life and learning how to handle

oneself, there were women who developed wonderful subtleties about how to control us. They were like animal handlers if you will. And the animal, even the lion, almost always adores the handler.

Now they're dominating us openly.

JBM: I don't know. I don't think I agree with that. It's changing.

There was the height of political correctness, which bordered on fascism and it was terrifying. But the majority of the women that I know, they want a real man—they don't want a man they can walk all over.

NM: Well, good. I'm 81, and these traumatic experiences occurred to me 30 years ago.

JBM: You were living then at the height of the war. But what's truly encouraging, what's encouraging me now, is we need more women in power, but we need women who do it the way a woman does it, not the way a man would do it if he were a woman—or the way she thinks a man would do it if he were a woman.

NM: Listen, most of the women in power were not that impressive. There was Maggie Thatcher—the Iron Lady. You know, she was effective as a politician—in a certain sense she was more effective as a politician than Ronald Reagan was, her counterpart at that time. She wasn't a very nice person, and if she'd been a male, she would have been thoroughly detested.

JBM: That's what I'm saying. I think she was doing it the way she thought a man would do it if he were a woman. As opposed to someone, say, like Arianna Huffington who is completely a woman and who had this line which has just swept across the Democratic Party of "you don't try to remodel your house while it's on fire." That's not something a man would say.

NM: How is that relevant to what we're talking about?

JBM: Well, we're just now starting to see women getting into power positions who are still allowed to be women. They don't have to pretend to act like a man.

NM: Name a few, would you?

JBM: Arianna Huffington, Hillary Clinton—

NM: Hillary Clinton is a very good example. I met her many years ago, oh, maybe 20, 25 years ago when she was the governor's wife in Arkansas. Probably in '84, 20 years ago. She was immensely intelligent—I happened to sit next to her at dinner—and we had a marvelous conversation. I was impressed with how bright she was, how open, and what a fine mind she had. She's not as interesting today. She a politician today. She's very cautious. Her books are boring. What's that one, "It Takes a Village. . ."—full of cant. The way Maggie Thatcher was full of it. You say what's useful to say, not what you believe. You never speak from the heart; you speak manipulatively. Hillary is always watching

her tongue these days. Totally unspontaneous in exactly the way an average mediocre-to-good, effective politician exercises his spiel.

JBM: But as we said before, she's a politician at a high level—she has no choice.

NM: So why get excited about her as a role model?

JBM: I'm not saying we're there yet. I see people coming up in the ranks. I see Laura Dawn of MoveOn.org who is changing the face of politics. I see Arianna Huffington who is approaching it from a new angle. I mean, politics this year is more exciting than ever before in my lifetime, certainly. People who were never

involved before are going there because it's sexier, it's getting to be more fun.

NM: All right. I can see a time when women are more important politically than they are now, and for better reasons, but that doesn't mean anything much is going to change. In a certain sense, a politician, regardless of gender, is neutered by the process. By the process. A lot of politicians are sexy guys in person because, after all, they're pressing the flesh. All the time. Shake a thousand hands in a day and you're horny by the end of the day. The hands are telling you something. Where's the guy who won't get a hard-on if he's admired by a lot of people? But, nonetheless, politics dehumanizes you—any political leader.

JBM: OK, but. . .

NM: By the way, I don't say this out of sour grapes because when I ran for mayor in that primary back in 1969, I considered it my duty, believe it or not—as most politicians do. I felt God had wanted me to go into politics to save New York. I was a fool, like all the others. And I wasn't nearly as good as I thought I'd be in politics but I was prepared to pay the price. And the price was a serious one in my mind—I knew I would never write again. I knew I would use up my soul in ways that were unhappy for me. But I felt: I haven't been a good guy. I haven't been that good a guy all these years; I want to save my soul. Now this was crude and simplistic thinking and I turned out to be an ineffectual

politician. But I was ready to bite the bullet. I knew it wasn't going to be good for my soul, my personality, or my best ideas, to become a politician. I'd be used up by it. It's a tremendously difficult business. You know, we respect basketball players because they have such power, running up and down the court all day. Well, very few humans can become good politicians because of the amount of work you have to do every day. The responsibilities. The number of distasteful things you have to do in every session are immense. So I don't sneer at politicians. I think they're entitled to the same kind of respect we give reasonably good athletes. Stamina is impressive. But I don't have any illusions that in becoming a politician you become a nobler

person—very rarely does that happen. The only reason it does happen once in a while is because it's an impossible Creation if you can't have exceptions to every single rule.

JBM: You once wrote somewhere: "As many people die from an excess of timidity as from bravery. Nobody ever mentions that." Do you care to give an explanation of courage?

NM: I have one ready-made. Courage can only be measured by the ground from which you start. An example—I've used it before and will use again—is an old lady who is ill in every joint, terribly arthritic, nonetheless has to get someplace—she has a reason to cross a difficult street and she doesn't quite understand the lights. Nonetheless she feels an inner imperative to cross that street. And

she manages to get across even though she's terrified. I would call that courage. I would say it is analogous to the case of a well-trained Marine, a good kid, who gets into combat, sees his buddies wounded, a good friend killed, goes through hell. He gets to the point where he expects he will die. Until that moment, you can't really speak of his courage. He's been trained to be brave—you can motivate people to be brave. But when you get to that crux in combat where you say, "It's not worth it. I'm scared shitless, I can't go on, I want to quit, I don't care about my buddies, fuck it all, I want to quit"—and then another side of you takes over and says, "You will go on, whether you die or not, you will go on"—that's courage.

Courage, in a very real sense, can be meaningless if it comes too easily. If you're a marvelous athlete in a very easy war, and very good in your martial skills, you may feel panic, but you're trained to be brave.

So I would say courage is transcendence. Whatever our level of competence in hairy activities, if we go beyond ourselves, transcend ourselves, that's courage.

That's why I say timidity kills. Kills more people than bravery because every time one's timid, one's pulling back creative impulses in oneself, denying them, one's denting the ego. And as an ego contracts out of shame, illness begins. This is my opinion.

JBM: So is courage a virtue?

NM: Absolutely a virtue! Make it the virtue. I would go so far as

to say that it's very hard to feel love if you're full of shame. We

can feel love for someone else when we have gained respect for

ourselves—it's why we have this endless obsession with courage.

Where is the man who can ignore it? It's analogous to a woman

who'll wear no make-up, no jewelry, won't comb her hair because

she hates women who are elegant, feels those women are phony. "I

want to be seen as my natural self." Yet that woman can never

sneer at elegance in full confidence. A part of her feels that there's

something wrong with her. She doesn't want to get the utmost out

of herself. By the same token, some men sneer at bravery, say it's

overrated, and that it breeds all sorts of trouble. Of course it does.

A macho brute is a macho brute. But not even a saint can sneer at
bravery with a completely clear and open heart. Not even a saint.

JBM: You know, one of the outcomes of living in such an
organized society where everything is taken care of—men don't go
out and kill their food and bring it back—there's a complicity,
almost a sense of deliberate forgetting that when it all comes down
to it, ultimately we're fucking animals. And we'll bite each other
and fight each other if our own is attacked. And I don't know if
this is true of everybody, but 95% of the time when I meet another
man, under it all is that sense of "Can I take you or can you take
me?" And it's usually a kind of fun, [smiling question and query,]

but it's always there. And something like 9/11 reminds us all on a national level that tomorrow, like that [snaps fingers] all of this societal bullshit could be gone and we're back to grunting and biting. That's important. I think it's one of the major differences between the mentality of a man in the millennium and the mentality of a man in the '90s when political correctness was at its height and the sensitive pony-tailed guy was getting laid more than he should.

NM: Well, I think you've a serious situation when the sensitive—or over-sensitive—pony-tailed guy is getting laid more than the macho brute.

JBM: I don't know that he was getting laid more. No, he was just getting laid more than he should for too little.

NM: Oh, you're a bigot.

JBM: I've got my prejudices.

NM: You've got your father.

JBM: In Freud's essay, *The Uncanny*, he contends that the strongest instances of the uncanny involve "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive, or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate." We live in an age where such distinctions become even less clear. This is indeed frightening. We're overmatched by our technology. Our ability to comprehend is exceeded by the ability to construct and fabricate.

You have spoken of the inanimate—that which cannot be animated. Increasingly, it seems, we are overcome by this uncanniness. Is there more of this to come in our future?

NM: I say absolutely yes, a great deal more. So long as technology expands and expands, we're going to have more and more uneasiness. I remember back in I think it was '69, I was down at NASA, south of Houston, covering the first moonshot, Apollo 11. In the book I wrote about it, there was a chapter called "The Psychology of Machines" which discusses the immense amount of attention these guys gave to glitches. It truly worried them—there was something so spooky about glitches. They had the best technology available, and yet the most inexplicable little

malfunctions would occur. It obsessed them. The real question, I decided, even though they wouldn't admit it to themselves, was "Do machines have a psychology?" Do things go wrong because the machines have temperaments?

JBM: Are we talking about a psychology or a soul?

NM: Look, you're beyond me on that one. I was asking if there was an inner life in the machine that we were not in touch with.

You rarely find a person now who has a computer who doesn't feel their new companion has a personality. Or, cars—everyone feels his car has its own presence. There is a case where the uncanny doesn't scare us, it pleases us almost.

JBM: You know, whenever I hook my computer up to the internet, she reacts very poorly and I feel it's the equivalent of putting 10,000 dicks in out of the blue and she's saying, "Hey, I just want yours. What is this?" and she doesn't work as well. My car is different, but if I let somebody else drive who isn't as in love with it, it doesn't respond as well.

NM: I think Freud [cannot get] put his finger on the nature of the uncanny. Part of what is so depressing about modern technology is the way it cuts off our senses. One of the things that's so awful about plastic—and I've been fulminating against plastic—most unsuccessfully—for the last 30, 40 years, is plastic is not uncanny. It's just there, inert. It's very hard to conceive of any kind of soul

or spirit inhabiting the stuff because it doesn't come out of nature.

Any object that does—even a wooden cane—has a touch of

personality. But plastic doesn't. I've always felt it is the

handmaiden to technology. Why do people love technology? It

gives you more power than you'd have without the technology but

you pay a serious price for it. You're a little more inert in some of

you finer sensibilities.

JBM: Where is our technology leading us? Because a car is

technology but it wasn't until recently that there was plastic all

over a car.

NM: As they make plastic stronger, and more analogous to

steel—which they will—so, in turn, cars will be made entirely of

plastic finally because economically speaking, it offers more profit. But I'm going to leave this.

NM: I'm going to leave this. To my mind, the mediocrities have taken over the world under the banner of technology, corporate vision, the purveyance of democracy to all countries of the world, whether they're ready for it, or capable of it at this point, but we tell them in effect, "Fuck you, you're going to end up a democracy whether you like it or not," which turns democracy into a farce.

Because democracy is a grace. Any true democracy is sensitive, it's perishable, and we're in danger right now of losing our democracy right here. The people who are running the world now, very badly in many places, have the feeling that successfully

controlled direction is the only answer and of course, my feeling is exactly the opposite. Global capitalism does not speak of a free market but of a controlled ideology. It is alien to the creative possibilities that have not yet been tapped in people who've never had a chance to be creative, who work and die without creative moments in their lives. Some [???] hope, I think, is buried in their gene stream. When talented people emerge from no sophisticated cultural backgrounds, I see them as the product of ten generations of frustration from people who wanted to be more than their lives gave them. Such an artist is now receiving the bounty that was packed into the gene stream of his or her forbears. This premise also works in reverse with people who are evil. Restrained evils,

the withheld evils extended over many generations can end up by producing a monster of a dictator.

JBM: There's an argument that our technology is stunting our evolution. Were we not spending so much time going out into the computer, focusing on—the TV, what have you—more people would have evolved to a higher psychic level. Instead, we're developing a technology where—every day we get closer to having one device that will be your phone and your email, your this, your that, your internet access, a little device you carry with you and you'll program your likes and dislikes into it—it'll be sending out a signal and as you pass a stranger on the street—say you both like

to watch Star Trek, a little bell will go off on both, and it'll tell you what your compatibility is. Why are we doing this?

NM: Because of a deep fear. We've lost the dubious but nonetheless intense consolations of religion. Formal, organized religion introduced many perversities but it also offered notions that gave people hope. If you were a good enough person, you'd enter heaven. By now, because religion truly stood in the way of the development of capitalism and technology, corporate capitalism, that is even more—but if a man's running a small business, he's living by his wits. Whereas people enter corporations so they don't have to live by their smarts and instincts. Only a few people have to take responsibility. The

corporation can be a relatively benign organization, compared to worse ones, but it is subtly, yet completely in my mind, totalitarian. And this is spreading everywhere. People want to control the world because they're in terror that otherwise we are going to blow it all up. My feeling is if the corporations take over the world, it will blow apart. It just doesn't suit human nature.

JBM: Have they not taken over the world already?

NM: Not completely. Not completely. There are still corners and avenues, games and places.

JBM: There's an underground. . .

NM: That underground has to go a long way before I will take it seriously.

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