

Is Money Killing Art?

By Jerry Saltz

PLUS: The Artists Who Matter Now | Warhol's Twin Boys | The Coming Chelsea Shakeout

OCTOBER 15, 2007

**HOW EVEN
A LITTLE
MORE SLEEP
MAKES KIDS
SMARTER**

By Po Bronson

NEW YORK God, by Mailer

Introducing a radical new theology featuring a struggling Creator, a contemptuous Devil, and a war in which evil is winning.

*By Norman Mailer,
in conversation
with Michael Lennon*

\$3.99 (CANADA \$4.95)



OCTOBER 15, 2007

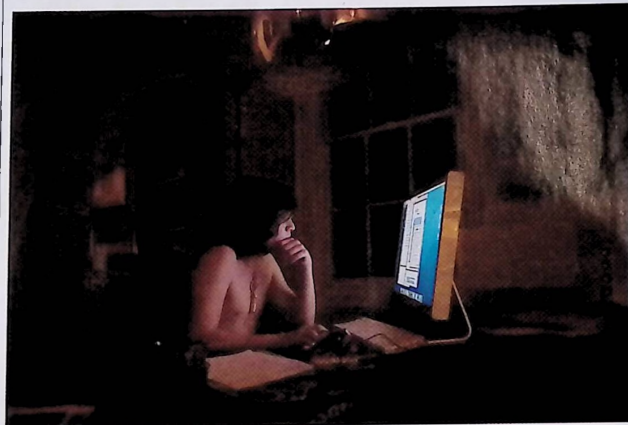
12 | Comments

15 | Intelligence

A Mets fan's survival guide ... Spitzer I.D.'s an ally ... A friendly, naked Tom Ford ... McMas in Soho

22 | The Imperial City

The national impulse to squelch disagreeable viewpoints has reached a crazy tipping point. Why we need to relax.
By Kurt Andersen



"A loss of one hour of sleep is equivalent to [the loss of] two years of cognitive maturation and development."

DR. AVI SADEH, IN "SNOOZE OR LOSE," PAGE 30

THE CULTURE PAGES

79 | The upbeat, creative existence of **Nico Muhly**, hipster composer
By Rebecca Milzoff

82 | Movies Great acting and directing (barely) lift **We Own the Night** out of the B-movie gutter

85 | TV **Angie Harmon** plays yet another TV detective, this time wearing sneakers (and still looking good)

86 | Classical The **New York Philharmonic** is too polished for its own good

87 | Theater Theresa Rebeck manages to make stamp collecting interesting in **Mauritius**

90 | Books **Alice Sebold's** new novel is a rewind of her first book—all wound, no healing

THE WEEK

94 | A guide to the city's best culture and restaurants

116 | Marketplace/Personals

136 | 'New York' Crossword By Maura B. Jacobson

On the Cover: Photo-illustration by Sean McCabe. Photograph by Adam Nadel/Polaris.

This page: Photograph by Martine Fougeron.

STRATEGIST

61 | Best Bets A full-size **folding scooter** and other ways to brighten your commute

64 | Storefront, including **Sales & Bargains** and a brief history of **Glitter**

66 | Look Book A chic former **I-banker**, enjoying her early retirement

68 | Food Laurent Tourondel embraces the local-ingredients craze at **BLT Market**. Plus: **Football bars** for every type of fan.

72 | Rumaging With New York's flea markets disappearing, where to find great old stuff

76 | Real Estate New Yorkers love their illicit **washers and dryers**.

24 The Rise of Mailerism

A dialogue with the American novelist about the religion he has embraced as his own, including God's role as the artist of creation and the ongoing war between God and the Devil, with reincarnation as the Creator's chief weapon and technology as the Devil's. By Norman Mailer with Michael Lennon

30 Snooze or Lose

Think twice before overscheduling your kids. New research reveals the cognitive toll that sleep deprivation takes on our overstimulated kids. And every fifteen minutes counts. By Po Bronson

The Art Rush

36 **Has Money Ruined Art?** Even in the midst of this soul-crushing moment, when art and commerce are often confused for one another, great work is being done. By Jerry Saltz. Plus: 40 **The Artists Who Still Matter** Living, working artists whose art changed art. 42 **Chelsea's Subprime Moment** Why overleveraging and high rent may force galleries to shutter. 44 **Sold!** Why Lisa Dennison left the Guggenheim for Sotheby's. 47 **Early Warning Signs** Look to London's October auctions for a preview of what could happen in New York. 48 **Young Masters** Ten promising artists to have emerged from the boom. 55 **Factory Boys** The Dupont twins recall their lurid romp through a binge-y New York heyday of money, sex, and art.

Van Cleef & Arpels

MAGIC ALHAMBRA COLLECTION

NEW YORK 744 FIFTH AVENUE 212-644-9500

www.vancleef-arpels.com 800-VCA-5797

NEW YORK

THE RISE OF MAILERISM

NORMAN MAILER'S GOD, NOT
SURPRISINGLY,

is a

GREAT ARTIST,

WHO CREATED MANKIND AND
ALL THE PLANTS AND OTHER ANIMALS,
AND COULD REINCARNATE THEM
ACCORDING TO HIS WHIM.
BUT HE WAS NOT ALL-POWERFUL.
BECAUSE THERE WAS THE DEVIL—AND

the DEVIL had TECHNOLOGY.

And lately, the Devil seems to be winning...

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN NORMAN MAILER AND MICHAEL LENNON



GOD



THE DEVIL

From *On God*, by Norman
Mailer with Michael
Lennon. Copyright © 2007

by Norman Mailer.
Published by arrangement
with Random House

Publishing Group,
a division of Random
House, Inc.



IN A six-decade career, Norman Mailer has written thirteen novels, nineteen works of nonfiction, two poetry collections, and one play. He's directed four movies. He ran for mayor of New York, and in the living room of his Brooklyn Heights home, he built, in three weeks, with two friends, a vast Lego city, incorporating some 15,000 pieces, known as the city of the future, seeming to take as much pride in it as in any of his other creations. But even at 84, he has a vast ambition. And now he has created something like a religion. In a new book, *On God*, a dialogue with one of his literary executors, Michael Lennon, an emeritus professor at Wilkes University, he lays out his personal vision of what the universe's higher truths might look like, if we were in a position to know them. But his theology is not theoretical to him. After eight decades, it is what he believes. He expects no adherents, and does not profess to be a prophet, but he has worked to forge his beliefs into a coherent catechism.

Mailer's deity is much like Mailer. He or she is an artist—with the stipulation that God is the greatest artist—concerned most particularly with the human soul, but with much else besides. God takes great pleasure in his creations. God is constantly experimenting, and highly fallible. God is far from all-powerful, but is learning along with us. God is in constant struggle with his own fallibility, and also with evil—with the devil—and is not certain whether good will triumph in the end. We are God's creations, but we are not at all times part of his plan—God may not even be cognizant of all that we do. And if God needs our love, the question Mailer insists has to be answered is, Why?

Like Emerson, Mailer borrows from countless other traditions, discarding their husks, or rewrites them. (Mailer allows that Jesus may very well have been the son of God, but thinks that his crucifixion and resurrection must have been a mistake and the mistake's crude fix.) In place of heaven (his hell seems like a celestial DMV), Mailer posits a system of reincarnation retooled from the Indian religions. Karmic factors certainly play

a role, but God's creative interests, as well as his needs in his struggle with the devil, are more important. Not only bodies, but souls, too, can be eliminated for various reasons—sometimes they're tired, sometimes simply because they're no longer interesting to God. Evolution is God's studio. Some of his creations work, and some need improvement—Mailer believes in a highly modified version of Intelligent Design.

Mailer's devil is borrowed partly from Milton—very possibly a fallen angel who, Mailer posits, may find God incompetent. The devil's principal weapon is technology, which was of course a driving force of the twentieth century—Mailer's century. Mailer believes that the devil aspires to create a mechanized world, where souls are increasingly interchangeable. Mailer even questions the value of quotidian inventions, like plastic or the flush toilet, believing that they may have insulated people from the truth of their existence.

In another sense, *On God* is Mailer's own *non serviam*, his disavowal of organized religion. He allows that the Ten Commandments are useful in most cases, but views any slavish following of God's rules as an abdication of personal responsibility. His own ethic consists of divining right action amid the confusion of the world—obviously, many mistakes are made. Courage amid uncertainty is, as always, Mailer's highest virtue.

The tragedy of the twentieth century is embedded in Mailer's new theology. The Holocaust—enabled as it was by technology—along with the nuclear bomb were for Mailer obviously the work of the devil. They fouled up the mechanics of reincarnation, confusing God, devaluing all souls.

Mailer understands the vanity many will see in this project—God the novelist, the Universe as mirror of self. But he's lived with critics his entire career.

As he writes in his introduction, "the conviction grew that I had a right to believe in the God I could visualize."

MICHAEL LENNON: Let's start at the beginning, with your views on God.

MAILER: Much of the world's present-day cosmology is based on such works of revelation as the Old and New Testament, or the Koran, but for me, revelation is itself the question mark—not God's word, but ours. I confess that I have no attachment to organized religion. I see God, rather, as a Creator, as the greatest artist. I see human beings as His most developed artworks. I also see animals as His artworks. When I think of evolution, what stands out most is the drama that went on in God as an artist. Successes were also marred by failures. I think of all the errors He made in evolution as well as of the successes. In marine life, for example, some fish have hideous eyes—they protrude from the head in tubes many inches long. Think of all those animals of the past with their peculiar ugliness, their misshapen bodies, worm life, frog life, vermin life, that myriad of insects—so many unsus-

cessful experiments. These were also modes the Artist was trying—this great artist, this divine artist—to express something incredible, and it was not, for certain, an easy process. Sometimes a young artist has to make large errors before he or she can go further.

I can hear the obvious rejoinder: "There's Norman Mailer, an artist of dubious high rank looking to give himself honor, nobility, and importance by speaking of God as an artist." I'm perfectly aware that that accusation is there to be brought in. But whether my motive is pure or impure, this will be the argument I advance: God is an artist. And like an artist, God has successes, God has failures.

Evil, you've said more than once, is growing in power—especially in the last hundred years. Yes.

Do you think there was ever a time in the past, a golden age, when good was in the ascendancy? Let's say that in my lifetime, certain things have gotten better and other things have grown worse, so much so that latter-day events would stagger the imagination of the nineteenth century. If, for example, the flush toilet is an improvement in existence, and if the automobile is an improvement, if technological progress is an improvement, then look at the price that was paid. It's not too hard to argue that the gulags, the concentration camps, the atom bomb, came out of technological improvement. For the average person in the average developed country, life, if seen in terms of comfort, is better than it was in the middle of the nineteenth century, but by the measure of our human development as ethical, spiritual, responsible, and creative human beings, it may be worse. Reason, ultimately, looks to strip us of the notion that there is a Creator. The moment you have a society built on reason alone, then individual power begins to substitute for the concept of a Creator.

Progressivism has yet to prove itself. We live in a more diffuse state of general anxiety than people did in 1900. I don't want to be a bore about this, but nuclear warfare also came along. The argument: Did we really improve anything spiritually? For instance, were people better off when they had to squat over a hole in the ground and so could smell their own product? Maybe they were a little closer to themselves than they are now.

Are you ready to talk about the Devil?

My notion of the Devil depends to a good degree on Milton. I think he fashioned a wonderful approximation to what the likelihood might be. In one way or another, there was a profound argument between God and some very high angels—or between God and God—and the result was finally that one god won, the

God we speak of as our Creator. God won, but it was a Pyrrhic victory, because Lucifer, if you will, also became well installed. And this war has gone on ever since, gone on in us.

I would guess that evolution was tampered with, if not actually blindsided on occasion, by the Devil. I think there were false trips that God engaged in because the Devil deluded Him. And it isn't that God is only fighting the Devil. He's also debating within Himself or Herself what the next proper course might be.

My understanding is that God and the Devil are often present in our

actions. When we work with great energy it's because our best motive and our worst motive—or, to put it another way, God and the Devil—are equally engaged in the outcome and so, for a period, working within us. There can be collaboration between opposites, as well as war. This collaboration can consist of certain agreements—"The rules of war will be..." And of course, the rules can be broken. The Devil can betray God. Once in a while, God also breaks the rules—with a miracle. But my argument is that when we act with great energy, it is because God and the Devil have the same interest in the outcome. (Their differences will be settled later.) Whereas when we work with little energy, it's because they are not only at odds but are countermanning each other's impact upon us.

What would be an indication that this suggested collaboration between God and the Devil is not working well?

Let's not emphasize "collaboration." I've spoken of it as "the accepted rules of the game." Take an average contest in professional football. Two teams fight each other on the field with skill and bestiality, each side laboring to win. Nonetheless, a whole set of laws also prevails. After they tackle a guy, they don't kick him in the head. I'm saying that in order to keep it flowing, God and the Devil have certain understandings with each other. When there is

great energy available to us, then I expect They are in a temporary collaboration.

But generally speaking, we are mired in good and evil—mired because we spend most of our time in trade-offs and in the exhaustion of our efforts. One part of us wants to do something to which the other part is opposed. Very often within us, good fights an offensive battle against evil. We know that. The Christian churches are built on that: Fight the evil in your soul.

Saint Michael the Archangel.

Yes. But my argument is that it has become a contest among three protagonists. It isn't that we are passive onlookers while God and the Devil wage a war within us. We are the third force and don't always know which side we are on in any given moment, or whether on another occasion we are independent of both.

If you'll accept my notion that technology may be the most advanced, extreme, and brilliant creation of the Devil—for technology, of course, does incredible things—then you get a real sense of why some people would be more leagued with the Devil than devoted to God. Half the human universe must by now be on the side of technology.

The Manichaeans did see God and the Devil as brothers who fight until the end of time, but at the end good will defeat evil. Is that where you depart from the Manichaeans?

Absolutely. We don't know the end—we could end with the failure of the good. Because if the good is guaranteed to win at the end, then we are engaged in a wrestling match, a fixed one. If goodness is assured an ultimate victory over evil, we are in a comedy, and I must say it is an ugly farce, considering how we suffer in the course of the contest.

What do you mean when you call yourself an existentialist?

I mean that the purpose of existence is not known. God may often dwell in states of bewilderment. That makes more sense to me than that God knows clearly what He or She is doing and tells us how to do it. If that is the case, we are no more than extras in a huge opera.

The Fundamentalists, beneath everything else, feel the same fears that existential thinkers suffer—that the whole thing can come to an end. Fundamentalists look to alleviate that fear by way of what I would call their desperate belief that it's "God's will" and at the end they will be transported to Heaven. Well, once again, this supposes that God is All-Good and All-Powerful and will carry the righteous right up

there. Of course, that offers nothing to the idiocies of human history, particularly that the more we develop as humans, the worse we are able to treat one another. Why? Because we now have the power to destroy one another at higher, more unfeeling levels.

There's not a vision of Heaven in your belief system. And without such a vision it's unlikely to draw many adherents.

I'm not trying to found a religion. I think if these ideas of mine have any value, a great deal of time will go by before there are any adherents. First of all, however, I believe that our childlike notion of Heaven has to be relinquished.

But not Hell?

I don't believe in Hell as eternal punishment. Rather, Hell has dimensions. Some parts of it are critically worse than others. My notion remains that the only Heaven and Hell we ever receive—the only judgment that comes to us—is by way of reincarnation. To wit, as a reward we can be given a better possibility in our next life. Or we can be born into a worse one, if that is what we deserve. I'm not interested in absolute moral judgments, eternal Heaven, eternal Hell—to the contrary. Just think of what it means to be a good man or a bad one. What, after all, is the measure of difference? The good guy may be 65 percent good and 35 percent bad—that's a very good guy. The argument I would advance is that Heaven and Hell make no sense if the majority of humans are a complex mixture of good and evil. There's no reason to receive a reward if you're 57 percent good and 43 percent evil. Why sit around forever in an elevated version of Club Med?

The point to all my suppositions is that God still has an unfulfilled vision and wishes to do more. So I would suppose that we receive instead a partial reward or partial punishment, and it is meted out to us in our reincarnation. How better to account for the ongoing feeling of conscience that we all seem to have? Conscience is there for good cause; conscience is vital—if

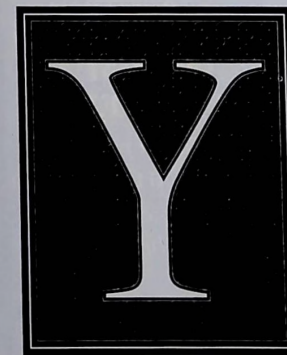
for nothing else, it's there because it gives us a clue to what is likely to be our next future. Will we be reborn in a situation that offers more opportunities? Or, for punishment, will there be fewer good chances? Will our next life be easier or more painful?

You did remark that not all souls are recycled.

I believe the soul is a gift from God. Of course, you can abuse any living gift. Any number of people may end by saying, "All I want is a little peace. Let me sleep forever." They may be given just that.



"It isn't that we are passive onlookers while
GOD AND THE DEVIL WAGE A WAR BETWEEN US.
We are
THE THIRD FORCE,
and don't always know which side we're on."



So such a termination is not necessarily a function of evil...

Not necessarily of evil—but it is giving up. If the complications of life and the exhaustion of contending with all the little gods and devils in yourself burn you out, there can come a point where the soul loses its desire to exist. You see, reincarnation is a gamble. You could do worse the next time. Fear of an even more painful existence may convince you to throw in your hand. Or God could so decide for you. On the other hand, I think there are humans who choose to commit physical suicide because they feel that if they don't their souls will die before their bodies. Gary Gilmore was a perfect example. Why did he so desire to be executed? Because he expected his soul would expire in prison, and he was a great believer in the value of his own ongoing soul.

Are new souls being created?

Yes, I would expect God creates new spiritual lives. God may say, "I've been reconsidering the terrible propensities of the Devil. Let us see if we can conceive of a soul who will be able to war with the Devil a little more effectively, a new soul who will have many of the qualities of the Devil but can transmute them, transform them, elevate our sense of spirit even in the dirtiest, ugliest, foulest places. God may have decided that an iota of goodness in an evil soul can be immensely important.

You hardly speak of the casualties in this war between God and the Devil.

While the soul is presumably a separate being from the body, I would suppose that the soul also has its period of existence. A particular soul might expire after a single earthly existence, another could be reincarnated a number of times, but doubtless there's a limit. Yes, souls do expire, I must suppose. Just as God may finally expire, or the Devil, indeed. There are forces out there who wouldn't mind seeing the collapse of one, the other, or both. We may be speaking of a force that consists of the drive to nothingness. Nothingness may be a huge power out in the great cosmic universe. It may desire the extinction of the universe.

Let's keep going on reincarnation. I feel that you have more to say on that.

Yes. One matter we've not gotten into is my supposition that the atom bomb, the concentration camps, and the gulags were mighty efforts by the Devil to foul up reincarnation, to choke off the subtlety of the divine judgment within reincarnation. I hope I've suggested the delicate dispositions of God, the care with which the question is asked: "What shall I do with this soul?" That is at the core of reincarnation—delicate, responsible, artful, deliberate judgment. If the process is overloaded, it can break down.

What are the reasons—as far as you can surmise—that a soul is chosen for reincarnation? Does God or His aides choose to extinguish some hideous souls, or must the souls acquiesce, give up, and, in effect, commit eternal suicide, go out of existence?

I think certain people can lose the desire to keep their soul alive. They've suffered too much, one way or another. The soul is weary.

So certain souls expire; they are ready to.

Generally speaking, however, most souls are probably not willing to die that easily.

Can God execute a soul?

Why not? How not? God can create us, God can end us—which is part of the huge fear people have of God. God can terminate us. Absolutely. But God hates to give up on an interesting artistic possibility in a human. So let's say He might take very bad people and have them reincarnated. I would say God sees wonderful potentialities in awful people. One of the reasons they were so awful was because they had large potentialities that became frustrated early and so turned into their opposites. Concerning this particular soul,

therefore, God wants to try again. Or, to the contrary, take the case of someone who is perfectly bland and pleasant, good and decent, yet God is not vitally interested. That soul has done about what it's going to do and is no longer interesting to the Lord's higher purpose. God might then decide, We can only reincarnate him or her in an animal. We have to see if that soul responds to a more arduous life. Or God may decide, Not worth repeating: Just as an artist can be ruthless, so can God when it comes to humans with mediocre lives.

*"I'm guessing
TECHNOLOGY IS
AN ARM
OF THE DEVIL.*

*Plastic is a perfect
WEAPON IN HIS ARMORY.*

*Living with it,
we are subtly sickened."*

When do you think God may have created the process?

It may have occurred only after God endowed a great many higher animals and humans with souls. He may then have decided, "I, as an artist, can improve on this Creation. Some could have turned out better if they had not lived their lives under grievous circumstances. Give them, therefore, another opportunity to exercise their free will. Maybe they will be wiser." It comes down to something basic. God's notion: Let's make the Creation better. The Devil's: Let's maim the Creation. I have, says the Devil, something in mind that will supplant and replace it.

What would the Devil want? Total destruction? Nihilism?

I suppose it could be an immensely technological universe where the need for existence—individual existence—and the concomitant need for soul would be less. That might be more to the Devil's taste: individual units functioning in relation to other individual units. Less spiritual. More mechanized. That seems to be the prevailing tendency in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—more and more interchangeable units, ready to serve a corporate machine. At the other end of it, you have the maniacal intensity of the most extreme Muslims, whose only feeling is that there's something so wrong with this approach that it all has to be destroyed, and don't ask questions.

I want to ask a question about Purgatory. Do you feel some sympathy for that idea?

Some—and a fair portion of uneasiness. I will say that I expect there may be some sizable difficulties present after death, a universal Hell, perhaps, of waiting that we may all have to go through before we are born again—those of us who will be born again. Purgatory might sit there as a set of possibilities with many unhappy holding tanks. God may look at three quarters of us, say, "I don't want to make up my mind just yet," and drop us into slow Purgatory, so to speak.

Now, what the form of this Purgatory might be—whether it bears resemblance to a Palestinian refugee camp—I have no idea. One of the beliefs I hold is that the Hereafter is less different than we assume. We may have the same frustrations and difficulties in the afterlife—overcrowding, for example, or even, conceivably, waste.

After the Holocaust, we were forced to recognize there was something absolutely murderous in our species—obviously, it was not just reserved for the Germans; there was something vastly destructive in

our nature. We received this knowledge over and over again, in Russia, in China, in Africa, in some of our own actions—indeed, in Vietnam. The point I want to make is that the Holocaust may have exacted a great price from God, even greater than from us. At the core of karma is the notion that it is composed of wise judgment. What if that is not always true? In the godly assessment of each life—in the reading of the soul, so to speak, that takes place after one dies—can it be that God sometimes says, "I'm too weary to think about this now"? If you believe in karma, as I do—believe not only in rebirth but in subtle divine judgment (hopefully it is subtle) concerning the manner in which you will be reborn—another part of me remains sardonic and expects that God may have His or Her occasional problem operating the mechanics of reincarnation. When reincarnation is flooded with a huge number of deaths that have no meaning—because they are abrupt, even near instantaneous,

without warning, and so leave the victims bereft of awareness at the moment of their death, then they enter reincarnation with less preparation within. I think the Holocaust ravaged many human entrances into death. Reincarnation was flooded with near-to-nameless dead.

Does your vision of the divided universe require courage to be the cardinal virtue?

I would rather go back to God's experience as He or She was creating the flora and fauna of existence, all those incredible biological experiments that went on over millions of years. Plus, most crucially, the percipience

gathered from the failures. Think of the excitement of God when the dinosaur came into being, the immense excitement that He had something pretty big and pretty formidable. Then it proved too big—badly designed. Yet what became obvious was that animals who had courage—or those plants that had a kind of odd integrity, if you will, in terms of their environment—seemed to do better for the most part than those who didn't. Of course, there are animals—we can see this directly—who had too much courage. This notion of balance underwriting courage is what God began to search for.

And God may have been developing along with evolution. Why must a god be independent of time? It makes sense for me to believe that God was in the slime from the beginning, and God was less in those days. God has grown with us. God has grown with evolution.

I know you've been thinking about Intelligent Design, and I have, too. But

(Continued on page 115)

