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TRANSCRIPTION OF AUDIOTAPE FOR: DOTSON RADER

PROJECT: NORMAN MAILER INTERVIEW
PROVINCETOWN, July 9, 2002
DATE TRANSCRIBED: July 12, 2002
JOB #: 1 of 3
TAPE #: 1
SIDE(S): A/B
LENGTH: 46/47 minutes
FILE NAME: RAD0711A

*The last tenor
fifteen pages
can be used
for C.I.F.F.
(many ideas
could be stated.)*

7/27/02

*Very
last 15
pages.
Put it in
a file
Possible
work
to
come*

*(about
my religious
ideas)*

INTERVIEWER: This is Dotson Rader. Provincetown, Massachusetts, Tuesday, July 9, 2002. This is an interview with Norman Mailer at his home in Provincetown for The London Times. He's just finished writing his new book called, The Spooky Art, which is about the craft of writing. The book will be published on January 31st of this year – of next year, rather. Which is Norman Mailer's 80th birthday. Anyway, it's a nice sunny day, it's about 80 degrees, it's balmy, and we're going to be sitting downstairs in his living room overlooking the water.

The thing about interviews that always makes me nervous is if something happens to the tape.

NORMAN MAILER: Is there too much draft in here? I can turn off that fan.

INTERVIEWER: No, I'm fine. But what body of water are we on here?

NORMAN MAILER: This is – well, the main body is the Massachusetts Bay.

INTERVIEWER: Right out here?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. Which is salt water. See, the ocean – look out the window and I'll draw it for you. You see the very tip of the lighthouse, it's almost due south?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: All right, that curves around like this, all the way back, and then goes all the way over towards Boston. A spiral.

INTERVIEWER: North.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, but Boston – this way it's due south.

INTERVIEWER: We're facing south here?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. 'Cause the thing hooks around, and we're here. It's very hard to hold direction here. For example, you'd think Boston's out that way, wouldn't you?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: Boston's that way.

INTERVIEWER: No, that doesn't – okay.

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] Because we're on a spiral and you lose all sense of direction.

INTERVIEWER: I just want to see if this is picking up. [CHECKS TAPE RECORDER] I just want to tell you what happened to me. On September 11th – I was talking to John last night about where he was when it happened. And I was remembering where I was. And I was supposed to go have lunch with Garth Brooks of all people.

NORMAN MAILER: Who?

INTERVIEWER: Garth Brooks, who's a country-western singer. And so I woke up around nine I guess in the morning, late, and I picked up the phone to call him, to make sure that everything was straight – and the phone didn't work. And I thought it was odd.

NORMAN MAILER: Where were you?

INTERVIEWER: I was at home on East 85th Street. And I thought maybe I hadn't paid the bill or something, right? So I got dressed and went downstairs. And I live four blocks from Gracie Mansion. None of the payphones on the street worked. And there was an oddness in people, 'cause people were sort of wandering around kind of lost. I mean it was a very strange sense. And I started walking downtown – it was a warm, sunny, almost hot day. And I started walking downtown – this is the part... We were supposed to have lunch at 57th and Park, and I was walking down Third Avenue, and when I got about, I'd say, 64th Street, I started noticing this huge cloud at the end of Manhattan in the sky, which I thought was odd. I didn't know what it was. And looking down Third Avenue, as far as I could see, Norman, was this – it was like a flood of people, a wave of people, most of them white shirts – men

in white shirts. And they were the office workers from Wall Street. And this mass of people in absolute silence were walking up the island, and turning – it was like a parade – and turning at 57th Street, and moving over towards the 59th Street Bridge to cross over out of the island. And I thought, I wonder if Jesus has come again.

NORMAN MAILER: [LAUGHS]

INTERVIEWER: I'm serious. 'Cause they were in white – I thought it was the second coming, and Jesus was calling his saints home, and I'm being left here. Nobody told me, right? That was my initial feeling.

NORMAN MAILER: Wouldn't that be it if Jesus had come and everybody went over to Queens?

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: That about expresses my pessimism concerning cosmic matters.

INTERVIEWER: But where were you, how'd you find out about it, and what was your initial...? I'm just trying to set the scene here.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, I don't recall exactly. I remember turning on the TV because somebody had already seen it on the TV. In the house here – I was up here.

INTERVIEWER: You were up here.

them. And so there was a feeling that the country could take care of everything. And now suddenly this symbol of America's capitalism, of the great growth of America's capitalism in the 90's had been destroyed. And 3 thousand people – at the time we thought it was 7 thousand people – had been killed. And so that created, I think, an identity crisis.

I'm been fascinated with identity crises, 'cause when I was young I had one myself. Which was I went from being a young, unknown, rather nice young Brooklyn boy to being a celebrity overnight. And was totally unequipped for it, and had an identity crisis. As I said over time, people are almost tired of hearing me say it, it was as if there was somebody named Norman Mailer, and to meet him people had to meet me first.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS] That's a great way of putting it.

NORMAN MAILER: And that's a good definition of an identity crisis. All right, so...

INTERVIEWER: I want to check this one more time. [CHECKS TAPE RECORDER]

NORMAN MAILER: We wouldn't want to do all this and then have no record of it.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you, with regards to the World Trade Center, and the attack on the World Trade Center, I think it's interesting that they chose that.

NORMAN MAILER: What?

INTERVIEWER: That they chose the World Trade Center.

NORMAN MAILER: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And how much had to do with the bad architecture of it – but in terms of the World Trade Center, just a parenthetical. In 1993, the building was already attacked. It was attacked also by Muslim terrorists. Why – how – you called it the symbol of American capitalism. If the symbol of American capitalism could be once attacked, how is it possible that it could've been attacked again?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, let's get into that later. But, in fact, the first attack, while it did damage, did not seize the American imagination. Now, the American imagination is almost – when you start talking about America, one of the problems always when you're talking about America is the country – there are times when the country can almost be seen as a creature. In other words, it reacts with a unanimity that's staggering, that you don't find in other countries. Especially in another country as large, as diffuse, as contradictory, with as many odd and disassociated elements as the United States. It's absolutely incredible the way occasionally the entire country acts, as I say, like a creature. It has a response. The response is definite.

That did not happen with the earlier attack. People were shocked, but finally they caught the people who did it, almost immediately if I recall. And while there was a lot of damage done and some people were killed, it was not a catastrophe. This dwarfed nature. When the buildings went down – when the entire nation by then saw those buildings crumbling, when they saw bodies flying through the air – 'cause they couldn't stand the flames, and so they just

– there was a sense that in some funny way we had it coming.

NORMAN MAILER: What?

INTERVIEWER: The first attack.

NORMAN MAILER: We got it coming?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, in the sense, well, they're arrogant, you know, so what?

NORMAN MAILER: I don't get that. I don't follow you there.

INTERVIEWER: Let me put it this way. One thing I don't want to talk about now, but what I want to lay the groundwork for is later on, when we talk about Europe – is the difference in response in terms of the embracing of the American misfortune by, say, the British as opposed to the French. And I want to try to make sense...

NORMAN MAILER: Well, let's wait until we get there. Though I think we have to be very careful to stay on one line.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, sorry.

NORMAN MAILER: We're going to cover so much ground today, that I don't want to start to anticipate. Also, it'll make it easy to put it together.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Sorry.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

NORMAN MAILER: So, that's another profound shock. Then what you have is the peculiar business that we have a President who was not elected by majority vote, and who gives every evidence when he's speaking on his own that he cannot bear any question that takes longer than 10 seconds to answer. The only thing that saves him is the he keeps changing his mind every week, the 10 second answer. So it's like a roulette. Sometimes he hits the right number, and often he doesn't. All right, so there's this – that normally you'd have a President who would become a laughing stock very quickly. But in this case because of the identity crisis – who are we as Americans? What are we? Why are we not loved? All of those questions, all of the smugness, all the complacency, all that sense in America that it's just the greatest country that ever lived and it's fabulous is bypassed. What I mean is – not bypassed. What's the word I want? All that is a tremendous jolt. Then there's the following jolts – let me just be clear on this.

First the Twin Towers, September 11th. And then if we go over this year that followed, the other great shocks – the Enron and...

INTERVIEWER: Right. But you also had the anthrax.

NORMAN MAILER: But those are smaller. Those are things we can live with.

INTERVIEWER: What I'm doing is agreeing with your point. There's a whole series of things that Americans just took for granted as being secure.

the rocket programs when those astronauts go up, the stuff they eat is as close to plastic as you can get food to be.

The point that I want to emphasize here is, yes, technology says over and over and over, give up some pleasure and you'll get a considerable amount of power.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: All right. What was the point of departure for that?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, we were talking about the identity crisis among Americans in America. And you brought that, and what you brought up – you were talking about the whole series of insecurities that 9-11 had commenced, that had begun with 9-11, and which we're still involved in this process. The distrust of one institution after another. And standing over all this is a man who may not have legally been elected, or Constitutionally elected as President, who speaks in sound bites. But they're sound bites that work.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, yeah. They're buttons.

INTERVIEWER: And that's where you got off on the debasement of language, and then the debasement of American culture – the dumbing down of America.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, but there was a point I wanted to make and I've lost it, damn it. Maybe I'll come back to it. Let me go back at it this way.

INTERVIEWER: In what sense? I mean I don't think America...

NORMAN MAILER: In what sense? I'll go through it. Women – the huge freedom given to women in American culture is seen as an outrage to Islam – to Muslims.

INTERVIEWER: But it's true...

NORMAN MAILER: The licentiousness of American TV. I use that word the way the Ema might speak of it. He would call it licentious. We look at it and we sort of enjoy it. But, no, no, no, they find it licentious in the extreme. They feel that everything that Islam stands for is going to be eroded and destroyed by the American culture, by the culture of the West.

INTERVIEWER: All right, I understand what you're saying. All right, let me put it this way. We've had – if you want to use the term cultural imperialism when you think about America.

NORMAN MAILER: I call it cultural invasion, rather than imperialism.

INTERVIEWER: All right, cultural invasion.

NORMAN MAILER: Whatever.

INTERVIEWER: But it's been around a long time. The British in the 18th and 19th Century all over the world colonized, and when they were – Central Africa or Southern African, when they were colonized, what would they do? They would impose their institutions, they'd impose their law, their courts,

INTERVIEWER: I don't want to argue Islam with you, except to say, unlike Christianity, Islam was a warrior's religion. It was founded by warriors. Desert battles going on...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] No more than any other society at the time. In other words, they fought in the name of necessity, as very often many, many people fought in those days. Look, I don't want to get into a position where I'm defending Islam, any more than...

INTERVIEWER: No, I don't want to put you in...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] I just want to say that part of the -- there's no understanding of Islam. Until one's right there to recognize that for people who believe in Islam, for Muslims who are truly devote, this is the only religion. This is an extraordinarily powerful religion. And this is what gives their life...

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGINNING OF SIDE B]

NORMAN MAILER: What matters is that you are in a direct relation to God.

INTERVIEWER: That's very similar to Christianity.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. Well, it's an offshoot of Christianity. I mean Mohammad was conversant with the Old Testament, the New Testament, with all of that. He built the Koran on it to a certain extent. He invokes it often in the Koran. But the only point I want to make is...

INTERVIEWER: We were talking about why we're hated.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. Well, their feeling is that the most meaningful single experience in their life was being violated by the Westerners.

INTERVIEWER: Which is what?

NORMAN MAILER: Their Islamic culture.

INTERVIEWER: Their relationship with God – that we're violating it?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. To them they feel the kind of outrage toward us that, let's say, a good Catholic would feel if the altar were violated. If a black mass were performed in a church.

INTERVIEWER: But if that's true, if that's what the motivation is about, then there's no fixing it.

is why they hate us – I want to read a quote to you. And this is something I find very troubling.

[TAPE STOPS/STARTS]

INTERVIEWER: A month after 9-11, I went to Los Angeles, and then I went to London, and then I went to Paris. In London the British embraced me. I felt like I was in Kansas City. I mean there was incredible identity and sympathy for what had happened to America. I go to Paris, where I'm with friends of mine who are French – there's no sympathy. And the attitude seems to be one, it's our fault. We had it coming.

Now, wait a minute, I want to read a quote for you. This is a quote that was made by Tony Blair's wife, Sherry Blair, in regard to society bombing, which is what the World Trade Center was.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: She says, "As long as young people feel they have got no hope but to blow themselves up, you are never going to make progress," end of quote.

NORMAN MAILER: Never going to make progress?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. The idea being that somehow it's our fault that the Muslims don't have any hope. Somehow we're responsible...

NORMAN MAILER: Well, I think you're extending her remark.

INTERVIEWER: I am extending her remark. That's the point I wanted you to – is to what degree are we...? I mean we're hated, but to what degree – you don't ask to be hated, but to what degree are we complicit in the causes of that hatred? I don't know if you understand...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] You're giving me a no-win business.

INTERVIEWER: Let me put it this way. The way you present the problem – technology, as opposed to people who want to go back. And I said there's no fix then for it.

NORMAN MAILER: No what?

INTERVIEWER: No fix for it. There's no way to fix it.

NORMAN MAILER: Like so many Americans, you really have this notion that there's got to be a fix for everything. Sometimes there are problems that are not solvable. Did you ever hear of tragedy?

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES] Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: The thing is that part of the American – Look, America's an exceptional country. And I don't like being in a position of always belaboring it. But on the other hand, it's so big, and so powerful, and so vain, and so capable of doing marvelous things, that I get angry when I see it being less than it can be. You know, in other words, to me the country is less fabulous than it was 50 years ago. Now you say that's due to my age.

You get sour as you get older. But I don't feel sour.

INTERVIEWER: I agree with you.

NORMAN MAILER: But in terms of just beauty alone, the country was much more beautiful. The cities, the slums in the cities had more flavor, and more character, and more vivacity than they have now with that urban housing. If you traveled on the railroad it was incredible. Or you drove across the country, it was exciting. Now you're on superhighways, you don't see the country any longer.

I don't want to just formulate on this, but what I'm getting at is – there's a distinction lost. Which is when you say, is it America's fault, that assumes it's the fault of all of us. That assumes that we all have the power to change America. We don't. We don't. We're a democracy that is fundamentally run by an oligarchy. It's a democracy that retains many of the essential elements of democracy, and has lost many of the essential elements. For example, nobody ever said that a democracy is a place where the richest people in the country earn a thousand times more than the poorest people.

INTERVIEWER: I think it's actually 4 thousand.

NORMAN MAILER: 4 thousand, all right. Quantity changes quality. When one man is ten times richer – when the richest man is ten times richer than the poorest man, or even 50 times richer than the poorest man, it's not hard to conceive of a reasonably decent society. When you get to the point where it's – what is it, 4 thousand to one?

the invasion of Afghanistan in a year, which we consulted with none of our allies about. Right?

NORMAN MAILER: I don't even want to get into that, 'cause I don't know enough about it.

INTERVIEWER: The point I'm trying to make is they continually – since 9-11, the Europeans have been continually complaining about the fact that we don't consult with them. And by consult I think they mean ask their permission. And that we bully them. And that we act like imperialists. And that we're arrogant. What I'm asking you is, is that true?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, it's got a great deal of truth in it.

INTERVIEWER: You could do a little defense of us. [CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: No, I want some of your dialogue in this piece.
[CHUCKLES] Look, what I start with all the time – let me go far away from it and I'll come back.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: We had a little parade in Provincetown the other day, the Fourth of July. And a rather nice looking man – he looked to me like a young liberal lawyer. A pleasant fellow with glasses, might've been Ivy League. And he came up to me and smiled and handed me a small flag, small American flag. And I looked at him and shook my head no.

forever. And that makes it profoundly obsessive.

INTERVIEWER: Would you use the word evil there?

NORMAN MAILER: Evil, how?

INTERVIEWER: That terrorism is evil?

NORMAN MAILER: In that sense – well, I have a funny definition of evil. To me there's a great difference between being evil and being wicked. I don't use the words interchangeably at all. People who are wicked are always raising the ante without knowing quite what they're doing. Most of us are wicked to a good degree. Most of us who are game players or adventurous any way at all are wicked, 'cause we're raising the ante all the time without knowing what the results might be. We're mischievous, if you will.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

NORMAN MAILER: Evil is having a pretty good idea what you're going to do, and the damage you're going to do, and then proceeding to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Evil is to do – evil is to consciously seek to do harm.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. Yeah, but to also have an intimate sense of the harm you're going to do.

INTERVIEWER: You're aware of the fact it's wrong – that you're doing wrong to others who are innocent. You're aware of it. And you go ahead and

would only change its... Right? These things wouldn't happen, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Not so.

INTERVIEWER: Wait. All right, just let me make the point. Then I look at what's going on between India and the Muslim terrorists in Kashmir. What's going on with Muslim terrorists in the Philippines, what's going on in Indonesia, what's going on in China, what went on in Chechnya, what's going on in Bosnia – none of which have anything to do with America, right?

So, this is basically my questions, regardless of what you were saying about Islam and about the nature of terrorism. I quite agree with you.

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] You think Islam has a special purchase (?) on terrorism?

INTERVIEWER: I think what we are facing, Norman, is in a real sense, in a slightly different sense, is a clash of civilizations. In the sense that what we're dealing with is a clash between a cult of death, which is what this is – 'cause wherever these people are they bring...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] Wait a minute. Cult of death... You're going too far in one way. For every Muslim who believes in your cult of death – I don't know what the numbers are, 100 or a thousand don't. It's just that people who are ready to sacrifice their lives form a very special group – they don't need big numbers.

INTERVIEWER: But millions cheer them in the streets.

NORMAN MAILER: Oh, it's very easy to cheer.

INTERVIEWER: Millions cheer them in the streets.

NORMAN MAILER: Listen, I can cheer athletes who score winning touchdowns, I don't know the first thing about them. In other words, I'm cheering for an idea. It's one thing to cheer for an idea, it's another to shed your own blood for the idea. There's a huge gulf between the two.

INTERVIEWER: Terrorism. It seems to me what is different here, not just in degree but in kind, as opposed to, say, other state – 'cause this is all a form of state terrorism. These groups are abetted by and protected by states.

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] All right, but it's very complicated. I'm not going to argue the point.

INTERVIEWER: All right. My point being – take the most egregious example of terrorism, Hitler, right? Hitler –

NORMAN MAILER: But that was totally different. That was much worse.

INTERVIEWER: But my point is even with Hitler, the horrors of the Holocaust – he did his best to keep it secret. There was still an element of shame involved in this, in terms of keeping the rest of the world from knowing about it. These people go to the top of their minarets on their TVs and they celebrate it to the world. That's what I'm trying to say. There doesn't seem to be any restraint, internal, external on this kind of terror. So what do we do about it? It's a big question.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, not everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Well, no, but remember the '64 campaign? '64-'65 and the flag waving going on in Vietnam.

NORMAN MAILER: I remember writing about it – those huge portraits of Lyndon Johnson. There was a sort of banana republic dictatorship air to that '64 convention.

INTERVIEWER: And any kind of criticism of the war policy was [OVERLAPPING] by the President and the democratic party as being treason – treasonous, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I have the same feeling here.

NORMAN MAILER: Oh, it's more so now, I think. If anything, more so.

INTERVIEWER: Now, listen, I'm going to stop now.

[END OF TAPE]

Thank you.

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TRANSCRIPTION OF AUDIOTAPE FOR: DOTSON RADER

PROJECT:	NORMAN MAILER INTERVIEW PROVINCETOWN, 7-9-02
DATE TRANSCRIBED:	July 13, 2002
JOB #:	2 of 3
TAPE #:	2
SIDE(S):	A/B
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INTERVIEWER: Tape 2 of 3 of interview with Norman Mailer by Dotson Rader, Provincetown, Massachusetts, Tuesday, July 9th, 2002.

[TAPE STOPS/STARTS]

INTERVIEWER: Tony Blair has come under a lot of criticism at home in England, and particularly from the left of his own party, as being too supportive of the United States. His rushing over here – I mean I found it deeply moving – but his rushing over here when the President gave his first speech to Congress, right after 9-11. The Queen having the “Star Spangled Banner” played a week later at Buckingham Palace, all these sort of things. That the British forces were the only ones to go into Afghanistan with us. I mean all the way he’s been in lockstep with the President. The criticism is that he’s been a toady, and that he should distance himself.

So, in other words, the question is, why are the British – we talked about it at

the beginning of the interview – why do the British, both politically and emotionally, react to American distress so differently than the Continentals, or even the Canadians? That's the question.

NORMAN MAILER: There are superficial answers I can give you. One of them is that the British are closer to terrorism than France. France did have the Algerians way back, but the British had a much more difficult situation for them in a funny way – which was Palestine back after the Second World War. And then the whole business in Ireland that went on for decades and decades, for half a century or more.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORMAN MAILER: And if you remember, the British used to get very bitter about terrorism. Much more bitter than the French anyway. I remember there was a great deal of anti-Semitism in England about the time of the [UNINTEL] and the Hidona (?) used to kill British soldiers?

INTERVIEWER: Is that the Stern gang?

NORMAN MAILER: The Stern gang and the [UNINTEL] yeah. That was like a tradition there. In fact, the resurgence of a certain amount of anti-Semitism in Britain can be traced back to those roots that the British soldiers were being killed by Jews, by Jewish terrorists way back then, back around 1950.

Then especially with the Irish it got very intense. I remember being in England [UNINTEL] anti-Irish feeling against Irish Catholics. It was very strong in Britain. So they do feel for terrorism. And my feelings about terrorism, my hating terrorism because of what it does in terms of taking away

the dignity of one's own death, I think is also very deep in the Brits.

INTERVIEWER: In the Brits?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. So I think that was one element. And, of course, the common language is a profound [UNINTEL] – there's no getting around it. If you live with the English language you love it. And the English have more of a right to enjoy that language than we do. And they do. And so, when people who speak their language are injured, they feel close to it. I think these may be – I don't say these are the answers, I think these are some of the answers. I offer them as some of the answers. I don't pretend to understand it totally.

INTERVIEWER: What I also sense about the British is they have a kind of proprietary feeling about us. It's almost like...

NORMAN MAILER: Still.

INTERVIEWER: Still.

NORMAN MAILER: What my kid brother has done sort of thing. Who could believe it?

INTERVIEWER: I don't criticize my own. They have a sense that when the outside world hits us, they're not going to join in with everybody else in jumping on us.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, and don't forget, there is almost a final bond, which is that if push came to shove, the two countries would probably meld –

years over a million in Algeria, which they did. The French have a very selective memory, and that's what pisses me off.

NORMAN MAILER: Listen, we're here to talk about 9-11.

INTERVIEWER: [OVERLAPPING] Oh, I'm sorry.

NORMAN MAILER: And you got a hair up your ass about the French. Having just come back from Paris and enjoyed a week there...

INTERVIEWER: [OVERLAPPING] We want to talk about your religious...

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, but there's something else you wanted to get into first.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what we want to talk about is whether America was moving into a pre-fascistic state.

NORMAN MAILER: That I'd rather talk about first. You know, if I were to go back and read my interviews over 50 years I'd be embarrassed. Because of this intense feeling I have about the fragility of democracy, I've been predicting near totalitarianism or totalitarianism for America for a good many years now. And I've been wrong every time. And by now I've gotten – I made a remark about ten years ago saying that I was happier now than I used to be, because having a profoundly pessimistic nature, and discovering I was wrong a lot of the time, it's gotten easier over the years.

But in a funny way – and here I go again – I'm concerned about the nearness of a quasi-totalitarian condition in America. They speak of pre-cancerous

values. And those ten years –

INTERVIEWER: That's a very radical idea.

NORMAN MAILER: Those ten years have done a lot of damage to America in terms of the character logical fiber of the country. We're not as nice a place as we used to be 20, and 30, and 40 years ago.

INTERVIEWER: What you're talking about – those are the Bill Clinton years.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm not an unbridled champion of Bill Clinton. In fact, one of the things I've always found least attractive about Tony Blair was his toadyish attitude toward Bill Clinton. You know, if you're going to look for a big brother, don't look for Bill.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS] What do you take –

NORMAN MAILER: I mean if you want to look for a very attractive, exciting, immensely selfish big brother, then go to Bill.

INTERVIEWER: Why did – and I'm asking you as someone who knows a great deal about this – about the agency – I'm talking about the CIA. Why did the FBI and the CIA fail so badly on this?

NORMAN MAILER: Oh, I made a remark one day after 9-11. Somebody called me from Sweden and said, why did they fail? And I made a remark. The remark was smart ass to a degree, but nonetheless, thinking back on it, I'm not ashamed of the remark. I said, well, you know, we Americans are

very bad at foreign languages.

INTERVIEWER: At foreign languages?

NORMAN MAILER: And it's true. It's as simple as that. And also the CIA in particular, in the FBI got very bureaucratic for a variety of reasons. The FBI I think was always bureaucratic. First under Hoover's imprimatur, and then later under more liberal notions of how to behave. But, in fact, they were very restricted. Hanson, for example, the Russian spy, always fumed about how handcuffed the FBI was. That they couldn't do anything.

INTERVIEWER: The spy did?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. Well, he had a double agent...

INTERVIEWER: [OVERLAPPING] No, no, I know.

NORMAN MAILER: And when he was an FBI man he was an FBI man.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: But the thing is that the CIA in particular began to discover – ambitious people in the CIA began to discover that intelligence was not the place to go if you wanted to have a good career. The place to go was the sort of bureaucracy in the CIA. And depend on technology. Don't depend on human (?). Depend on – what's the other one called? Sigant? (?) Signal intelligence, or whatever. In other words, become more like the NSA. And less like the old OSS. You had to move away from the OSS toward the NSA. Do it through intelligence, machines, and bureaucracy. And so they record

short. Where was the development of the Arab languages among the young who came into the CIA? So, it's very hard to be an effective spy if you don't speak the language.

INTERVIEWER: But that goes back, again, to a remark you made this morning in regard to America's faith in technology. And the [UNINTEL] between technology – the progress of technology in terms of finding the answers, giving us the answers, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of – talking about the police state. You made a statement that you thought – we were talking about the Department of Homeland Security. And about 144 agencies in the federal government all dealing in one way or another with security, that was spread all over the government.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: For the first time in our history we're all going to be combined under one person. And so for the first time in our history, we have in place the bureaucratic police mechanism to control the entire country, which we've never had before on a federal level.

NORMAN MAILER: The mechanism is now in place.

INTERVIEWER: Right. You said, I think George Bush would be very comfortable with that.

NORMAN MAILER: He's quite comfortable with that.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what did you mean by that?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, what are his gifts? His gifts are, one, he's fairly good looking. Not outrageously good looking, but good looking enough so that the average American woman and man can find him attractive. That's his number one gift. The Argentines found Juan Peron quite attractive.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: To each his own. Mussolini... Hitler – you'd have to explain it to the Germans. But there is this notion, number one, that if you are attractive to your people, physically attractive, then that's your strength. Your weakness is if you have to contend with sharp argument that looks to unhorse you – infantrymen who come at you with raised pikes and they're trying to get you off the horse. What do you do? Get rid of the infantrymen, get rid of the pike men. Just horses. I'm just babbling here, but okay. So, there is that element.

The other element is that he's very, very good at prepared speeches, George Bush. He studied enunciated, articulation, emphasis, stress, and all the qualities you need for speech, provided it's written in front of him, or ideally on a prompter, and he's gone through it a few times so he can read it. And he's a fraternity President, essentially.

INTERVIEWER: But he's very good at that. You said about him that he's a bit of a psychopath.

NORMAN MAILER: When did I say that? Where?

INTERVIEWER: I'll give you the...

NORMAN MAILER: I'm not sure he is one of those.

INTERVIEWER: I'll give you the quote.

NORMAN MAILER: And when did I say it?

INTERVIEWER: You said this in February. From Amsterdam. This is a quote. This is after 9-11. "George rose to the moment. He's a bit of a psychopath, and he gave a great speech." Then you went on to say, "That's something psychopaths are good at."

NORMAN MAILER: Yes, they have a very good sense of the present. I won't retract the remark. I said he's a bit of a psychopath. Mind you, I'm a bit of a psychopath, too. I, too, rise to the moment, and I get into a lot of trouble for doing it.

INTERVIEWER: You were making a political statement. You weren't making a clinical analysis here of the man – you were making a political statement, right?

NORMAN MAILER: What I'm getting at – I won't retract the remark –

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's what I was giving you the opportunity to do.

NORMAN MAILER: No, no. He's a bit of a psychopath, he's not a

[UNINTEL] psychopath.

INTERVIEWER: That's what you said.

NORMAN MAILER: But what I'm getting at is many of us have a bit of the psychopath in us. The way I define a psychopath is their sense of the present is much more intense than the past or the future. See, I once wanted to write a book called, The Saint and the Psychopath, 'cause I think that's also true of saints.

INTERVIEWER: The Saint as a Psychopath?

NORMAN MAILER: The Saint and the Psychopath. I did the book on Gary Gilmore before I started it. I thought I was going to call it that. But then the book got too interesting and too large, and the title no longer applied. But in that sense, I don't consider psychopath – it's good to have a bit of the psychopath in you. A bit. So that's not to put him down. Bill Clinton had a bit of the psychopath in him. Give me a better explanation for his troubles.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: Ronald Reagan had a good deal of the psychopath in him. Absolutely, absolutely. It's very hard to become President without having a bit of it. Jimmy Carter, who's a wonderful, decent man, suffered in his Presidency terribly 'cause he didn't have enough of the psychopath in him.

INTERVIEWER: I don't want to go down the list of Presidents, but part of Jimmy Carter's problem – and we're talking about people we all know – is that

whether you like him or not, Rice, Powell, very bright people with very strong ideas. And not necessarily all in agreement. And when they start arguing around him, he's got an ear for which one is speaking the most truth in a given moment as far as he's concerned. 'Cause he can hear the – what's the word I'm looking for? He can hear the hint of the inauthentic in a seasoned expert's voice. This is my guess. I'm speaking as a novelist now.

INTERVIEWER: No, I think you're right.

NORMAN MAILER: But if I ever write about him as a novelist, that's what I would do. He could tell who's bullshitting today. That's one of the reasons he changes his mind all the time. 'Cause what happens is different experts have different days. Experts have days when they're better than they are on other days. And so on a given day he listens to Expert A, and goes that voice sounds the best. And three days later, Expert D sounds better. And so he listens to Expert D on the fourth day, and to Expert F on the seventh day, and so forth and so on. And so he's always changing his policies.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I agree with you...

NORMAN MAILER: I'm saying this as a speculation, mind you. There are many other forces at play. But insofar as he affects decision – 'cause there's a lot of stuff that goes on without him – but so far as he affects decisions, I think they come from the fact that he's got a very good bullshit detector.

INTERVIEWER: I agree with you on that. I agree with you when you said – I have the quote – that he rose – you have to give him the fact that he rose to the occasion. And he surprised all of us.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And in a sense this very ambiguous election or contested election, through 9-11 he found legitimacy as a President.

NORMAN MAILER: It gave him legitimacy. It granted it to him.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORMAN MAILER: He didn't earn it. He's a very lucky man. That has to be said. That absolutely has to be said. And he depends on his luck I would expect.

INTERVIEWER: His father wasn't lucky.

NORMAN MAILER: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: But he is a lucky man. One of the things I have – then I'll just drop it – but it interests me about Bush because I don't think – unlike his father, George – and we both have spent time with both of these men – he has no personal emotional investment in the decisions he makes. And it's a very kind of America patrician quality, characteristic.

NORMAN MAILER: I think you may be too patrician in that his father certainly has a patrician quality, his mother has one. I think he has the quality of a fraternity president. He's no more patrician than that. He didn't want to have that patrician quality. I mean if you want to be a patrician in your manner you don't go to Texas. You stay in the best parts of Maine.

INTERVIEWER: No, he ran as far as he could get.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. He wanted to be one of the people to a certain extent. And he's got that good fraternity president CEO, I'm a regular guy style.

INTERVIEWER: And men like him.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: He's a man whose close friends are all men. Men like being around him. He's easy company. He's very...

NORMAN MAILER: He probably might even be fun – who knows? I can guarantee you that I'm never going to know. [CHUCKLES] At all. Close up.

INTERVIEWER: Let's get onto the...

NORMAN MAILER: So where were we? Here's the point I wanted to make. We were talking about the possibility of totalitarianism.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

NORMAN MAILER: In a bad situation where values are crumbling, and the only value that remains is patriotism, patriotism becomes the accessory, the accomplice, the handmaiden to totalitarianism.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: You see? Because what's going on? We all know that the intensity of religion is less in America in every other way. In other words, there's no religious organization in America except perhaps for some of the evangelist groups. ~~That's~~ That's been in growing strength over the last 20 years. Catholicism took a great many hits before the latest debacle. The Baptists – you would know much more about it than I would, but it seems to me they're less strong than they used to be. Is that true?

INTERVIEWER: Where the growth is in American religion is among fundamentalists and charismatic Protestant groups.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And particularly, oddly enough, those groups are growing fastest among American immigrant groups.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. But fundamentalism by its nature is very close to totalitarianism anyway.

INTERVIEWER: It's closed system of belief.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. It's contradictory to democratic notions.

INTERVIEWER: Like fundamental Islam or fundamental Judaism.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. But the more democratic religions have been suffering.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, they're losing members. All the mainline Protestant

very simple strong ideas, and they're plenty fed up, they're pissed off. The right wing of America's in an ongoing control rage.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, they are.

NORMAN MAILER: And they're going to want to take over. I, for instance, don't believe at all in any conspiracy theories about 9-11. 20 years ago I might've, but not now. Because as a novelist I've come to learn in the course of writing things – did you read my book on the CIA? [OVERLAPPING] -- for a plot to succeed, a complicated plot. And I also know enough about political figures to know that nobody at the stature of a high cabinet official or President is ever going to go in for plots like that. 'Cause everything is shattered for them if it fails. They might want something like that – they might think secretly in their dreams, boy, this was good for us, but they would never admit it to themselves, let alone carry out a plot.

But, nonetheless, if you're looking at it objectively speaking, 9-11 was a huge boon (?) to the right wing.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, huge. And to the military.

NORMAN MAILER: And to the military.

INTERVIEWER: It suddenly gave them a mission again.

NORMAN MAILER: And to the security organizations.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

there's something about the Russians and the Americans that's compatible.

INTERVIEWER: I like the Russians.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, the point is that they, like us, are occupying more territory than possibly they deserve. [CHUCKLES]

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES] Russia strikes me in a funny way as a very kind of American country. Just from my brief time there – I felt very much at home there.

NORMAN MAILER: Freebooters do well in Russia.

INTERVIEWER: Just a couple of statements that you made, if you can comment on them. One was the idea that you had that – which we talked about earlier – the war on terrorism... And, by the way, is it a war or is it a police action? I mean are we dealing with a bunch of gang thugs or...?

NORMAN MAILER: It's not a war, it's a police action. And part of the difficulty is that it is the most perfect war a country like ours can have, 'cause nobody's bothered by it. But we have noble Americans dying for us. Not that many, which is also very nice, but we can feel virtuous about a war without having to suffer for it. That's an ideal condition. That's like that time when Hemmingway talked about how in Pamplona you'd have the two houses – one would be with his wife and family, and the other would be with his nine mistresses on nine floors.

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: And he would go back and forth from house to house and get [UNINTEL]...

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: So we have all the advantages of war, including calling a police action a war, with very few of the liabilities, other than the future taxes we'll have to pay for this one.

INTERVIEWER: Another thing we were talking about earlier – it's sort of a point – if you'd just put a little focus on, which is – you said that we may be involved with a cancer for which there is no cure. And you were talking about the top – I can give you the quote, but you were just saying that the top people – by which I think you meant the military – their fear. You were talking about the –

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] -- government, too, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That their fear is that we may be involved in something that isn't soluble, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Yes, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: If you can just reflect on that a moment. I was astonished by that. That's the most depressing thing you've said.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, it depends on the pervasiveness of terrorism. 'Cause if the terrorism is very large, I don't see – there's no real way to protect yourself against it. In other words, from the point of view of the military – if I

INTERVIEWER: I think there's around six.

NORMAN MAILER: Six million Jews – or Palestinians and Jews?

INTERVIEWER: No, no, there are about – Israel itself is about 6 million citizens, of whom a million and a half are Arab Israelis. Or 900 thousand are Arab Israelis, the rest are Jews.

NORMAN MAILER: So 5 million Jews.

INTERVIEWER: And in the West Bank and the Gaza there's little under 2 million Palestinians. But there's nearly 4 million Palestinians who are outside – who are dispersed.

NORMAN MAILER: But in any event, what the Israelis are doing is they've learned to live with terrorism. They hate it, at its worse it can leave them half demented for a few days. They've learned to live with it, because finally terrorism – the chance of terrorism killing any given individual at any given moment is very small. But the fear that comes out of terrorism can wreck an economy.

INTERVIEWER: No question about it. But it seems to me, Norman, you're contradicting yourself now. Because you were saying that in America the great fear is that we're moving into a police state because of these few acts of terror.

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] I didn't say the great fear of the country – it's my great fear.

INTERVIEWER: That America's moving that way. But the other thing you're saying, well, Israel's lived with this for 20 years and they haven't moved. They're a functioning democracy.

NORMAN MAILER: But they have a totally different inner core. Totally different. First of all, they are the remnants of the Holocaust – a big part of Israel. And the original pioneers were there at the beginning of the 20th Century, who lived with the Arabs in relative peace, who built their kibbutzes, who were ideologues, they were Zionists. That's one part of the poor. They're equal to American pioneers of the 19th Century.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORMAN MAILER: Then you have all the people who came over from the Holocaust. And then you have the second, third, and fourth generations of those people. And they have always lived under the gun. Whereas in America, the one thing that's wonderful about this country for immigrants who come here – they say there's such freedom here, you don't live under the gun, you see? So you can't compare the two countries in any way at all. In other words, behavior would be totally different in the two countries.

INTERVIEWER: Except that Americans identify very strongly with Israel. Americans emotionally identify with Israel...

NORMAN MAILER: Some Americans, not all.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think – speak to this point if you would for a second – which is that one of the things – I don't mean to hit France a lot, but let's just say Europe in general. I have been astonished since 9-11 about how openly expressed anti-Semitism has become in Europe. It begins by saying,

well, one of the reasons that America — why they're kidding us is because we are supporting Israel and its attack on Palestinians, blah-blah-blah. And basically if we'll just abandon the Israelis, i.e., the Jews, it'll stop. Which means to me what they're saying is —

NORMAN MAILER: I don't think it's true for a moment.

INTERVIEWER: No, I know. But the argument being that if you don't stop they're going to make the cost of protecting the Jews so high, at one point or another you're going to be unwilling to pay it. Or you won't be able to pay it and you're going to have to abandon the Jews.

NORMAN MAILER: It's very hard to do that. Because —

INTERVIEWER: I don't sense that in America. I have no feeling in America of any rise of anti-Semitism or any —

NORMAN MAILER: No, I don't feel anything particularly here that way. And I don't know enough about the subject to really discuss it in detail and say anything new. But I do think that it is to the interest of the Arab nations, obviously, to have Israel as the great villain. And although I am not — you know, I'm Jewish bone and blood, but I'm not a patriotic Jew in the sense of Israel right or wrong, my Israel. I don't have those feelings.

But what I do think is that at the end of the holocaust the real example of how crumby the people are at the top of each Arab nation is they could've said, here's a little piece of land — let these people have it. It's not going to hurt us. We could even use them. And they didn't. They made them immediately the enemy. They'd always felt a certain link to Hitler. And they're ugly, ugly

people at the top of these Arab nations.

INTERVIEWER: Still are.

NORMAN MAILER: Really ugly. And, therefore, I find it very hard to feel for the Palestinians, 'cause I feel the other Arab nations are using the Palestinians and despise them. In other words, I've heard people say – in other words, it's been reported, I don't know if it's true or not – reported that certain high Arab officials talking to – let me get it absolutely right now... In effect what they were saying is, we're very happy that the Israelis have a Palestinian problem, 'cause if they didn't have it we would have it. You see, to a certain extent the Palestinians because of their unique history are perhaps less assignable than other Arab enclaves. And for one thing, they're not even all Islamic by far. They're a very difficult mixture for countries like Saudi Arabia to deal with directly.

So they have this wonderful ploy where they use the Palestinians as their excuse to hate Israel, and to consider Israel the enemy. Where, in fact, they look upon Israel as their safeguard against the Palestinians, who would be very, very difficult to handle if Israel wasn't there. Now, this is a point of view, and as I say, I don't pretend to be an expert on these matters. But when I heard it, it made a kind of sense to me.

INTERVIEWER: I don't have much respect for the Palestinians. May I tell you why? After – during and after World War Two in Europe, in that period of time, a period of ten years –

NORMAN MAILER: 20 years.

INTERVIEWER: From '39 to '49.

NORMAN MAILER: '39 was when the war started, it ended in '45.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And then after the war, that ten year period – you had the greatest movement of – involuntary movement of populations in the history of the world, right? After World War Two, you had 20-some million displaced Europeans. A lot of them were driven out by the Soviets. Who had no citizenship, no land, no money. 15 years later, they're integrated into European life, they change their citizenship, a lot of their children are speaking different languages, blah-blah-blah. They're not living 50 years later in, quote-unquote, "refugee camps" on the borders of deserts, which is the way the Palestinians... And I think to myself – I look at these people, and they're well educated, and I think to myself, what kind of people would subject four generations of their children to this kind of squalor?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, I can't answer that.

INTERVIEWER: That's my point.

NORMAN MAILER: It's a powerful point, but I don't have enough knowledge to answer it.

INTERVIEWER: To get back just to one thing you wanted to touch on, Norman, which was your religious suppositions.

NORMAN MAILER: All right. You see, I wouldn't call them religious beliefs so much as the closest religious speculations that I'm capable of on

what the nature of divinity might be.

INTERVIEWER: Of divinity?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. Obviously, you can do no more than speculate. And most people get into terrible trouble to even begin to think about it. There's a wonderful Jewish story about a very devout Jewish rabbi. It comes from Martin Luther's tales on Hassidim, who says, "God, I pray to you everyday. I've been devoted to you, I love you, I adore you, I prayed to you for 40-50 years. Won't you reveal yourself to me?" So the story goes, and God then revealed himself to the rabbi. And the rabbi crawled under the bed and cried out, "Oh, God, please do not reveal yourself to me."

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: Wonderful story. [CHUCKLES] So with the instinctive [UNINTEL] of my blood -- nonetheless, what characterizes the Jewish temperament is that you shouldn't do it, then you do it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: So I poke into my own logic to try to come up with some notion of what it might all be about. Because what I see is all these religions -- the major religions of the world -- all believe in an all powerful God. One God, all powerful, all good. And everything we know about existence gives us the logical syllogism, if God is all good then he cannot be all powerful. And if God is all powerful then he cannot be all good.

Now, the finest minds of Christendom, and I'm sure of Islam and of the Jews

have wrestled with this dilemma for 2 thousand years and more, and they come up with extraordinary answers, which always depend finally on the fact that God is not knowable.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORMAN MAILER: There's never been an answer. Didn't [UNINTEL] rely on that. That faith is what you must depend on – not knowledge.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

NORMAN MAILER: But I have just always worked on this other assumption that –

INTERVIEWER: So you've got the key to the garden.

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] God, whether male or female, or both, is a great artist.

INTERVIEWER: Great artist?

NORMAN MAILER: Great artist, yes. A creator. We all take it for granted – the creator. And had a fabulous notion among the gods out there – in this sense you can call me a paganist and I don't care – wanted to create this particular universe, this solar system, if you will, and ran into huge difficulties with the upper organization.

INTERVIEWER: With which?

NORMAN MAILER: The upper organization, who said, you can have a partner. Who's the partner? Satan.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: If this does nothing else, it helps to explain our fascination with the Mafia. All right, so almost from the word go, the two of them have been having this enormous war –

INTERVIEWER: God and Satan?

NORMAN MAILER: 'Cause the devil also sees himself or herself, or themselves, as a creator. It's a war between two artists. And absolutely a dedicated war. And then we get into a further complication, which is it's very important to God that human beings have free will. And discover the universe for themselves. And there we are as humans, suffused with elements of God and the devil in ourselves – all of us just reek of good and evil. We're drenched in God and evil that come from God and the devil. And we've gotten so creative ourselves as human beings that we've created our own good and evil as well. So you could say that it's a triangle of forces now, in which humans – [UNINTEL] human is to liberate himself or herself from God and the devil. How else explain all this excitement about cloning, and stem cells, and the idea, as I said earlier today, that the final aim of technology is to create our own human being, nicely made of plastic. All right. As I see it, at any moment of existence there is this triangular war going on.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, man, Satan, and God?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. And by man, of course, I mean men and women, obviously. And so to try to understand anything that's going on you

of what you're saying fits into traditional Judaic, but also, more importantly, Christian apocryphal teachings about the end of the world, the end of the time, right? Which is now – You know what the best selling book was last year?

NORMAN MAILER: No.

INTERVIEWER: The best selling book was the seventh volume of the Left Behind Series, which is all about Israel, the battle of Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ. It's the number one selling novel in the country.

NORMAN MAILER: What's the title.

INTERVIEWER: The Remnant. The point I want to make is, part of what you're saying is part of what makes this book popular, which is that people are

—

NORMAN MAILER: They're looking for a pattern.

INTERVIEWER: They're looking for a pattern, but more importantly, they're looking for meaning, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What does this mean?

NORMAN MAILER: All right, but let me go on with this, 'cause I want to get into it. You see, one of the reasons I believe in karma is that reincarnation offers a logic that you simply can't get from heaven and hell. Over, and over, and over through the years when I ponder these things, it just seems to me –

what is the one ^{centuries have} truth that I know about 99 percent at least of the people I know? ^{to} Which is that they are part good and part bad. And their good and their evil is often ^{balanced} proportionate. ~~It's not like 90-10.~~ I never met anyone who was 90-10 good or evil. What you find is people are 53-47. A wonderful person ^{might} ~~is maybe~~ 61-39. A horrible, most evil person I've ever known was maybe 37-63.

INTERVIEWER: Hitler liked dogs.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. Hitler maybe gets down to 20-80, I don't know. What I'm getting at is – and on the basis of that – and the great majority of us are all, of course, in the 53-47 category. And we're all going to go to a heaven or a hell on the basis of highly improper numbers like 53-47? Forever to live in that fabulous hotel, or burn in Dante's ^{pot?} ~~hell~~. It makes no sense at all. It just doesn't.

And so what I prefer to believe is that we're reborn. Not all of us. But those of where – let's say that God, for the sake of argument, and it's only for the sake of argument, is the master of karma. That's one place where the devil's excluded.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: And so this is God's end of the game.

INTERVIEWER: I mean you're just saying this arbitrarily?

NORMAN MAILER: I'm saying this arbitrarily. Obviously there's no proof

at all – this is all speculation, as I said from the beginning.

INTERVIEWER: Well, there has to be internal logic to it.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, I find internal logic, all right. And this is God's chance to improve his creations. You see, we are all experiments. God is looking for answers. God does not know what's going on. God is an explorer, just as we are.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, God. That's a big idea.

NORMAN MAILER: It's a very big idea, but it makes as much sense as that God knows what it's all about, and is this fabulous stage designer who watches us and says, let's get rid of that actor, let's put this actor in, and all that. That makes no sense. Not in terms of the great human endeavor that we're all involved in. Whereas this way – look at evolution. God is always trying to improve his previous mistakes – or her previous mistakes.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know of any religion, and that includes Hinduism, that teaches that one of the attributes or qualities of God, one of the characteristics of God, one of the defining characteristics of being God is that God is in search of answers, right?

NORMAN MAILER: I don't know any either. But I'm saying this makes more sense to me.

INTERVIEWER: It's an extraordinary idea.

NORMAN MAILER: This makes more sense to me than that God knows it

all, and is immensely bored.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: The only way we can know God is through ourselves.

INTERVIEWER: Right. So what you're saying – Can I just stop for a second? What you're saying then is that human curiosity, which is the search for answers, the asking why, right? – is a divine quality?

NORMAN MAILER: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: That's part of the little divinity in us is our curiosity.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. There's a good deal of divinity in us.

INTERVIEWER: One of the things you've been saying throughout is the whole theme of architecture and the architect, right? God as artist or architect. And I was just thinking as you were talking, I was looking at the beach here – you can go anywhere in the world where there's a beach, and children on it, two years old, one year old, and children will build sandcastles. They will build houses, moats. I don't care if it's Africa – anywhere in the world. It's something in human beings that – we all start out as little children as architects. Then we lose it, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And so you're saying that's one of the divine qualities.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, all right. Now, what does that have to do with the fact that some of us are reborn and some of us aren't?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, because – let me retell my favorite story, the one I told you last night. I'll repeat it. Which is, I die, and I go before my monitor. The angel, who's my monitor in karma, ~~who~~ says, Mr. Mailer, we're so happy to meet you. And what would you like to be in your next life? And I say, I think I'd like to be a black athlete. I don't care if I'm born poor, that's all right, but I just want my shot. And the monitoring angel says, oh, Mr. Mailer, I have such bad news for you, but everybody these days wants to be a black athlete, ~~and there's just no room.~~ ^{over-} We're completely subscribed.

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES] Oversubscribed.

NORMAN MAILER: Oversubscribed. And so let me look up what we have you for. And he looks it up, and ~~he~~ ^{but you will} says, oh, dear. We've got you down for cockroach. And then he says, I ~~could~~ ^{be} the fastest cockroach on the ~~planet.~~ ^{block.}

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: So I, in my vanity, in my ego, say, well, all right, well, that's kind of a blow. But, nevertheless, the fastest cockroach on the block, that's not so bad. 'Cause in my human life I was sort of slow on my feet. And maybe I'd better shape up my feet, and maybe the next time out I'll be a human again.

All right, this is just – you talk about speculation. There's a point where

speculation embraces fantasy. [CHUCKLES] But okay – so the notion there is that God's great creative faculty in relation to us as human is karma. And everything in the scheme of things is now working to smash karma. For example, the Holocaust.

INTERVIEWER: It's anti-creative.

NORMAN MAILER: It's anti-karmic. Whenever you kill hundreds of thousands of people in a very short period of time – Hiroshima – what happens is karma is jammed up. You have a gridlock in karma, because there's an economy in the universe, even in heaven. And when you have 100 thousand souls obliterated at once, karma can hardly keep up with it. And it begins to make terrible mistakes – bureaucratic mistakes on a large scale.

Part of the devil's intent is to destroy karma. Because so long as God can keep improving the original design, God is likely to triumph. And so the devil precisely looks to terrorism, looks to those ways in which human susceptibilities will be strained, and exhausted, and infuriated, and turned negative – turned bilious.

INTERVIEWER: Bilious?

NORMAN MAILER: Bilious, yes. If we get caught in a traffic jam we feel bilious. If we have to wait in an airport we're bilious. That's one of the devil's gasses. (?)

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: So, I look at the world that way. But this is this

rather than being in that sweatbox in hell whimpering, or sitting around getting fat by the side of a pool in heaven. I mean the most idiotic two separate notions.

I have to tell you, I loathe Dante on the basis of ~~the~~ *The Inferno*. I loathe it. I mean of all the Johnny-One-Note books that are called great. Now, I've only read him in translation. They tell me the Italian is fabulous – it better be, because otherwise there's been a shell game played in the great halls of literature.

INTERVIEWER: That's the first time anybody has – including your wife – has given me a rationale, a reason for the necessity – if you believe that God is a loving God, and that God cares for us – in the necessity of reincarnation. Which is that God cares for us too much just to limit us to one shot.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes, he cares for us humanly, divinely, but also aesthetically.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. You're going to give your kid a second chance.

NORMAN MAILER: And a third, and a fourth, and a fifth.

INTERVIEWER: I never thought about that. No one's ever said that before that I'm aware of. And I've read about that.

NORMAN MAILER: Once you accept the fundamental premise, the rest follows. Why even have karma? Well, karma is a chance to make up for what wasn't done in one life. In fact, do we go through all we go through in our lives in order to have it end? Even end in the sense that there's no hereafter?

I've always found that irrational.

INTERVIEWER: You find it irrational?

NORMAN MAILER: What? In other words, to die – what is death, but peace, non-existence.

INTERVIEWER: Nothingness.

NORMAN MAILER: Nothingness. That makes no sense to me. On the other hand, to go through what we go through, so much good and so much bad in each of us, and then end up by the side of a heavenly pool or down in a sweatbox, heaven or hell, makes absolutely no sense. It's outrageous in fact.

INTERVIEWER: It is outrageous. That's what I believe – that's what I was raised to believe.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. And the idea that god is all powerful and all good is a logical contra taunt.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I agree with you there. But then we get back to – I mean you put your finger on it a while ago. You push me or any Christian against the wall --

NORMAN MAILER: Push what?

INTERVIEWER: Push me against the wall or any other Christian against the wall – and what do we fall back on? Well, it's a matter of faith. Faith.

NORMAN MAILER: You fall back on the notion that God cares about us, which is what we started with.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And therefore you've got to trust him.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, you have to hope that karma is run a little more efficiently than the average large American corporation.

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: That's why I used the example of the [OVERLAPPING] – You know, I'm not cynical one moment that the hereafter is vastly more perfect than what we have.

INTERVIEWER: You're not cynical it's more perfect?

NORMAN MAILER: I'm hoping it's somewhat more perfect. But that it's vastly more perfect, I rather doubt there. Error is everywhere.

INTERVIEWER: There I agree with you. Because I think part – if you're Christian – if you believe in the immortality of the soul, of the consciousness, which I do, and you go on to God, right, I don't think you look back – I don't think you miss your relatives, or I don't think you miss the earth or anything. I think you are just so – your curiosity is so reborn by the wonder you're presented with, with all the new things to find out, that you just go on. That's what I think.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, it's so complicated. There the speculation just breaks down. You can meet people in new guises in your new and previous

lives. We've all had that feeling of meeting certain people who for some reason, my God, we knew each other some other way. There is that, absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And there's also the sense of soul mates.

NORMAN MAILER: Soul mates, and impossible people, this and that, so forth and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, Norman, what do you think – this is a very Parade Magazine kind of question, but – you've been critical of America and you have a right to be critical. And you've spoken about American generosity on a very individual level. If your car breaks down they'll stop and give you a hand.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I mean you fought a war for this country, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And then you opposed another war because you love the country. At least I think that's why –

NORMAN MAILER: From my point of view, I love the country
[UNINTEL]...

INTERVIEWER: And so there must be something about this country that you

INTERVIEWER: Would you say this is where God has the most invested? If God has an ego? That God is more riding on the success of this country than he does, say...?

NORMAN MAILER: Don't you think it'd be kind of foolish to talk about God's ego? [CHUCKLES] Now that I've hung myself, do we have to set up a situation where I have to pull on the rope myself? [CHUCKLES]

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to ask you anyway, though I'm not going to use it. I was kind of appalled by Vidal's defense of McVeigh who blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. I mean it was just appalling.

NORMAN MAILER: Let's not get into that.

INTERVIEWER: The reason I asked you about your feelings about the country is I think there is a line. I'm not going to talk about that now, but I think there is a line where – You talk about the patriotism, 'cause I think personally now, Norman, I think there's a line that you could step over, where you move from honest criticism of your country to – if not sedition to actively wishing your country ill. Which is close to, it seems to me, sedition.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, all right. But I don't want to get into that, 'cause it's too loaded and too difficult. The reason it's so loaded is that – what is it you demand of a good and just society? I'd say in my religious notions that you have some notion of what you did in your life that was good and was bad, that you learn through your own experience. This is why I hate terrorism. It's why I hate exploitation on a large scale. It's why I hate power exercised brutally from above – 'cause it blurs your vision. You see, if you don't have a chance to live your life, then you've been cheated of the most fundamental

moral enrichment that a human being can have.

So long as we can understand our lives, so long as our lives are not overtaken by the absurd. And by the absurd I mean powerful but meaningless shifts in our lives. For example, it's very hard for people who've been living a life, it they suddenly get knocked down by a car and they're crippled thereafter. Very hard for them to put it together. Was it because of the bad things they did in their life, or was it just this is the way life is – it's full of interrupted passages.

INTERVIEWER: You ask, why me?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, yeah. The ideal life is a life where you don't have to ask, why me? You can say to yourself at the end of it, yes, I was treated fairly. Or I believe I was treated unfairly, and I believe I'll have some opportunity to talk about it. But when you have these sudden interruptions of existence...

Again, going back to the Satanic notion that much of our existence is determined that way. Satan loves interruption. I mean I would go so far as to say that the wrecking, the disassembling of narrative by television with their commercials is a Satanic act.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, God, that's a leap. That is a leap.

NORMAN MAILER: But it's not a leap if you start to think that whenever anything can break human concentrate, it's Satanic. Satan is trying to destroy God's work.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, that's what television has done to narrative –

you just said that. That's what television has done to narrative.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. It chops it up. It chops it up.

INTERVIEWER: People get impatient with –

NORMAN MAILER: It's a snake and they cut the snake into ten pieces. And that's why – they want to know why are kids doing so badly in our educational system. Well, one reason they're doing badly I can name is the architecture, again. All those brick shithouses that they call modern schools. Okay, all right. Another is the fluorescent lighting. Everybody looks ugly under fluorescent lights. They save a little bit on the electricity, and everybody's slightly depressed – a little more depressed than they want to be, which is not a good atmosphere for a classroom, or a courtroom.

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES] That's right. And the pimples show.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes, yes. But another reason is that narrative is being destroyed. Kids by now want interruption. 'Cause when they get the interruption they get a laugh, they get a physical surge of energy – they're being used up whether they know it or not. They're being tickled to death. And to the degree that we lose narrative, we lose the power to concentrate. So it's not such a leap. It's purposeful. The idea is to make people more and more stupid. We go back to what I said that America is getting more and more loutish.

INTERVIEWER: 9-11, up until 9-11, there was in this country a generally agreed upon narrative of our history, our purpose and a sense of where we

were going, right? And 9-11 interrupted that narrative, right?

NORMAN MAILER: Definitely.

INTERVIEWER: And we haven't been able to find the threads again.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, we tried to go back to the old threads and they don't quite work.

INTERVIEWER: We can't get the story to go on – it doesn't work anymore, because it's been interrupted and we can't find the pieces – we can't bridge back into – we can't get back into the story again.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, the idea that we were the most benevolent force in the world and good for other nations is very hard to believe in the same innocent way again.

INTERVIEWER: Well, there's a lot of things we're never going to believe again.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

[END OF TAPE]

Thank you.

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TRANSCRIPTION OF AUDIOTAPE FOR: DOTSON RADER

PROJECT: NORMAN MAILER INTERVIEW
PROVINCETOWN, 7-9-02
DATE TRANSCRIBED: July 13, 2002
JOB #: 3 of 3
TAPE #: 3
SIDE(S): A only
LENGTH: 03 minutes
FILE NAME: RAD0711C

INTERVIEWER: You were saying, you know what I love about this country...

NORMAN MAILER: You see, I had the great good luck that very few people have, to have a relatively independent income at the age of 25 and to be a writer. And so I've been able to spend my life thinking. It wasn't always that simple – there were years when I had financial troubles, and this and that, and so forth, and so on. But generally speaking, I've had more time to think than most people. And it isn't that I'm a better thinker than people at my level, whatever that is – it's that I've had that advantage. And this country gave me that advantage. America gave me that advantage. And so, I can hardly hate the country deep down because I've been treated very well by this country.

Now, I don't want to make this a sentimental portrait. You know, I once attacked J. Edgar Hoover on television back in 1959, and said he had done

more damage to America than Joseph Stalin.

INTERVIEWER: I remember that.

NORMAN MAILER: And what happened is – what was that called, the Freedom of Information Act?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: When I got my report from the FBI –

INTERVIEWER: Oh, did you get the...?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, 300 pages. And 80 of them were devoted to that one show, with FBI comments on –

INTERVIEWER: He must've been watching.

NORMAN MAILER: No, he heard about it. And he was living. And so 80 pages were devoted to my remarks. And most of them were on the order of, oh, well, Mailer, he's just an arrogant asshole, you see? But the fact is this is a great country – it certainly was then. Because angry as those people were, venomous as they were, they didn't take me off in chains, they didn't make me suffer. In fact, I didn't even know what had happened. I knew I was doing something that was a little – from the point of view of personal safety, a little outré. But, nonetheless, there it was.

All right, all I'm getting at is I've had great freedoms here in this country, and I just don't want to see them lost for the people who come after me. And

enough of that – maybe that won't work there.

INTERVIEWER: No, that works. But I'll tell you, one of the things, Norman
– this hasn't got anything to do with the tape...

[END OF TAPE]

Thank you.

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calls

NORMAN MAILER: And then I started watching it, of course, and while I was watching it I called Brooklyn. 'Cause I have my apartment in Brooklyn, and my daughter Maggie was staying there with a friend. And I wanted to know if she was all right. And she had seen it. She was – having seen it, she was virtually struck dumb by it. You know, she was terribly affected by it. And as we were talking –

INTERVIEWER: She just had to look across the river.

NORMAN MAILER: That's right. And as we were talking, the second plane hits the second building. And I'm watching it on TV. And her friend is watching it on TV and freaks out. 'Cause the friend is watching the plane hit and watching it on TV. And was virtually babbling after that.

INTERVIEWER: So he was seeing it in person from Brooklyn Heights...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] Seeing it in person, and seeing it on TV...

INTERVIEWER: And seeing it on TV at the same time. Unreal.

NORMAN MAILER: And it left a kind of [UNINTEL] in a funny way. 'Cause the one thing that TV always promises us is, folks, deep down secretly this is not real. It's why we love it so.

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES] Right. Even reality TV is fake, yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: In other words, we can deal with reality 'cause it isn't real. And now suddenly it was real. It's why there's always that numbness to

America's not 100 percent on target, it creates anxiety in the average American. They feel treacherous, they feel like traitors to the American spirit. That's one of the reasons they all gathered around Bush. The fact that he had not been elected by a majority became exactly his strength in a perverse way, which is no one would even begin to look at it now. No one would begin for one moment to contemplate the fact that maybe he shouldn't even have been there. Because now the country had to be saved. The country had been attacked by fiendish geniuses.

INTERVIEWER: Right, okay.

NORMAN MAILER: Who were ready to die for the idea. And every American had to ask himself, am I ready to die for my ideas? Well, there's a small percentage of a professional Army who are indeed ready to die for their ideas. [UNINTEL] There are those guys – they're ready to take terrible chances and die. And die for what? To go out and kill some Afghanis, when they really can't know for sure who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. Which is – no American should ever be put into that position. 'Cause we grow up on a film culture that enabled us always to distinguish between the good guys and the bad ones.

INTERVIEWER: I know, but that's – I keep wanting to interrupt, and I don't want to break your line of thought. But that's precisely the position that Bush is taking. Bush is planning for that. When he says, you're either for us or against us.

NORMAN MAILER: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: It's either black or it's white, there's good or there's evil,

INTERVIEWER: I said that.

NORMAN MAILER: I don't want to get a repeat of that last one.
[CHUCKLES]

INTERVIEWER: No, no, I cut.

NORMAN MAILER: All right. I don't know if the comfort factor is as large as you think it is. Because I think it doesn't stand up to the horror. And the horror was that we're so hated. That there nations on earth, people on earth, groups on earth that hate us to the point where they're perfectly willing, not even to destroy us, but to destroy themselves in order to destroy us. And that's biblical. That goes right down to the biblical root. Wasn't it Samson who pulled the pillars?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORMAN MAILER: And defeated the enemy by killing himself? All right. That struck a blow to the core of fundamentalism in America, because fundamentalists in America believe that all knowledge is in the Bible.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking about Christian fundamentalists?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. So, what you've got are all these Islam Samsons from the fundamentalist point of view. It doesn't mean they witness themselves that way, but in their sleep they have to see it that way.

INTERVIEWER: Now, let me just stop you there for a moment. One of the things that baffles Americans to this day, and to a degree baffles me, is why

they hate us so much. I've interviewed the President. When you ask the President why we're hated, his response is to say, because they're evil people. Which isn't an answer. In other words, the problem is them, rather than us.

NORMAN MAILER: That's the ten second answer.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So my question is why are we hated?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, that's a very large matter. Obviously, to some degree we're hated out of envy. I mean there are emotions that are very simple, in the way in high school we hate how the best looking girl and the best looking guy tend to get together at the dances and we don't. As simple as that. I mean that's a simple kind of envy – negative envy. By negative envy I mean there's not much justification for it other than the general meanness and jealousy of human nature.

But we're hated for other reasons entirely, which is that we're cultural – when we move into other countries through our very powerful corporate capitalism, very often we're cultural – I don't know if you can use the word barbarians. I don't know if you can go that far. But we're certainly the next thing to cultural barbarians, because we don't pay much attention to what we are trampling. And what makes it even worse and intensifies that anger is that we're successful at it.

Let me give a very good example of that. In Russia, in Moscow, the McDonald's are superior to the McDonald's in America. You go into a McDonald's in Moscow and there are marble floors, and you have the Russian equivalent of young corporate executives on cell phones talking to each other across the room on their cell phones. And they're very proud of it.

even have buttons. They do not go around murdering their neighbors who don't agree with them. They don't feel any – there is no religious compulsion to murder completely innocent strangers that there is among Islam.

NORMAN MAILER: Can I point out that we leave the Amish alone? We do less to the Amish than we do to the Muslims.

INTERVIEWER: I mean but they're surrounded by the same influences.

NORMAN MAILER: No, they have their enclaves. And you don't find high rise modern apartment houses on Amish territory so far as I know. All right, what happens when you go to any capital of the world these days? You meet the corporate [UNINTEL] as you leave the airport. You see a series of hideously ugly buildings.

INTERVIEWER: That's absolutely true.

NORMAN MAILER: Some friends of mine were going to Paris for the first time. And I said to them, now look, be prepared for a prodigious shock. You'll leave De Gaulle Airport, you're going to go through the ugliest ten miles you've ever seen before you reach Paris. In fact, I once wanted to make a movie which would consist of some third world capitalists meeting at a conference in Paris, an international conference. And they get off at Charles De Gaulle, and they move to the nearest high rise hotel, and they're there for three or four days – short movie. And they have these conferences, then they go back to Charles De Gaulle and they fly home. And the family comes up and says, what was Paris like? And the man says, you know, Paris was very disappointing. [CHUCKLES]

America since 9-11, from my point of view, is that The New York Times of all papers has suddenly become rather – I wouldn't say militant, but critical. And they're highly critical of many things that other newspapers and the television media don't go near, because they're worried, too. But this notion that one has to be compulsively a patriot is odious to me.

INTERVIEWER: But, Norman, it's something that in terms of American history, it is something that has happened – and it's usually coupled with witch hunts.

NORMAN MAILER: Time out.

[TAPE STOPS/STARTS]

INTERVIEWER: -- about terrorism.

NORMAN MAILER: One remark – one element I want to emphasize is I always thought it's very important not to just go in for the simple sort of watery liberal notion of let's understand both sides of the story. But, no, let's understand both sides of the story in depth. That's the difference.

INTERVIEWER: In depth?

NORMAN MAILER: In depth. If you can't understand both sides in depth, then give up the attempt until you can. Because nothing is worse than a kind of passive dewy kind of liberalism. Profound liberalism is another matter – it's different in kind. And for that matter I don't consider myself a liberal. Parenthetically, I call myself a left conservative. Because I think part of the horror in the modern world is that the best ideas of the left and the best ideas

if it ever got bad enough. There are some Brits who feel that way; there are some Americans who feel that way. And so there was a feeling that we're in this together. And, of course, they had their colonial experience with Muslims over the centuries. From the 18th Century on. So, given all that, that still doesn't necessarily explain, but I think it contributes to an explanation.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. This has nothing to do with the interview, but it's one of the things that pisses me off about the French. As you can tell, I really am pissed at the French.

NORMAN MAILER: It's a great mistake to get pissed at the French.

[CHUCKLES] I mean the French are the French. [CHUCKLES]

INTERVIEWER: Given their long, woeful history of defeats in battle – wait a minute – one of the most recent is Algeria. And I'm sitting at a dinner in Paris, and I'm being lectured by the French on American anti-Islamic racism, right? And I'm listening to this and finally I say, oh, well, I suppose we've killed a few hundred thousand maybe in 300 years.

NORMAN MAILER: Killed a few hundred thousand what?

INTERVIEWER: 300 thousand in all the wars – maybe 300 thousand, maybe, in all the wars of Islam – Muslims we've killed. Intentionally, unintentionally, whatever – altogether.

NORMAN MAILER: When you say we, Americans?

INTERVIEWER: America, yeah. And I was exaggerating – it's nowhere near that. I said, but it doesn't compare to your triumph of having killed in 14

he was too internal. He thought too much.

NORMAN MAILER: He was too deep, too sincere, too committed.

INTERVIEWER: He thought too much.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes, all right.

INTERVIEWER: He wasn't shallow enough.

NORMAN MAILER: He wasn't shallow enough, all right.

INTERVIEWER: Which is to say he couldn't take decisions without taking on guilt for them. Truman was a studied man, but he was shallow to the degree that he could take a decision like Hiroshima, and get a good night's sleep. And so could Ronald Reagan, and so could George Bush, Jr. Because there's no self-examination involved.

NORMAN MAILER: That's right. Self-examination is an onerous load for a thoroughbred potential candidate.

INTERVIEWER: Now, is that a quality of the psychopath as you're defining it?

NORMAN MAILER: What?

INTERVIEWER: The lack of self-examination?

NORMAN MAILER: Probably, probably. I mean I'm trying to say there's a

churches are losing members.

NORMAN MAILER: Catholics are losing priests.

INTERVIEWER: Catholics are losing priests, and the more liberal – I go to a more liberal – St. Ignatius – a more liberal Catholic Church, which is in trouble 'cause the Cardinal's trying to clean house there. So, you're quite right.

NORMAN MAILER: And then you take the Jews and while there's a certain return among certain Jews toward Orthodoxy, the average Jew becomes more and more – oh, Jewish through a sense of identity, but not at all religious. In other words, there are a great many Jews who will say, I'm a Jew, I'm proud to be a Jew. Do you go to the synagogue often? No, not that often – but I am Jewish.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: That would almost be the basic modern stance of the average modern Jew.

INTERVIEWER: And they identify with Israel.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, they identify with the Holocaust, they identify with Israel, but they're not churchgoers – synagogue denizens. So, the country has become the religion. America is the religion. If you look at it in terms of religious fervor, the patriotism that you see exhibited all the time by bullies, thugs, assholes, idiots, and probably good, decent people who are filled with love – a whole variety, it would take a great painter to capture those faces and

INTERVIEWER: [LAUGHS]

NORMAN MAILER: The most beautiful city in the world, Paris, ringed around by this hideous [UNINTEL] of architecture. Okay, all right. So that goes on in Muslim countries. They also have that hideous architecture.

INTERVIEWER: But Riad has it.

NORMAN MAILER: We have it to the point where...

INTERVIEWER: No, but Riad has it. All Muslim countries. You go to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, with these hideous...

NORMAN MAILER: All over the world.

INTERVIEWER: And it's not even first rate junk, it's third rate junk.

NORMAN MAILER: Of course. They can't even afford first rate junk. But all I'm saying is this architecture is beginning to break down some of the more sensitive, what can I say? – scintilla of culture. This is an invasion, don't you see? If you hate modern architecture with the virulence that I hate it, you see it as an invasion of your culture.

INTERVIEWER: I don't want this to become an interview about architecture. But in terms of...

NORMAN MAILER: It's key to the whole discussion.

INTERVIEWER: I know. I just want to... Getting back to America, which

Special

Interviewer.

When we look at America we think, well, we saved their ass in World War One, we saved their ass in World War Two.

For 67 years...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] Let's get one thing straight. Russia saved the world's ass in World War Two. ~~It wasn't the~~ Americans were a powerful element in World War Two, and we certainly helped to win that war. But ^{not} without the Russians... Germany lost the war fighting Russia, ^{and} they lost ~~so many of their troops~~ the Russians lost more troops than the Germans ever did. We ^{only} came in ^{by} in the middle of that war. ^{well} By the time it took us to mobilize, ^{eventually} everything, we were certainly into the middle of the war before we became an effective force, ^{and} we were very important. No question of it. But to ~~just~~ say smugly, we won the war, is to ignore exactly what the Russians gave.

Part of the absolute ^{division} rage between the two countries after the war was the Russians' outrage, ^{their attitude} we gave our blood in a way you never did. We lost 20 million people. ^{What} did you lose? ^{And so} (their ^{whole} attitude, ~~was~~ how dare you take full credit for winning the war?

INTERVIEWER: What I was trying to express, Norman, I wasn't trying to ~~express my own particular view~~. I was trying to express the view of what I ~~think~~ is the average American view.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes, ^{that} is the average American view.

INTERVIEWER: Of Europe ^{Europe's} that we saved their ass twice, we went through...

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] That outrages them

Special

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] Well, you're trying to force me into a position where I am defending the Muslims at all costs in every way, and I'm not going to get into that position. I'm sure they have as many sons of bitches and hardheads as we have, and maybe they have more. They probably have more in that they have lousier living conditions and they're under more tension than we are even. And what you have is a huge — a huge shame that Muslims bear because, don't forget, they were a superior civilization around 1200, 1300. They were the greatest faith on earth, and the most advanced culture, and the most developed minds. And now they lag behind.

Bernard Lewis has that book, you know, What Went Wrong? And there is a deep sense among them that we have failed. Now, we each can look — to get a sense of the intensity of that, think of those periods in your life when you felt you were a failure, or I felt I was a failure. The bitterness, the anger, the disturbance of that. Multiply it by the inhabitants of a faith, and you get a sense of how intense and how bad it all is.

But what I'm saying is, we have this habit of looking for solutions. Part of technology ^{assumes} there's always a solution to a problem. ~~Or if there isn't, then~~ you get damn close to a solution for a problem, and then you go on from there. ~~But what if the~~ ^{may well be} The ultimate desire of every technologist ultimately is to create a human being. Let's stop the crap. All right.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I agree with that.

NORMAN MAILER: Assume ^{the super-clone is} it's made of plastic. Well, that's wonderful, ~~because you'd be able to restore the skin without~~ ^{we'll skip} (all the problems that we have with our human skin, etc., etc.)

So, the answer is not that we have to look for an answer. The answer is that if

do it anyway.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: In other words, it's a wrong that is preventable and still is done, right?

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NORMAN MAILER: However you want to phrase it, yeah. So, in that sense, yes, terrorism is evil. However, you've got to take it in the context in which the terrorists see it, which is they are performing [UNINTEL]. And we thereby get into the immense complexity of moral relations. They feel they're destroying an octopus that's going to destroy their world. They're hoping to destroy a force that's inimical to what they believe in. Now that, of course, is the abstract porter (?) of those terrorists. The terrorist might violate every single rule in Islam, for example. He might be a drug addict, he might be this, he might be that, he might smoke like a fiend, he might drink booze, take drugs, all of it. It's almost as if, the way certain Christians in Graham Green novels do everything wrong, but at the end they are — they find — what's the word I'm looking for?

INTERVIEWER: Redemption.

NORMAN MAILER: Redemption, you see? So maybe some of these Islam terrorists are of that variety. They're not at all profound Muslims.

But the point is there's a tremendous rage in the world right now on all sides. After all, in America now there are a great many people on the right who are going around saying, let's kill all the Muslims, let's simplify the world. Get rid of all the Muslims and we'll have a simple world again, and we can then get into global capitalism with a certain ease and prosperity.

managed to direct. Boy, I'm running out of vocabulary.

INTERVIEWER: So you're talking about the ruling arrangement in the country, the ruling circles?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: The ruling class in the country. I don't think that's an offensive word. In terms of Europe — let's get onto Europe for a second — this is just personal, but I wish you'd just speak to the point 'cause you may not agree with me. I was thinking about France. And particularly the European left, but in Europe and in Britain, I sense over there a sense that in a way there's a sort of secret glee at our trouble. A sort of smug satisfaction they take in the fact that we got it.

I think in certain areas — for example, in Britain — when you go to Northern Ireland — I was over there like ten years ago in Belfast for a good deal of time, and it's astonishing because it was under military law, 'cause of the terrorism there. And the British have the sense that we didn't really sympathize with them. We were sending guns over to the killers.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: All right. My point is that — I can understand why, from what you say, why Muslims are unhappy with us, may want to kill us — I'm talking about the fanatics. I'm not altogether — and this I think is a very American notion — why our supposed "friends", in quotes, are so unhappy with us, and don't go along with us. Now, I'm speaking particularly of the European left and the French. And to most Americans — and I'm just on a soapbox here — but to most Americans, we look at Europe and we think, well,

INTERVIEWER: We fought Communism for ~~40~~ ²⁰ years, we saved them from Soviet tyranny, and that's gone now, and they have no gratitude.

NORMAN MAILER: No, no, ^{has been replaced by} because now what you've replaced Communist tyranny with is technological tyranny, whether you recognize it or not. We live in a technological society we didn't vote for.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: This is my argument. That it's just never been focused as such. No one's ever said, ~~no~~ one ever gave me the right to vote on whether I want a high rise building.

INTERVIEWER: Right, right.

NORMAN MAILER: No one ever asked me whether I wanted the Third Avenue el and the Sixth Avenue el torn down in Manhattan in order to have a bunch of ~~brick shithouses~~ ^{business and high rise} shithouses put up in their place.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

NORMAN MAILER: The world has been changed without our wanting it. Now, in America it's bad enough, but in Europe the attitude is, these Americans are taking over the whole place...

INTERVIEWER: [OVERLAPPING] Well, their attitude is that - the whole wording here again, and again, and again from the European commentators, particularly the British, is American unilateralism. That we don't consult with our allies. For example, it's just been leaked that we have devised a plan for

INTERVIEWER: You said, no?

NORMAN MAILER: I didn't say no, I just shook my head. And he walked on. It wasn't an episode in any way at all. He came over with a half smile and walked away with a half smile. But I was furious at myself afterwards for not saying to him, you don't have to wave a flag to be a patriot. Because what bothers me terribly is the kind of free floating patriotism that's going on now in the country.

You see, take the British for instance. The British have a lot of their country that is profound. They can hate it, they can revile it, they can tell dirty stories about it, they can give you dish on all the people who are leading the country. But deep down it's their family, it's their country and they love it. And their patriotism is deep.

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In America it's almost like we're playing musical chairs, and if you're caught without a flag you're out of the game. You see? And we all know the kind of bullies who are patriots. We all know the damage we're doing to the synapses of excellent professional athletes by having them have to make those patriot little speech at half time.

In other words, there's a kind of compulsive patriotism to America that drives me up the wall. Because if we're a great democracy – and in my mind there's nothing more important in sociopolitical terms than being able to maintain a great democracy – why do we need all this reaffirmation all the time? We're a large, powerful, rich country with wonderful resources. In many ways we're culturally rich. We're a fine country in many ways, and yet we have to reaffirm ourselves all the time, all the time, all the time.

And I've used this image, and I'll use it again. It's as if we're a 360 pound

we get through the century it'll be because answers were found en route that we can hardly even conceive of now. In other words, the problems that seem insoluble now may be solvable. They may not. I'm not interested in looking for answers to the world's problems, 'cause I wouldn't know them if I came across them. What I'm interested in is my own country, America. 'Cause I feel there still is a dialogue possible with my own country. Say, what are we doing? What are we really doing to ourselves? Let's not lose sight of the fact that we're not as great as we should be. That culturally, emotionally we're getting loutish, we're getting arrogant, we're getting vain. More and more arrogant, more and more vain.

We're losing a sense of the beauty of democracy, and also the peril of democracy. 'Cause democracy is built upon a notion that is exquisite and dangerous. Which is that if the will of the populous is expressed, there'll be more good than bad in it. Now, that's — there's nothing quid pro quo about that. After all, it was the first time — when America began, it was the first time in the history of civilization that a whole nation dared to make that bet.

INTERVIEWER: It was right near here it began.

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NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. Dare to assume that that would work. Up to that point the general feeling was — and it goes right through the formal religions as well — that the average human was not capable of that kind of judgment, and they had to be ruled from above. That wise people, older people, people who had the experience and had the power to direct how others should live was the only way to have a society. And so when America began, it began with an enormous gamble. And what it said is — it's based on a very simple notion — there's more good than bad in people.

Now, there can be more good than bad in people for a century or two, but at a

to wave those little flags – and they all love America. They love America because America has become the substitute for the religion.

Well, that's not necessarily a healthy business. Because to love your country uncritically means that you are greasing the slides for takeovers. In other words, somebody can take power and say, in effect, I love this country. And everybody goes, hurrah, hurrah, we've got a good man in there. In other words, critical distinctions begin to go, and democracy depends upon critical distinctions.

INTERVIEWER: But isn't it the difference between devotion to country as opposed to worship of country?

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. Huge difference. Devotion to country is one thing. Even devotion to country has to be examined to a degree, because, finally, rationally speaking, it's irrational. Why is the place that you were born more important than other places? It's a vanity.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you could say the same – why is the family you were born in more important than other families? We all live in these little pools of vanity.

NORMAN MAILER: Go back to the British for a moment. The British love of their country is because of the richness, and the close texture of their history. There is a great deal to think about. In other words, to be English and to know your history is to be nourished. Nourished not just by all the positive things that England did, but all the horrible things the English also did. So, until you get a sense that [NOISE OVERLAPS]... A good Englishman has a certain sense of the complexity of life. Even if he rides to hounds.

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[INSERT MM]

~~INTERVIEWER: Right [CHUCKLES]~~

[INSERT MM]

NORMAN MAILER: They're traditions. That's where so-and-so broke his neck 48 years ago. [CHUCKLES]

INTERVIEWER: They have memory.

~~INSERT~~

~~NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, they have memory, and we don't. And that is the scariest single thing about American democracy to me – is we don't have memories the way other countries do. We do not have deep traditions. We do not have anything in the way of democracy or totalitarianism. In other words,~~
the transition can be faster in this country than anywhere else, 'cause they're not the impedimenta, they are not the things that conservatives usually count upon to keep things going on a reasonable basis. Conservatism depends on the notion that if you don't let things change too quickly the best things will remain one way or another.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

NORMAN MAILER: But if you take away all the brakes, all the locks, all the stops, then a country can swing very quickly from one extreme to another. That happened in Russia in 1917.

INTERVIEWER: Good point. Just to go back to something you were saying earlier. You were talking about McDonald's. I don't want to dwell on that but – sometimes in the dark of the night, when I think about my country, and I shudder at the thought. But when you've been to England – let's say England – and you come back, there's a sense not just of the freedom here, which is refreshing, but there's also a sense of the fakery. That the country in itself is

bit of the psychopath in you, in me, in George W. Bush. And trying to sort of assess it. I think it's true that when we work on impulse, and the impulse is wicked at the very least – not evil, but wicked – to wit, we're upping the ante without knowing what's going to happen – then, yes, you could say the activity is psychopathic. And that you can have a good night's sleep after doing something extraordinary or foolish, you see? Because there is that inner voice that's saying, go, go, go. All right, but I'm straying from my point.

INTERVIEWER: Well, the question was would he be comfortable with the construction of a police state? Or with this kind of apparatus.

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NORMAN MAILER: I just think that his abilities are to deal with structured situations, with good language provided to him by other people. He is not at all good – since he is not a profound student of the media, and not a profound student of politics itself even, he depends on other people. Like a good psychopath, ~~he's got a marvelous sense of bullshit from other people.~~ *and for businessmen* I think the one strength I would guess that George W. Bush has is that he can tell when an expert is saying something that he knows a lot about and when he's pretending he knows a lot about. 'Cause, after all, there's no such thing as an expert who knows what's going on all the time in their own field.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORMAN MAILER: And so, how does he make his decisions? He did the exact opposite of Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton made the point of surrounding himself with people who might be 90 percent as intelligent as himself, but never as an intelligent or more intelligent. And there was Clinton, the brightest guy in the circle. Bush is smart enough to know that he couldn't possibly do that, or the country would be run by morons. So what he did is he got very bright people around him, very able people, Rumsfeld, Chaney,

artificial, and that the patriotism is a bit artificial.

You often think, well, the most American city is Vegas, Las Vegas. The entire thing from the architecture – everything about it is a scam and a fake...

NORMAN MAILER: And ~~amp~~.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And everybody that goes knows it. And that's American culture – why it is so exportable, because it's so completely fake.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, it doesn't have roots.

INTERVIEWER: And that leaves us vulnerable to –

NORMAN MAILER: To totalitarianism. And it's the greatest single worry one can have. But, look, you look at our situation as a country. Leaving the Indians to the side for the moment. Virtually everyone who came here was a reject from their original country. In a certain sense they came over with the sense that they were the weeds that were cut down in a previous country. And they came here – this is not true for every last American who came here, but it's true maybe for 90 percent of the Americans...

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't true of me. [CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: Well, it was certainly true of my people. They came over 'cause they were rejects. The majority of the immigrants who came, came as rejects. A lot of the earliest settlers...

INTERVIEWER: You're saying they were losers?

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] ...were proud people, who...

INTERVIEWER: [OVERLAPPING] You're saying they were losers?

NORMAN MAILER: Well, I don't like the word losers. They were not winners.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. They couldn't make it work.

NORMAN MAILER: It wasn't working well enough. And they were adventurous to try something new. That's why I don't want to call them losers.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NORMAN MAILER: But they took a great chance. Especially in the days when it took three weeks to cross the ocean. But they came, they came. And they thrived. And they did not look back. And the act of not looking back, very few traditions carried over. So that in America, for instance, it's easier to violate the cultural heartland of a country's existence than in other places.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. By violate you mean what?

NORMAN MAILER: I mean ^{Gresham's} ~~Gresham's~~ Law, bad money drives out good. Bad art drives out good. It carries over to aesthetics.

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INTERVIEWER: Bad architecture drives out –

NORMAN MAILER: Bad art drives out good art.

INTERVIEWER: Bad architecture.

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NORMAN MAILER: Absolutely. Absolutely. Bad music drives out good music. Back in 1950-55 we had fabulous jazz. And what we have now, in my bigoted opinion, is not nearly as good. And not nearly as interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Right. I agree with you.

NORMAN MAILER: ~~[OVERLAPPING] -- individual and creative.~~

Technology drives out good sound. Any plug ugly ~~(?)~~ can plug in his guitar and have immense volume without skill. Force without skill has been taking over the country.

INTERVIEWER: It seems to me one of the things – in everything you say in terms of 9-11 – if I'm completely off base then we'll just drop it. In talking about America, and I suppose by extension the West, you talked about the dumbing down of America. And what I take that to mean is...

NORMAN MAILER: The dumbing down, the loading up, to coin a bad word.

INTERVIEWER: American values, American culture, American education is becoming shallower and shallower...

NORMAN MAILER: Well, you said that. I don't really know enough about

that. But I assume it is, yes. [OVERLAPPING] We're certainly becoming more politically correct.

INTERVIEWER: Which is a kind of—

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] -- a form of totalitarianism.

INTERVIEWER: [OVERLAPPING] Which is a kind of laziness, because no one wants to fight for an idea. So you accept whatever the —

NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] You establish what the given is. And don't stray.

INTERVIEWER: But with that comes, it seems to me, a growing lack of... In other words, I think one of the reasons that 9-11 was so shocking — you talked about the two shocks of that event, right? One thing that made it shocking is we've become a far less serious people. We don't take life and things very seriously.

NORMAN MAILER: I've been saying that over, and over, and over the whole time.

INTERVIEWER: And suddenly seriousness was there.

NORMAN MAILER: That's your point — yeah, and a good one. And we're not equipped to deal with seriousness. And that's my fear. Because we're not equipped to deal with the serious, we're going to want palliatives, we're going to want strictures, we're going to want to be told how to live. And there are plenty of people around who are willing to do that, 'cause they've got some

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NORMAN MAILER: And it also fired up the new religion in America, American patriotism. So everything worked for them. And, you know, it may happen again. There's like a diabolical principle going on now. From the terrorists' point of view, what they want to do now is wreck the American economy.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: I mean you don't have to wonder what Bin Laden wants to do – he wants to injure the American economy.

INTERVIEWER: Well, we know they want to go after the banks, right?

NORMAN MAILER: You can name it as well as I can.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I agree with you.

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NORMAN MAILER: But even interfere with the smooth passage of life. Every time you go to an airport and you want to take off for a plane, and you're held up for six, eight, ten hours for security, the damage it does – we know how much damage is done if we get caught in a traffic jam and we lose a half hour.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. You stop flying, you stop wanting to fly. I mean I don't fly as much as I used to 'cause it's too much of a hassle.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: If I can take a train, I'll take a train, even if it's longer. All

right. Is there a certain irony or is there a certain appropriateness – and this is way off the point, but... Robin, who's the editor, we were talking in London, and there's a certain kind of irony, at least at this point in our history, when both – we've been talking a lot about Russia – Russia, our former enemy, and the United States are intimately cooperative now in fighting terrorism. We have American soldiers on former Soviet basis in the former Soviet Union. It's unbelievable. But both governments are headed by former spies. I mean the son of a former spy.

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NORMAN MAILER: The son of a former spy – big difference.

INTERVIEWER: And a former spy. And there's kind of irony there.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, but the irony was there in reverse – you're too young to know this. But during the war, the Second World War, Russia was ennobled for us. We kept hearing about the wonderful sacrifices of the Russian Red Army, the glorious feats of the Russian Red Army, the fabulous – Stalin was presented as this wonderful beneficent sort of uncle type figure, you see. The people who hated the Soviet Union then were frowned upon and squeezed out. You have no idea how positive this country was...

INTERVIEWER: Toward Russia?

NORMAN MAILER: Toward Russia during the war. And then in one year, boom, it just turned inside out. And once you've been through that – and they went from being the second best country in the world to absolutely the worst nation. That's when you knew that we were yo-yos, and we were being pulled on a string. So this is just mild, as far as I'm concerned, that we're now getting friendly. We'll get very friendly with the Russians again. Actually,

were a military man, I suspect the way I would look at it is we're facing various bacteriological and viral wars on the health of the American public. And how do we set about – where's the cure for a virus? There is none, is there? What do you do with it?

Or if the answer is the cure for a virus is that it wears itself out. But if the virus is too widespread, then it doesn't wear itself out. It goes on and on, and it destroys the body politic.

INTERVIEWER: It also mutates.

NORMAN MAILER: Well, I'm at the end of my knowledge of viruses. [CHUCKLES] I love getting into images where I've got one run on the ladder and no other...

INTERVIEWER: What I thought of when you were talking about that is – we were talking earlier, after lunch about visiting AIDS patients and AIDS wars.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER: And the two great scourges – You said September 11th in one of your quotes, was the beginning of the 21st Century, the way August 1914 was the beginning of the 20th. This is the beginning of the 21st Century. We can already see the two great scourges of this century. We're in the middle of it. One is AIDS, a real virus that affects the body, and using your analogy, terrorism, which is a virus that affects the body politic. Is that correct – these two?

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, okay. Well, there are many viruses that are

attacking the body politic – come on. Greed. Greed may end up doing more damage to the American psyche, and the American economy, and the American sense of good wherewithal than terrorists. ^{as AIDS} You see, we just don't know the strength of the terrorists. The media's built them up to an enormous degree. So far there's been one large terrorist attack and that's it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: And a few petty ones here and there that I can't even remember at this point. Can you?

INTERVIEWER: Well, I can remember...

NORMAN MAILER: Like the guy with the explosives in his shoe.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, the Brit, Richard Reed. Right.

NORMAN MAILER: The point is that one of the defenses against it is arithmetic. Every American should take a very good course in arithmetic.

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: In other words, how many people are there in America? 250 million is it now? 270 million.

INTERVIEWER: 270.

NORMAN MAILER: All right. And you can get into the worst of it. (?) The numbers are dwarfed – the Twin Towers was dwarfed by the horror of it, the

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panics in airports, where one man or two men are found and caught, and 6 thousand people are held up for hours, and hours, and hours.

INTERVIEWER: And then it ripples through the whole country.

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NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. And the notion that you're going to have your freedom saved by people who work for security is a difficult notion. Because people who work for security have a one-way street. Which is anything that happens that's bad is very bad for them. And so they're going to do their utmost to restrict the movement of people, restrict the freedom of people in critical situations. As a long term life they have very bad habits about democracy. 'Cause democracy is inimical to security, you see? And unless Americans are willing to say at a certain point we're going to take some hits – that's more important. Take a few hits without panicking – than to look for absolute security.

What scared the hell out of me was a poll that came out about two days ago, that half the people in America are willing to accept a certain curtailment of their liberties in return for more security. Now, you're going to have to locate this poll 'cause I just heard it on TV, and it was one of those streamers that ran across – God know where it came from, and to my shame I didn't follow it up.

But if that's true already at this point, that 50 percent are ready to give up their liberties to some good extent in return for more security, which is a comedy anyway, then what's going to happen if something really bad happens?

There's going to be a feeling here – Daddy, get me out of this. 'Cause the adventurous notion that Americans are all individuals, free individuals, has taken a lot of hits in the last... And particularly in the last ten years with the market and the greed. And the idea – you know, Marx and Jesus Christ come together on one fundamental notion, which is that money leaches out all other

talking about the country.

NORMAN MAILER: Yes. Well, yes and no, yes and no. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: That's what I think 9-11 did us, is it may have deeply wounded our exceptionality as a nation.

NORMAN MAILER: I agree. Yeah, we've been saying that.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

NORMAN MAILER: I talk of it as an identity crisis. All right, so we reaffirm that identity crisis by being stronger. But, you know, it's — there've been profound arguments going on at the top of American life ever since the Second World War. I mean there were people in this country who used to say, let's nuke the Russians before they get a bomb. They were held down. Then the Russians got the bomb. So then the arms race began. How many millions can we lose and still keep the country in tact? There were all those arguments.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, let's bomb China.

NORMAN MAILER: And then we finally blundered through. We blundered through. And then we bankrupted the Russians and won the Cold War, so-called.

INTERVIEWER: Right, right.

NORMAN MAILER: I remember once having a discussion with Pat Buchanan, and saying to him, we didn't win the Cold War. We bankrupted

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hands pointing down.

(5) ^{Yes.}
NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, yeah. And ^{which} it was as if the little bit of that building that had been exquisite was left. The essence. And so I said, yes, I think the ruins are more beautiful than the building. Well, then ^{which} The New York Post got a hold of it, and ^{which} said ^(had me saying) "the ruin is more beautiful than the building," ^{as if} which made it sound like all the people who were dead and buried ^{beneath} were part of the beauty of it. It was an ugly, ugly story. And the fact ^{of that} — My son, Michael, called me up and said, are you out of your mind? Don't you realize how people are suffering here, and you say something like that? I said, I wasn't talking about the people who were dead, I was talking about the building alone. Well, that wasn't the way it came out in ~~the New York Post~~ the paper. So I put my foot in my mouth.

So after that I then had this slightly embattled relation to the whole thing, because ^{that} given the mood at the time — and the mood at the time, we'll get into ^{the} it later, but given the absolute anguish of ^{the} that day, and given the unbelievable identity crisis that hit just about everybody who lived in Manhattan — and then ~~it went out in widening circles, less and less. But all of America was affected by it. Because the notion always~~ — there had always been this tacit notion that we were impregnable. And, in fact, we have been ever since the Second World War, because we've always had more in the way of armament than any other country ~~than the rest of the world, if you put the rest of the world together. And we've always had that. And we had a series~~ with the notable exception of Vietnam and ~~North Korea~~ the Korean War. But outside those two wars, we've had a series of very easy, rather stupid wars.

And Vietnam and Korea

INTERVIEWER: Which were never fought on our soil.

NORMAN MAILER: Never fought on our soil, and we never suffered under

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NORMAN MAILER: No big deal. So, anyway, the second one involved an identity crisis for just about all New Yorkers, and for much of the country for quite a while. Because it changed our notion of ourselves. Now, since then what's interesting is this identity crisis has been continuing because of other shocks all over the place. The corporate shocks. That the corporations, some of the most powerful corporations in America and some of the wealthiest corporations in America were houses of sand. And built their fortunes on lies. So trust in the market was, of course, injured terribly.

And then you have all the hideous stuff that the Catholic Church has had to undergo with the pedophilia. So, the Catholic Church won't be the same for years to come. And I think of someone like friends who are priests, and how difficult it is for them now just to walk the street and know that half the people are looking at them and saying, I wonder if he ever had anything to do with a child.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORMAN MAILER: You know, it's no easy matter.

INTERVIEWER: You're exactly right.

NORMAN MAILER: Part of the core of American self-sufficiency has always been the Catholic Church with its dedicated Catholics, most of them in the working class. One of the reasons there's never been a revolution in America is precisely because of that Catholic Church and its closeness to the American working class.

deserves it, although no one would express it that way.

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INTERVIEWER: Go back to the point you were making about architecture. It's very interesting. I've never heard this discussed in that context. In a sense it's a literary idea, which is to say – the first attack in '93, if the same attack had happened, say against the Empire State Building or the Chrysler Building, which are beloved buildings, the response would've been a lot different.

NORMAN MAILER: Much larger, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So, in a sense the architecture itself is – in a sense, part of the vulnerability of the people working in that building was due to the fact that it was such bad architecture – that nobody cared about the building.

[CHUCKLES]

NORMAN MAILER: It's arguable. It was bad, uncomfortable architecture on the inside from what I've heard about the building. The outside, there were certain periods when many New York photographers loved the building because of the way it would reflect light at certain hours. On the other hand, I always just saw it as these two Mastodon teeth that had broken, you might say, the architectural spirit of the Manhattan skyline. All right, and many architects felt that way, and many didn't, and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. That's not the point.

The point I want to make is your point essentially, that it didn't carry across the country, the first attack in 1993. There was a great indifference to what had happened. Just as people in New York don't necessarily wear sackcloth and ashes if there's a dreadful flood in Kansas.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, but also, in New York – and you put your finger on it

preferred death by – what could one say? – by a descent into the implacable surface of the earth, rather than to be roasted alive where they stood.

6 All right, those sort of things are all the elements of a dream, of a nightmare. So there was no comparison between the two. The second catastrophe was not even two orders of magnitude greater than the first one. And on top of that the terrorists had gotten away with it. How? They had emulated themselves. They had died in the crash. And so that was staggering. 'Cause America is now down to the point where it's gotten so large, so comfortable, so wealthy, that I think...

[DOORBELL RINGS]

I have to answer it.

[TAPE STOPS/STARTS]

NORMAN MAILER: And I agree with you. That first attack affected New York, and there was a lot of outrage, particularly down in the Wall Street section. By the time you got to Coney Island it wasn't that big anymore. And once you crossed the water over to the mainland, people didn't give a damn. They thought, ah, New York's an ugly, rotten city. Secretly they felt maybe New York deserves it. Which is one of the things I've talked about before – which is there's so many separate elements, and enclaves, and regions, and territories, and no-nos in the country, that it's always rare when the country reacts, as I say, like a creature.

So the first time you didn't have that at all. What you had was exactly – once you got out of New York, the general feeling was, well, New York probably

hands pointing down.

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Yes.
NORMAN MAILER: Yeah, yeah. And ~~it~~ ^{it} was as if the little bit of that building ~~that~~ ^{which} had been exquisite was left. The essence. And so I said, yes, I think the ruins are more beautiful than the building. Well, then The New York Post got a hold of it, and ~~said~~ ^{had me say my} changed one word. Said "the ruin is more beautiful than the building," which ~~made it sound like~~ ^{as if} all the people who were ~~dead and buried~~ ^{beneath} were part of the beauty of it. It was an ugly, ugly story. And the fact ~~My son, Michael~~ ^{My oldest} called me up and said, are you out of your mind? Don't you realize how people are suffering here, and you say something like that? I said, I wasn't talking about the people who were dead, I was talking about the building alone. Well, that wasn't the way it came out in ~~the paper. So I put my foot in my mouth.~~ ^{the New York Post.}

So, after that I ~~then~~ ^{had} had this slightly embattled relation to the whole thing. Because given the mood at the time — and ~~the mood at the time~~ ^{the}, we'll get into ~~it later, but~~ ^{that} given the absolute anguish of ~~that~~ ^{the} day, and given the unbelievable identity crisis that hit just about everybody who lived in Manhattan — ~~and then it went out in widening circles, less and less. But all of America was affected by it.~~ ^{that} Because the notion always — there had always been this tacit notion that we were impregnable. And, in fact, we have been ever since the Second World War, because we've always had more in the way of armament than any other country — ~~than the rest of the world, if you put the rest of the world together.~~ ^{the} And we've always had that. And we had a series — with the notable exception of Vietnam and North Korea — ~~the Korean War.~~ ^{the} But outside those two wars, we've had a series of very easy, rather stupid wars.

~~And Vietnam and Korea~~
INTERVIEWER: Which were never fought on our soil.

NORMAN MAILER: Never fought on our soil, and we never suffered under

to print the bill — just look at the architecture. Hideous stuff, hideous stuff.

~~And the Twin Towers was the finest example of hideous stuff.~~

~~Because...~~

INTERVIEWER: [CHUCKLES] I agree with you.

All right, you
NORMAN MAILER: You can raise an argument that it was beautiful. And *the Twin Towers were*
they were in certain lights. And it
certainly was beautiful at certain angles. But I had always had this —

[UNINTEL] And so in the course of this interview, I said to the young lady
who was interviewing me — she said, do you think the ruins are more eloquent
than...? And I said, yes. *there were* 'Cause there *there were* had been the most fabulous photographs
taken already of the ruins, and it was as if — and the ruins looked Gothic.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly. Exactly.

NORMAN MAILER: They had — they spoke of deeper things than the
building itself.

INTERVIEWER: You know what it reminded me of was pictures I'd seen as
a boy of the ruins of Canterbury Cathedral after the *Nazis* [UNINTEL] bombed it.

NORMAN MAILER: Yeah. It had that quality, yes. And it was as if — if you
remember, there was a rather interesting bit of — *yes, there had been*
burst into — how to call it? There were
— some Gothic arches at the bottom of the Twin Towers over part of the
entranceway, and that remained.

INTERVIEWER: They were like hands. They were like the fingers and

INTERVIEWER: It was like one of the great triumphal arches of Rome. It was the declaration to the world at how powerful and rich – and there was sort of an imperial arrogance to it. And this is what I would like to speak to, just in terms of the nature of people. One of the things that surprised me, and did surprise me after that event in the city of New York, where the police had been vilified, particularly in minority communities – where a lot of the normal tension in New York, you could feel it building up in New York, right? – it was all over, it was finished. And suddenly we saw firemen and policemen in a very different light.

But also, I was down there, I went down to the morgue, I went down and directed traffic for two nights 'cause the lights weren't working. There were all sorts of things you did. And people were standing there holding these Xeroxed pieces of paper like this, with photographs of their brother, their son, or their lover, saying, have you seen him? All right.

What I was struck by was two things. Was the immense fragility and neediness of the human person. How terribly fragile we are, right? And that the attack on the World Trade Center because of our fragility, was a very profound affront to my sense of my humanity. And to this day, to ask you – if we could go back to where we started this, 'cause I still don't understand – and I think it's the great question that Americans have. To this day, even after all you've told me, I still do not understand how we – I'm talking about those people who worked in that building and those firemen – what we could possibly have done that would've motivated someone to plan for three years to do this to us. That's the –

53 ↓ NORMAN MAILER: [OVERLAPPING] There was absolutely no concern. It isn't a matter of, oh, these are awful people and I'm going to wipe them out. That wasn't in the mind of the terrorists. In the mind of the terrorists is, what

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~~INTRODUCTION~~1

*South
when you
made these
connections
and the fact
to Virginia
No need to
relax
it
to
me*

DOTSON RADER: I was at home in my apartment on East 85th Street in Manhattan when the first of the Twin Towers was hit by one of the planes. But at the time I didn't know it had happened. Later that morning I tried to make a phone call and my phone was dead. So I got dressed and went outside. I live four blocks from Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor. None of the pay phones on the street worked. People were wandering oddly about, sort of dazed, as if kind of lost. It was very strange. I started walking downtown - it was a bright, almost hot day in New York. I was supposed to have lunch with a friend at 57th Street and I was walking down Third Avenue to meet him at the restaurant. When I reached 64th Street, I noticed this huge, bubbling cloud in the sky above Manhattan south of me. The rest of the sky was blue and clear. I didn't know what it was. And then looking down Third Avenue, six or seven blocks away, as far as I could see, I suddenly noticed a vast throng of people, a flood of humanity, like a slow wave rolling north up the avenue. Many of them were men in white shirts. They were the office workers from Wall Street fleeing the disaster. This quiet mass of people, tens of thousands, was walking up the island like a funeral procession and turning at 57th Street and then moving as one towards the 59th Street Bridge to cross over out of the island. And I thought, "Jesus! Is this Christ's Second Coming?" Because they were in white, and they looked stunned, and they were speaking in whispers like kids in church, I

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thought it was the Rapture, and Jesus was calling his saints home, and I'm being left behind. That was my initial feeling.

NORMAN MAILER: Wouldn't that be it? Jesus has come and everybody has gone to meet him by crossing the bridge from Manhattan to Queens. That does capture my pessimism concerning cosmic matters. [LAUGHTER]

DOTSON RADER: Okay. Where were you on September 11? How did you learn about the terrorist attacks, and what was your initial reaction?

NORMAN MAILER: I was in my house up here in Provincetown. I remember a phone call telling me to turn on the TV. While I was watching I called my ^{youngest} daughter, Maggie. I have an apartment in Brooklyn Heights, and she was staying there with a friend. You can see lower Manhattan and the Twin Towers from that apartment. Our windows look across the East River. So, Maggie had witnessed the first attack and was terribly affected by it. Then while on the phone, the second plane hit the other Twin Tower building. I'm still watching on TV. In Brooklyn, Maggie and her friend are both seeing it through the window as well as viewing it on TV. That was a considerable shock. Why? Because the one thing TV always promises us is that, deep down, what we see on television is not real. It's why there's always that subtle numbness to TV. The most astonishing events, even terrifying events nonetheless have a touch of nonexistence when on the tube. They don't terrify us. We see something that's hideous but we're not shocked proportionally. It's why we can watch anything on TV.

Now, there are exceptions. The shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald was one; the second plane striking the second Twin Tower; the collapse of the Towers. TV at that

by Jack Ruby

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moment was no longer a coat of insulation between us and the horrific. When broken, the impact is enormous.

DOTSON RADER: What struck me, what I'll never forget, is the silence. Everyone was just silent. Or if they spoke they whispered. It was like everyone was at a funeral. And this went on for hours and hours. Occasionally the silence was broken by an ambulance or police siren. And what I'd never seen in New York before—military jets started flying over the island, because they started closing Manhattan down. The military started showing up in the streets. I thought to myself, what in God's name is happening?

2.

What in God's name was happening? It is one thing to hear a mighty explosion.

It is another to recognize some time after the event that one has been deafened by it.

The US was going through an identity crisis. Questions about our nature as ^{a country} ~~Americans~~ were being asked that most good American men and women had never posed to themselves before. Questions such as: Why are we so hated? How could anyone resent us that much? We do no evil. We believe in goodness and freedom. Who are we, then? Are we not what we think we are? More pressing—who are "they?" What does it all mean?

Simple questions. Blank as white and empty pages. We were going through an identity crisis and that is an incomparable experience. The ego has been disrupted. It has been preempted. Most of us look to command an ego that will keep us reasonably efficient while carrying out our personal projects. We see ourselves as husbands or wives, as brave or prudent, reliable or decent or—certain egos may depend on the right

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to excuse themselves—as flighty, or in search of friendship which, once found, will take care of all else.

In that sense it's firm
It hardly matters what kind of notion the ego attaches to itself. That, from the need of the ego, is less important than the ongoing expectation that the notion will rest reasonably stable. Upon that depends our identity, that firm seat which offers the psyche ^{an} ~~a viable~~ everyday working notion of who we are (good-looking or good-looking enough—whatever serves.)

An identity crisis builds slowly, or it can land like a thunderclap, but the effect is unmistakable. *can after declaration*
One ~~no longer has a firm notion~~ of who one is. The seat upon which the ego depends has been *slipped* ~~taken out~~ from under. The psyche is in *disarray* ~~disarray~~. The simplest questions become difficult to answer.

A mass identity crisis for all of America descended upon us after 9/11, and our response was wholly comprehensible. We were plunged into a fever of patriotism. If our long-term comfortable and complacent sense that America was just the greatest country ever, had been brought into doubt, the instinctive reflex was to reaffirm ourselves. We had to overcome the identity crisis—hell, overpower it, wave a flag.

We had had a faith. The ship of the United States was impregnable and had been on a great course. We were steering ourselves into a great future. All of a sudden, not to be able to feel like that was equal to seeing oneself as a traitor to the grand design. So, we gathered around George W. Bush. That he had not been elected by a majority even became a species of new strength for him. *transient* *fresh*
The ~~new~~ still-forming national identity could not for a moment contemplate the fact that maybe Bush should not even be in the White House. Why? Because now the country had to be saved. A horror had come upon us—

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there were people on earth so eager to destroy us that they were ready to immolate themselves. That went right to the Biblical root. Samson had pulled down the pillars of the Temple. Now, there were all these Muslim Samsons. A ripple went through the country, a determining wind. In its wake, flags rippled everywhere. Nearly everyone in America was waving a flag.

For a few of us, this great indiscriminate wave of patriotism was not a joy to behold. "Patriotism," after all, "is the last refuge of a scoundrel." So said H.L. Mencken, or was it Samuel Johnson? One could argue over the source, but not the sentiment.

3.

NORMAN MAILER: We had a small parade in Provincetown on the Fourth of July, 2002. A rather nice looking, pleasant fellow -- he looked to me like a young liberal lawyer -- came up and smiled and handed me a small American flag. And I looked at him and just shook my head no. And he walked on. It wasn't an episode in any way. He came over with a half smile and walked away with a half smile. But I was furious at myself afterwards for not saying, "You don't have to wave a flag to be a patriot." By July, 2002, it bothered me a good deal. Free-floating patriotism seemed like a direct measure of our free-floating anxiety.

Take the British for contrast. The British have a love of their country that is profound. They can revile it, tell dirty stories about it, give you dish on all the imperfects who are leading the country. But deep down, their patriotism is deep. In America it's as if we're playing musical chairs, and don't get caught without a flag or you're out of the game. Why do we need all this reaffirmation? It's as if we're a three hundred pound man.

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who's seven feet tall, superbly shaped, absolutely powerful, and yet every three minutes he's got to reaffirm the fact that his arm pits have a wonderful odor. We don't need compulsive, self-serving patriotism. It's odious. When you have a great country it's your duty to be critical of it so it can become even greater. But culturally, emotionally we are growing more arrogant, more vain. We're not only losing a sense of the beauty of democracy, but also of its peril.

Democracy is built upon a notion that is exquisite and dangerous. It virtually states that if the will of the populace is freely expressed, more good than bad will result. When America began, it was the first time in the history of civilization that a nation dared to make an enormous bet founded on this daring notion—that there is more good than bad in people. Until then the prevailing assumption had been that the powers at the top knew best—people were no good and ~~we~~ had to be controlled. Now, we have to keep reminding ourselves that just because we've been a great democracy doesn't guarantee we're going to continue to be one. Democracy is existential. It changes. It changes all the time. That's one reason why I detest this totally promiscuous patriotism. You don't take democracy for granted. It is always in peril. We all know that any man or woman can go from being a relatively good person to a bad one. We can all become corrupted, or embittered. We can be swallowed by our miseries in life, become weary, give up. The fact that we've been a great democracy doesn't mean we will continue to be one. ^{there is a} And the ~~peril~~ is in totally promiscuous patriotism. Wave a little flag and become a good person? Ugly. You don't take a democracy for granted. You take a monarchy for granted, or a fascist state. You have to. That's the given. But a democracy changes all the time.

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The fear that waved the flag in every hand was our nightmare of terrorism. Nightmares tell us that life is absurd, unreasonable, unjust, warped, crazy, and ridiculously dangerous. Terrorism suggests that your death will have no relation to your life—as if ^{your} death will also produce an identity crisis—you are not who you think you are, not even in death, especially not in death.

Implicit in our attitude toward ^{our own end} death is that there is a logic within it for most of ^{us} ~~us~~. We spend ~~a part of~~ our lives searching for that logic. We live in a certain manner, we act out some of our virtues and vices, we restrain others. From the sum of all those actions and abstentions will come our final disease. That is our assumption at least—for most of us. It can even be seen as a logical conclusion. We pay with our bodies for the sins and excesses of our mind and heart. It is almost as if we want it that way. Our psyches are jarred, even tortured, by absurdity, and confirmed, ~~and~~ sometimes soothed, ^{even,} by a reasonable recognition of consequence.

Terrorism, however, shatters ~~our sense of~~ this equation. The comprehension of our death that we have worked to obtain, is lost. So, ^{we} ~~A~~ hate it. It reduces our ability to find meaning in our lives.

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NORMAN MAILER: I hate terrorism, I loathe it. Since I believe in reincarnation, I think the character of your death is tremendously important to you. One wants to be able to meet one's death with a certain seriousness. To me, it is horrible to be killed without warning. Because you can't prepare yourself in any last way for your next existence. . So your death contributes to absurdity. Terrorism's ultimate tendency is to make life absurd.

When I consider the nearly three thousand people who died in the Twin Towers disaster, it's not the ones who were good fathers, and good mothers, and good daughters, good brothers, and good husbands or sons that I mourn most. It's the ones who came from families that were less happy. When a good family member dies, there's a tenderness and a sorrow that can restore life to those who are left behind. But when someone dies who's half loved and half hated by his own family, whose children, for example, are always trying to get closer to that man or to that woman and don't quite succeed, then the after-effect is obsessive. Those are the ones who are hurt the most. I won't call them dysfunctional families, but it's into the less successful families that terrorism bites most deeply. Because there is that terrible woe that one can't speak to the dead parent, or the dead son or daughter, or dead mate, one can't set things right anymore. One was planning to, one was hoping to, and now it's lost forever. That makes it profoundly obsessive.

DOTSON RADER: Would you define terrorism as wickedness, as an evil?

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NORMAN MAILER: To me there's a great difference between doing evil and being wicked. I don't use the words interchangeably. People who are wicked are always raising the ante without knowing quite what they're doing. Most of us are wicked to a good degree. Most of us who are game players or adventurous ⁽²⁾any way are wicked. We raise the ante all the time without knowing what the results might be. We're mischievous, if you will.

Evil, however, is to have a pretty good idea of the irreparable damage you're going to do, and then proceed to do it. In that sense, yes, terrorism is evil.

However, it's worth trying to understand terrorism in the context by which the terrorists see it. They feel they're gouging out an octopus that's looking to destroy their world. They feel virtuous. The individual terrorist might be violating every single rule in Islam, he might, for example, be a drug addict, or booze a lot, but at the end he still believes he will find redemption through immolation. He is one small shard in the spiritual wreckage of the world right now. After all, in America, there are a great many people on the right who are going around saying, let's kill all the Muslims, let's simplify the world. You think Islam has a special purchase on terrorism?

DOTSON RADER: What I think is that we are facing a war of civilizations between an Islamic cult of death...

NORMAN MAILER: Wait a minute. Cult of death? You're going too far. For every Muslim who believes in your cult of death, thousands don't. People who are ready to sacrifice their lives form a very special group. They don't need big numbers.

DOTSON RADER: But millions cheer them in the streets.

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NORMAN MAILER: Oh, it's easy to cheer. I can cheer athletes who score winning touchdowns when I don't know the first thing about them. I'm cheering for an idea—my team! That's one thing. It's another to shed your own blood. There's a gulf between the two. Many a Muslim who hates us is nowhere near to being a terrorist.

Still, so many of them do hate us.

DOTSON RADER: Okay, recognizing that, why? Why are we so hated?

NORMAN MAILER: To some degree it's envy. Some human emotions are obvious. But we're also hated for more intrusive reasons. Corporate capitalism does have this tendency to take over large parts of the economies of other countries. Often we are the next thing to cultural barbarians. We don't always pay attention to what we are trampling. What intensifies the anger is how often we are successful in these commercial invasions. You go into a McDonald's in Moscow and there are marble floors. The Russian equivalent of young corporate executives are phoning each other across the room on their cell phones. They're proud of that. I spoke once at Moscow State University to a class that was studying American literature. One of the students asked me, "Is there anything in our economy that compares to American economy?" I said, "Yes. Your McDonald's are better than ours." And they loved it. They were delighted. They had something they could do that was better than us. It was as if Brooklyn College was playing the University of Nebraska in football. The score had been one hundred to nothing, but then they kicked a field goal – it's now one hundred to three. And the Brooklyn College stands went crazy. So, by the same token, those are the people – and these are the young people in Moscow – who are reacting positively to American corporate culture.

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Now, think of all the other people in Russia who hate the very thought that not only were they bankrupted by the United States, not only were they betrayed by a Communism that many of them had believed in, but now on top of it they're being culturally invaded by these people with their money-grubbing notions of food. And worse, the young love it. The young are leaving them. So the hatred towards America intensifies.

Now take the West's cultural invasion into Islam. The Muslim reaction is that Islam is endangered by modern technology and corporate capitalism. They see everything in America as aiming to destroy the basis of Islam. The huge freedom given to women in American culture is seen as an outrage by orthodox Muslims. American TV they find licentious in the extreme. They feel all that Islam stands for is going to be eroded by American culture. So, to repeat. The core of the hatred of Muslims toward us is the fear that they're going to lose their own people to Western values. Maybe half the people in Muslim countries may want secretly to be free of Islam. And so the ones who retain the old religion become extreme in response. Many Muslims can put Christian fundamentalists to shame by the intensity of their belief. It's an interesting belief, after all.

There is one fascinating element in Islam, which is the idea that all Muslims are equal before God, a tremendous egalitarian concept. Like all organized religion, Islam ends up being the perversion of itself in practice. Just as in Christianity, compassion is supposed to be the greatest good, but its present exercise in the world seems to be a study in military power and greed. In Islam, no Muslim has the right to consider himself superior to another Muslim. What happens in reality is that you have oppressive societies

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run for the wealthy, with the poor getting less and less. Tremendous economic inequalities in many a Muslim society. And tyrannical people in the seats of power.

Now, of course, the Koran, like the Old and New Testaments, has something in it for everyone. You can run north, run south, blow east, you can blow west. But there have been numerous revolutions within Islam over the centuries to restore its original beliefs. There is no understanding of Islam until one recognizes that Muslims who are truly devoted feel they are in a direct relationship with God. Their Islamic culture is the most meaningful experience of their lives, and their culture is being infiltrated. They feel the kind of outrage toward us that, let's say, a good Catholic would know if a black mass were performed in his church.

DOTSON RADER: But if that's true, if that's what the motivation is about, then there's no fixing it.

NORMAN MAILER: There's no quick fix. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that this is a war between those who believe the advance of technology is the best solution for human ills and those who believe that we got off the track somewhere a century ago, two centuries ago, five centuries ago, and we've been going in the wrong direction ever since—that the purpose of human beings on earth is not to obtain more and more technological power, but to refine our souls. This is the deep divide that now goes on even with many Americans. You know, what does it profit me if I gain the entire world and lose my soul?

Now, I don't want to paint myself into a corner where I am defending Islam. I'm sure they have as many sons of bitches as we have, maybe more. They probably have more in that they suffer lousier living conditions and they're under more tension.

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Muslims also bear a huge sense of shame because they were a superior civilization around 1200, 1300 A.D., the most advanced culture then, and now they lag behind. There is a deep sense of failure among them. Think of those periods in your life when you felt you were a failure, and recall the bitterness, the anger, the disturbance. Multiply that by the followers of a faith, and that gives some sense of how bad it can get.

We in the West have this habit of looking for solutions. Part of the spirit of technology is to assume that there's always a solution to a problem, or something damn close to one. There may be no solution this time. This may be the beginning of an international cancer we cannot cure. What's in the mind of a cancer cell? *Doubtless, it's* ~~It's not unlikely~~ *that* the basic desire is to kill as many cells and invade as many organs as it can. So, too, the greater number of people that the terrorists can wipe out, the happier they're going to be. Before you feel too righteous and outraged, however, let me ask: Did Harry Truman shiver in his bed at the thought that a hundred thousand people had been killed in Hiroshima and another hundred thousand in Nagasaki two days later, or, was he proud that he had won the war?

6.

And, one could add, had won it by extraordinary means, never employed before. The explosion of the first atom bomb had an immensely greater effect upon human identity, world-wide human identity, than 9/11, yes, an order of magnitude more. We've never recovered from the knowledge that our earthly universe is chained to a bomb larger than human measure. So many of the roots of human history were pulled out by that bomb, and we have been paying the price ever since.

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NORMAN MAILER: Live in a technological environment long enough and you begin to feel as if your soul is frayed. A curious process has been going on in America for many years. You could term it the dumbing down of Americans, as if we have become cruder in certain ways as a reaction to a terribly uncomfortable time of coming to grips with technology, which is essentially antipathetic to the part of ourselves we love best – that creature who senses and can enjoy life. At this point in existence we're being asked to substitute power for pleasure.

Technology says to you, fellow, get it through your head, you're going to have a little less pleasure from now on, but much more power. That's technology's credo. And it opens a tendency for many of us to become narcissistic and power-driven. (And icy within.) To work in a technological environment, what do you have under your fingertips? Plastic. We all know plastic doesn't feel as good as wood, or skin. Even metal offers more to the touch, but the aim of technological society, ultimately, is to work everything over to plastic – woods, metals, flowers, food if they can do it, and indeed they've virtually accomplished that with the astronaut's nutrient packages.

Take commercial airplanes, for example. Getting on one is always a hellish experience. Not because you fear the plane is going to crash, but you are put into a totally

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plastic environment, you are hermetically sealed, you are engaged willy-nilly in the collective aura and psychic emissions of sixty, eighty strangers in a confined space.

DOTSON RADER: Even the air is fake.

NORMAN MAILER: Even the air is fake, yes. So it is a specifically unpleasant experience. And the airlines have been trying intermittently for the last fifty years to make the experience less unpleasant. The rest of the time they are looking to reduce amenities and squeeze out more money. Ah, the pangs of conscience, pro and con, within capitalism!

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(2)

PREFACE TO THE ADDRESS AT THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB

Last fall, I did another interview with Scott McConnell ^{and} on my old and ^{mightily} ~~highly~~ combative friend Taki Theodoropolous in their magazine The American Conservative.

It was in this interview titled "Why I Am a Left Conservative" that I came to grips with many of the thoughts that were to appear in the Commonwealth Club speech and, if truth be told, something like a third of that oration is taken almost directly from ^{thus} ~~that~~ second interview. (Such piracy is permissible, I would expect, when one is stealing from oneself.)