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GENERAL EDITOR
James J. Sosnoski

GUEST EDITOR
Paul Smith

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
R. L. Wadsworth Jr.

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James J. Sosnoski
The Society for Critical Exchange
P. O. Box 475
Oxford, Ohio 45056

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INTRODUCTION

PAUL SMITH

The essays in this issue of *Critical Exchange* are the papers given at SCE's two sessions at the 1984 MLA convention. The titles of the sessions were "Men in Feminism-I" and "Men in Feminism-II." The first session consisted in papers by myself, Stephen Heath and Andrew Ross; the second in responses by Alice Jardine, Elizabeth Weed, Judith Mayne and Peggy Kamuf.

The participants have not substantially edited their talks for CEx, so the papers offered here must be considered as drafts. There is a number of references throughout the issue to two published essays which it was not possible to reprint here: Stephen Heath's "Male Feminism" (*The Dalhousie Review*, vol.64, no.2) and my "A Question of Feminine Identity" (*Notebooks in Cultural Analysis*, vol.1). Quotations are also made from a response to the latter text: Alice Jardine's and Rosi Braidotti's "Corps Re'spondantes," which is not published. There are plans afoot to include these three texts, the essays in this issue, and some other work in a book-length collection about the relation of men to feminism.

The question of men's relation to feminism is scarcely a simple one, involving as it does a whole range of political and ethical issues; and it would be ridiculous to imagine that such a question is at all thoroughly dealt with through the present seven essays. However, it seems important that the question be broached and a dialogue begun. It was primarily in the hope of beginning a discussion that SCE sponsored these sessions and now publishes these inchoate papers. As always with SCE projects, the participants welcome commentary and response.

Paul Smith
Miami University

MEN IN FEMINISM: MEN & FEMINIST THEORY

PAUL SMITH

"Jesus as liberator calls for a renunciation and dissolution of this whole web of status relationships by which societies have defined privilege and unprivilege. He speaks especially to outcast women, not as representatives of the 'feminine,' but because they are at the bottom of this network of oppression. His ability to be liberator does not reside in his maleness, but, on the contrary, in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment."

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World*

"Men in Feminism:" the title for these two sessions, and for which I have to take some large part of responsibility, turns out to be at least provocative, perhaps offensive, at any rate troublesome for everyone involved. The provocation, the offense, the trouble that men are for feminism is no longer—at least, in the academy where most of us here reside—simply a matter of men's being the object or cause of feminism (men's fault, feminism's cause; men as the agents of that which feminism seeks to change). Men, some men, now—and perhaps by way of repeating an age-old habit—are entering feminism, actively penetrating it (whatever 'it' might be, either before or after this penetration) for a variety of motives and in a variety of modes, fashions. That penetration is often looked upon with suspicion; it can be taken to be yet another interruption, a more or less illegal act of breaking and entering, entering and breaking, for which those men must finally be held to account. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked by those men, with them, for them, is, to what extent is their irruption (penetration and interruption) justified; is it of any political use to feminism; and the related but I hope distinct question, to what extent is it wanted?

Within the academy (a feminism outside the academy is something I want to talk about, but for now, speaking from where we are, within the American academy) there seems now to be a material split, a breach between women's studies (its programmes and institutions) and feminist theory (its perhaps more marginal programmes and

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institutions). If it can be assumed for the moment—though people, I'm sure will have disagreements—that women's studies has by now been quite fully integrated into the institutional and disciplinary structures of the academy, then the area known as feminist theory becomes the vanguard of whatever political effect that academic feminism might aspire to. To say this is to reflect, I hope accurately, the sentiment of many feminist theorists.

It is, of course, not altogether clear that feminist theory is not itself being recuperated, institutionalised, disciplinised, in a similar manner. There are discernible within that area of academic activity networks of power, hierarchies and reputations, a whole politics amongst the women who are feminist theorists; these networks already (perhaps, 'always-already') become formally consonant with existing institutional apparatuses. Indeed, the set of relations involved there is perhaps only quantitatively different from what's already in place: qualitatively, things are rather similar.

This may, of course, be nothing more than an indication that feminist theory is just one strand, on block in the midst of many others which together embody the more general presence now of 'theory' in academic institutions. Feminist theory, however 'feminist' it may be, and howsoever 'feminist' is construed, does not exist outside the academy and, more specifically, is historically not separable from the 'theory' that has muscled its way into the humanities over the last ten or twenty years.

Theory, as feminist theory has taught us to know, is itself implicated fully into the phallocracy: it helps invent, legitimate and reproduce the male order. This is as much true by etymological definition (the sight, the clarity and the objectifying character of *theoria*) as it is pragmatically true (we can currently celebrate the presence of theorists in the universities, and we know that they're settling themselves ever more snugly into their institutional homes and enjoying the fruits of a certain tenure). And for overdetermined reasons, men still seem to be able to sing to that institutional tune as well as any parvenues.

But that's the point, according to the feminist theorist; that's why feminist theory is different from theory. It's exactly because theory is phallogentric that feminist theory can be effective. If, as theory tells us, women are taken by the male order to be the other, the very point of difference, women's theory is necessarily subversive of that order and thus of the very structures it works within. So, it is said, the aim of feminist theory's critique is to 'see' theory ('see,' as in a game of poker), and see theory change its spots.

If this is indeed the intendment of feminist theory, then men, biological men, are necessarily a problem. Men are in a sense the bearers or supports of the phallogentric tradition.

Yet feminist theory wants to indict the very structures which are said to erect masculinity and femininity. Feminist theory—broadly speaking—sees (through phallogentric theory) that male-centered social and psychical structures place biological men in such a way that they enforce those structures almost irremediably. But equally, the structures place women as the other, in a different relation, in a place which is not really a place—women always for those structures but never really in them. Feminist theory shows, then, that women are thus oppressed/hidden/repressed/marginalised by those structures but at the same time privileged to escape them or to be displaced by them.

I sketch out—crudely and in a way that's probably arguable—this essential paradox in order to ask a brace of questions. Can men understand this theoretical and academic position in feminist theory? And can they thence be of any political use to it?

In one sense, I think, they can certainly understand it. As the everyday practitioners of fetishism, they shouldn't be much put out of joint by this paradoxical view of women as being both there and not there, both for the upholding of the structures and also disavowed by them. Indeed, the position of men in relation to feminism which is described and recommended by Luce Irigaray (and to which Stephen Heath has attached himself in his essay, "Male Feminism")—the position of 'admirer'—seems to me to be almost an endorsement of fetishism. But the difference for the women who are feminist theorists is that it is now they who are describing women in this manner. Perhaps, after all, there's something which men can't understand—feminists fetishising women.

But serious joking aside, there's another, more prosaic sense in which men can (and, I think, do) understand this double ascription of women: that's insofar as it is exactly theoretical. The intellectual task of understanding, comprehending feminist theory is not a huge problem because feminist theory is situated within the array of post-structuralist discourses with which we are all now over-familiar. Feminist theory is thus understandable; it's understandable that it exists; one hopes to be understanding when it advances its claims. The problem, so far as I'm aware, is not one of understanding per se.

What exactly the problems are for men in feminism, and what problems feminist theorists have with men in feminism is not going to be easy to actually utter, here or anywhere else. But one factor

that needs to be considered, I think, is the question of the normative, even legalistic aspect of feminist theory itself and the concomitant culpability of the male breaker and enterer. The question—in any context—of who is allowed to say or do what, to whom and about whom is patently a legal question: it can come up only when any given discourse is forming or has formed a mode of pragmatic legislation, when it is legalising itself, and defining its outside, naming potential transgressors. Any discourse desires to be its own space, in a way; it needs to think itself as *sui generis*; it must exclude. Let me stress that I think this is the case with any discourse: it's not a question here of impugning feminist theory any more or less than Marxism, Reaganism, or any other discourse. Feminist theory has its exclusive mechanisms—it excludes particular people, establishes ways of checking credentials, controls a vocabulary, even excludes other feminist discourses. Here, as everywhere, the important thing for the transgressor to know is, not just the sentence, but the reason for the law's existence. For the greater good, or to advance and consolidate particular interests?

So far as men are concerned, then; so far as they, as supposed homomorphs to the systems which feminism challenges, irrupt into that discourse as it incipiently formalises itself; as they learn to understand it and follow its guidelines; what are they required to do? I've already suggested that men can understand feminist theory and that the problems are elsewhere. This was the message I myself received just recently. In response to an article I wrote, "A Question of Feminine Identity," Alice Jardine, who will speak in the second session, asked this in relation to men in feminist theory:

What is it that keeps them from speaking and writing of themselves, of their own positionality in the contemporary discursive field? I am not, of course, talking here about becoming "personal," just of knowing what they already know—that no one speaks or writes suspended between heaven and earth.

And she continues:

Most difficult of all is that these few men, our allies, have learned their lessons well. The actual content of their writing is rarely incorrect *per se*. It is almost as if they have learned a new vocabulary perfectly, but have not paid enough attention to syntax or intonation.

These comments—addressed to a certain context, to be sure, but of wider concern, nevertheless—these comments detained me for a long time in the writing of this paper; they still detain me. So, without necessarily becoming 'personal,' I'd like to talk a little about my own response to them.

It would be disingenuous of me to claim that my primary response is not rather defensive, a defensiveness which runs as a strand through any number of other moments of response—annoyed, resigned, argumentative, submissive, and so on—some of them more markedly typical 'masculine' traits than others. Generally, Alice's statements appeared to me as a familiar, albeit kindly example of the suspicions which women feminists will have of men feminists; thus they produce in me the overdetermined repetition of a fear—exactly, the fear of being excluded—and a desire to vindicate myself in relation to the demands of the other. Although these comments speak of me and other men as allies, we're clearly not quite the right allies, or not able to do quite the right thing. Even the fact that I'm perceived as understanding feminist theory (I've learned my lessons well) is "difficult" for this female feminist because, finally, I do not have the right intonation and syntax. I don't have the native accent; I'm an alien. I can, of course, be an alien only in a system that perceives itself as having some definitional integrity which can be legally enforced or embodied as a correctness of activity or speech.

It may well be that I'm mistaking Alice's comments: I'm perhaps too quickly assuming that they arise from a sense of the integrity of feminist discourse which is similar to a kind of nationalism. This strictly political analogy might constitute the 'incorrect' reading. Perhaps, rather, these comments are making a more theoretical reference—more to my inability to speak authentically the mother tongue, the specificity of which is theoretically more available to women than to men. Perhaps it's being suggested that males who would be feminist need to undertake to write and speak as if they were women, to explore their relationship to the imaginary, to mimic the feminist theoretical effort of undermining the male economy by deploying the very excess which that economy has neglected.

To take up that question for a moment: if feminist theory is really claiming that a man speaking or writing on feminism cannot or simply does not include his body, I'd want to ask what are the signs that are missing? What would a male writing his imaginary actually produce? I am, I must confess, stumped by that question. The only answers at which I could guess seem unlikely to be 'correct.'

On the one hand, we men might think that the writing of our imaginary would be exactly a pornography, the manifestation of our imaginary relation to the maternal body and nothing so much as a true ambivalence, or a more resilient fetishism. If the structures in which we are caught, in which our egos are constructed, are accurately described by theory and by feminist theory, what is our imaginary but a pornographic defense against the mother's body? Granted that it's certainly the case, as Irigaray and many others have told us, that we still have everything to say about our own sexuality, the fight against our own fetishism cannot be conducted by simply exhibiting it, putting it out as an exhibit for the court. If we are even to tell feminism and the world, in answer to Ruby Rich's question, why it is that we like pornography so much, we're not going to do that just by producing it.

On the other hand, there's another answer, mooted from time to time in French feminist work (though not often by American feminists). That is: men could write like a Genet, a Klossowski, a Jabès, a Joyce, a Blanchot, or like any other of the male authors whom feminist theory has at different moments authorised. Yet we know into what theoretical impasses the champions of those supposedly 'perverse' writers have been led: an ahistorical and often irresponsible advancing of the claims of the avant-garde; the positing of some unspecified or inexplicable agency of sexual-revolutionary genius in such writers; great pseudo-biological schemas of innate bisexuality, and so on.

Or, similarly, as men we could be writing like a Roland Barthes, consistently undermining ourselves, marginalising ourselves, de-privileging ourselves—only to land up like Barthes with an express loathing for sexual politics, or even for politics itself.

These are some of the impossible, incorrect, incriminating answers to some of the questions which emerge for a man (this man, at any rate) in trying to think through a relation to feminist theory—to think through, however crudely, the problems which seem to be the material effects of feminist theory for a man. In that thinking, I in fact always feel exactly the impossibility of saying anything properly correct. There is always the looming probability of being incriminated, the continual likelihood of appearing provocative, offensive, troublesome. All these feelings, fears, are in one sense the result of engaging with a discourse whose laws I can never quite obey. I understand that such a discourse has every reason not to take me seriously, not to take me in; but as yet it has not actually passed the proper legislation. Men still constitute a shadowy,

unlegislable area for feminist theory.

So long as this is still the case, so long as the edict has not been passed, it seems to me that it could be considered useful to have men in feminism, men who are still, or as yet, neither outlaws or in-laws. Not those white, academic "authoritative men" who Gayatri Spivak guesses might subject feminist work to correction as a result of their essentially male or phallocratic urges. Nor men who might simply learn the skills and techniques, the competence, of feminist approaches in a kind of benevolent mimicry. Nor, certainly those who would rival women in obeying the true word of feminism, or even translating what Elaine Showalter calls feminism's "findings...into the warp of their obscure critical languages."

Rather, within the context of feminist theory, men might do something like the same thing as women do/did within theory itself: they can be there (already are there sometimes) to help: to subvert, unsettle and undermine the (seemingly rather fast to settle) laws of that discourse. To undermine not, of course, feminism itself, but only a process of settling, solidifying. This they might do purely by virtue of existing in it as a difference. They might act as a reminder to feminist theory of the material fact of difference, the real consequences of which is feminism's material.

Difference cannot be continually deferred; nor can it be dealt with purely at a textual and theoretical level. Rather, difference is constitutive of social life; it is real and has real effects; it is not purely academic; it is not going to be altered by the establishing of a watertight set of discursive parameters. In other words, men can perhaps help to forestall the merely academic institutionalisation of feminism. They may be able to take an interrogative but sympathetic role. From the point of their impossible—provocative, offensive, troublesome—position in feminism, they might help to keep in view the referent which most of our current theory is all too eager to defer.

That referent is quite simply a political struggle of which feminism, however understood, can be only one part. It may well be that the limit of men's being in feminist theory is also the limit of feminist theory itself. It seems to me that when feminist theory turns to confront or to construct its public sphere, or when it has had done with codifying itself in the contested but limited sphere of the academic, that is the point where we can really talk about alliances between feminists and men, between people engaged in a political struggle which is carried out on many fronts. I'm far from sympathising with the kind of sentiment that Terry Eagleton expressed very recently: that theory and the oppressed are natural

allies (since "the truth is that...theory has always been more acceptable to the ruled than the rulers"). In American academia, theory--feminist or not--is by and large ingrown, with no public sphere to which to attach itself or through which to be effective. The heat generated in the kitchen around the question of men in feminism does seem to me an indication of (even a compensation for) a rather narrowly efficacious political project.

Paul Smith
Miami University

STEPHEN HEATH

Thinking about this MLA session I wrote an essay entitled 'Male Feminism.'¹ Once written and sent out to the other participants, however, it became clear that it was not going to be possible for me to speak that essay here; its length alone would be prohibitive. The difficulty I had thus made for myself was only eased a few days ago when I received the paper that Paul Smith has just delivered, under the title, 'Men in Feminism: Men in Feminist Theory'. It seemed to me at once that that paper valuably raised a number of questions and that starting from it and then there was something I could try to say.²

One or two things struck me immediately in what Paul said, concerning feminist theory: Feminist theory, however "feminist" it may be, and however "feminist" is construed, does not exist outside the academy. And then: the intellectual task of understanding, comprehending feminist theory is not a huge problem because feminist theory is situated within the array of post-structuralist discourses with which we are now over-familiar. Reading those remarks, I remembered, apparently very different, Derrida a couple of years back beginning what I suppose is his most direct written engagement with feminism as follows:

We will therefore not leave time to come back to what is behind us, nor to look attentively. We will only take a glimpse. (In French to take a glimpse is to look into the spaces between things, *entre-voir*, that is, interview.)³

For Paul, and for us in this session, his responsibility, 'Men in Feminism' has a subtitle, 'Men in Feminist Theory', and the problem is the 'men and', not the 'feminist theory' which is known, understandable, ranged 'within the array of post-structuralist discourse with which we are now over-familiar', as such 'not a huge problem'. For Derrida, feminism seems not so clear--oddly enough given that he after all is the arch post-structuralist--but more a matter of spaces between things; and he is not going to look attentively, no array, 'only take a glimpse', '*entre-voir*'. That, of course, is the vocabulary of fetishism: the glimpse, the inter-entre view, the seen but not

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attentively, on the margin of disturbance. Freud's accounts of fetishism give us all the terms for this glimpsing-glancing seeing that does not stop to look, that turns away from the reality and leaves behind, off somewhere else. And, of course, fetishism was a major reference for Paul, but in a number of ways: from men as the 'everyday practitioners of fetishism' to 'feminists fetishising women' (but the question there is what is it that makes us need to see women, feminists liking women, talking about and finding terms for that, as fetishism?); and then also a fetishism of feminist theory which is seen so as to be not seen, perfectly framed in the academy outside of which it has no existence, perfectly understandable, no problem 'of understanding *per se*'. We go from the glimpse to the clearly seen, from lack of attention to sure understanding, but it is the same strategy of not seeing: Derrida glances off the reality, Paul constructs its replacement image, his 'feminist theory', and then naturally enough fetishism becomes the necessary theoretical term, the mode of seeing and understanding. Who, after all, understands more than the fetishist? He understands **perfectly**, which is the problem or the normal state of functioning, depending on how you look at it; Freud stresses that the penis is 'the normal prototype of fetishes' and the norm of sexual identity, 'the primacy of the phallus'⁴, the way we are, men and women, so that there is no escape for and from 'feminists fetishising women'.

None of this is meant to be glibly 'holier than thou', certainly not than Paul. It is simply that I think there is a problem, one of place (the fetishist must keep everything in his 'its place'), that is quickly apparent as men, as we, approach feminism. I do not want to say that 'where am I?' is a male question but I do think that men want very much to know **where they are** vis-à-vis feminism, that feminism can quickly be produced by them as a matter of their place (and so of its), and as a **theoretical** matter, especially in a context like this, this MLA session, where we can too easily make feminism **an approach**, which then gives us an approach, a handy object, some thing we can place ourselves in relation to, 'feminist theory' as **topic** (exactly, our *topos*)—where can I stand?

The title of this session is first of all 'Men in Feminism'. To be in or out, that is the question we readily get ourselves into: gaining, obtaining, maintaining, sustaining, **fixing** a place, a position, ours. Derrida, though, speaks, writes a discourse of non-place, or rather challenges 'a certain idea of the locus [lieu] and the place [place] and I said earlier that he seemed to want not to be too clear about feminism. But then he turns out to be very clear, even as he refuses

to look attentively, only the fetish glimpse (which is why he is so clear): he writes reactively, against what he calls "'reactive" feminism' which he grants may have a certain historical necessity but which must not, obviously, be allowed to occupy the whole terrain, back with a vengeance to locus and place—where is mine going to be? Can one not say, in Nietzsche's language, that there is a "reactive" feminism, and that a certain historical necessity often puts this form of feminism in power in today's organised struggles? Perhaps one should not so much combat it head on—other interests would be at stake in such a move—as prevent its occupying the entire terrain.' "Reactive" feminism' sounds like women's movement and struggle, in reaction—precisely—against oppression, against the sexual terms of existing social reality. Identifying it as such, as "'reactive" feminism', is the male vision; and from that identification it is then seen as 'occupying the entire terrain', or about to...dangerously, a threat. Perhaps in the realm of theory I can counter the danger, at least hang on to a place, one at least of displacement, hisplacement, hang on in my writing over and above and slidingly under the identities, the realities 'they' analyse and seek to change on the basis of that analysis, their "'reactive" feminism'. Thus Derrida, dreaming of, feeling the necessity for a 'choreographic text with polysexual signatures' (not that this seems to stop him publishing his books with the one male name on their covers).

Paul is nowhere near saying any of this but then again in a way what he does say can find itself in the end not so distant after all, comes back to matters of place and legality and exclusion or inclusion, finishes in a series of ironic reversals in which men now occupy the dark continent, are the excluded other ('men constitute a shadowy, unlegislable area for feminist theory'), the remainder as 'reminder', the 'irreducible difference' ('they can act as reminder to feminist theory of the material fact of difference'). Margin to reaction, reminder to feminist theory's law... 'men can help to subvert, unsettle and undermine the (seemingly rather fast to settle) laws of that discourse'...the entire terrain, the fast settlement....

All representation, we know, is transferential. Representation is at once an image given, an argument made and a deputation established, a construction of object, me and other. Representation, to put it another way, includes my position, my desire and its vicissitudes. The problem for men, 'men in feminism', has little in my opinion to do with feminist theory but much to do with the representation of feminism for men. What does woman want? What does feminism want? Perhaps I still cannot help asking such

questions, the second as our new version of the first, but perhaps I can also nevertheless try to break out of their representations, learn to take them back to where feminism turns them, to me, feminism as **everyday theory** for me—quite different to my MLA-projected, academy-enclosed 'feminist theory'. So the question then is not what does feminism-woman-she want? Or, why am I excluded, losing ground, remaindered? Rather, it is what is feminism for me? Or, how do I change, who am I if I listen and respond to feminism, if I understand with its understanding?

This is not a theoretical question, nor can it be answered theoretically; it is a practical-theoretical-political-ethical one (feminist issues are surely by definition always that). Which is what the construction 'feminist theory' can quickly mask, easily becoming a male representation, a male **topic** (again in every sense of the word). The understanding of feminist theory, quite simply of feminism, is a huge problem for men, for us, because it involves grasping the fact that it is **not** another discourse (let alone in a post-structuralist array), nor another voice to be added, an approach to be remembered and catered for, but that it radically affects and shifts everything and that that radical shift is not negotiable—the old understanding—in such panic terms as 'occupying the entire terrain', is not translatable into a problem of 'inclusion'/'exclusion'. It is easy for me to say that—an image of self-righteousness is quick to form, I know—but the point is to live it, including in theory, in writing, teaching and so on.

This is where Paul's imagination of positions seems to me difficult, what he envisages men might do ('what are they required to do?'). Part of the difficulty is to do with 'correctness', the problem men, we, can have, again of protecting—of self-protecting—position. I want to be somewhere **securely**. Thinking through feminist theory, Paul says he feels 'the impossibility of saying anything properly correct'. Which is in a way odd because he also quotes Alice Jardine on the writing of men, his included, as 'rarely incorrect per se'. But then her point is that correctness is not the point: being properly correct is purely theoretical, pure theory; the reality is different, is unceasing, contradictory, difficult, heterogeneous, impossible, everyday. My problem as a man is not being properly correct—as Jardine suggests, men can be extremely good at that, staking out their right place—but acknowledging that my relation to feminism is not going to be some simple recognition (I recognize feminism and ask that it mirroringly recognize me), that it must change me beyond any position to fall back on, beyond any forgone security.

In the passage from which the 'rarely incorrect per se' came, Jardine continued: It is almost as if they ['these few men, our allies'] have learned a new vocabulary perfectly, but have not paid enough attention to syntax or intonation.

What I like there is 'intonation'; it reminds me of an essay by Dorothy Richardson, 'About Punctuation', in which she remarks that 'in the slow, attentive reading demanded by unpunctuated texts the faculty of hearing has its chance until the text **speaks** itself'⁵ (it might be noted, the appropriate coincidence, that both Jardine and Richardson value attention, replying to Derrida's immediate decision 'not to leave time...to look attentively'). Intonation and hearing can serve as terms for the kind of recognition feminism involves: women's voices, women's experience, women's **facts**; not just an object 'feminist theory'; not just that representation but, on the contrary, an **acuteness** of identity—reading, hearing, seeing, learning beyond the **given**, including the feminism men think they know.

We have to give up the worry of place and non-place to which we are prone, with the fear and the anger and the defensive projections and constructions that result. Intonation and hearing, a way of saying a different attention; not the deconstructive inattention of fixing on the spaces between, not the reaction of such theory. Richardson again: 'In telling things, technical terms must be used; which never quite apply'.⁶ It is not that we, men, do not fit feminist theory, are not fitting for it, have to torment ourselves about that; it is simply that we have to give up the fit of theory, however 'choreographic', that the technical terms we might find never quite apply, however perfectly we can get off a new vocabulary, that our relation to feminism is not to be eased, however much we may cast it into the terms of academy and institution. The hardest thing is that feminism is ordinary, everyday, and 'a change of world'.

But where does that leave us? What should we do? There is no ready answer (that would be an easing), we just have to learn. All I can say here and now in the MLA, in this context, is that we should probably start by trying to grasp **who we are as men**, asking that from feminism rather than wondering what 'they' want from an assumed male us. We need to drop the academic masks, to pose at every moment the sexual determinations of the discourse we develop as we teach and write, to stop knowing as we do, as we want, as we impose—and could 'men in feminism' today be anything but another strategy of that, our imposition?

Stephen Heath, Jesus College, Cambridge

NOTES

¹'Male Feminism' is to be found in *The Dalhousie Review*, vol.64, no.2. [Ed.]

²Paul Smith, 'Men in Feminism: Men in Feminist Theory'; quotations here are from the draft distributed to the MLA panel members.

³Jacques Derrida, 'Choreographies' (interview with Christie V. McDonald), *Diacritics*, Summer 1982; all further quotations from Derrida are from this interview.

⁴S. Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74) vol.XXI, p.157; vol.XIX, p.142.

⁵Dorothy Richardson, 'About Punctuation', *The Adelphi*, vol.I, no.11, p.990.

⁶Dorothy Richardson, *Revolving Lights* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1923), p.87.

DEMONSTRATING SEXUAL DIFFERENCES

ANDREW ROSS

God didn't make mistakes, the newspapers did." (Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper)

"It is not my fault that I cannot eat or rest," he replied. "I assure you it is through no settled design." (Heathcliff, Wuthering Heights)

My paper is intended to demonstrate the political significance and use of the concept of sexual difference, a term which has a certain currency in recent debates about feminism. My examples are drawn from the case of Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, who, between 1975 and 1981, in what is called "Bronte country" in Northern England, was the killer and mutilator of at least thirteen women (some "prostitutes," others not), and the attacker of at least seven others who survived; who, during this time, was the object of the costliest, most extensive and most obsessive man-hunt in police history; and whose intentions and moral culpability were the subject of one of the most revealing court trials in modern British social history.¹

Sutcliffe would never have been exposed to the public milieu of a juried trial if the judge at the initial hearings had not expressed his dissatisfaction over what he called a "conflict" between certain statements made earlier by Sutcliffe to the police, and others made later in the course of psychiatric investigation. Up to this point, it was generally assumed that the defense plea for diminished responsibility on Sutcliffe's behalf would be accepted, a plea which drew upon the testimony of four psychiatrists that the defendant was a paranoid schizophrenic; that he had manifested four of the eight classic symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia; in short, that he was not **bad**, but merely **mad**. What was this "conflict" which made the judge change his mind? Was it a simple rhetorical discrepancy between two statements that occasioned the need for an Old Bailey trial which called into question so many institutional practices: the cavalier ethics of the police methods employed during the investigation; the unbridled checkbook journalism of the tabloid press; the prejudicial and persecutory imperatives of the legal system; the forensic validity of psychiatric opinion; the more general validity of a male working-

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class culture that produced, possessed, and, in some part, protected, Sutcliffe during his life of crime; and lastly, the various factional responses from the feminist ranks, ranging from those who claimed that all men were on trial along with Sutcliffe, to those who advanced the arguably more radical claim that it was a socially sanctioned system of fixing and legislating categories of sexual difference that was on trial?

The conflicting statements made by Sutcliffe are alarmingly simple, and yet they run so deeply that one can hardly start to do them justice in the time available for analysis. At the time of his arrest, he expressed a desire to kill **all women** ("I had the urge to kill any woman"). However, the statements produced in court to substantiate his schizophrenic condition claimed that he had acted in the service of a divine mission, guided by God's voice, with the specific intent only of killing **all prostitutes**. This latter mission, to kill all prostitutes, was **recognized**, symptomatically, at all levels of interpretation, from the popular to the professional, as a moral mission, and therefore less culpable than the asocial desire to kill "all women," a desire recognized, perhaps, only in the well-known slogans of revolutionary feminists who construct the following syllogism: "Some men rape and kill women. All men are potential rapist-killers. Therefore all women are potential victims." In point of fact, the Sutcliffe affair reveals little we do not already know about the respective social and political fallibility of either of these points of view (which is to say that under different circumstances, one would be tempted to argue that the syllogism of revolutionary feminism is just as "false", indeed, just as reactionary, as the other, puritanical persecution of a specific social class of women, in this case, prostitutes). What the Sutcliffe case does reveal is a discrepancy, or "conflict" as the judge put it, that cuts across these points of view, a conflict which, finally, could only be resolved by manhandling the entire legal apparatus to the point of inducing a social catharsis of national dimensions: a conflict, which, I shall argue, ultimately suggests that there is no determinate or necessary relation between the domain of biological categories (all women, all men) and the domain of social categories which demonstrate sexual difference (prostitutes, non-prostitutes). Rather, two different realms of necessity come into conflict, and it is a man, Sutcliffe — a man, moreover, who is in two minds about what it is to be a man — who reveals the dangers of failing to distinguish between the natural and the sexual.

Firstly, it should be borne in mind how rigorously the distinction

between "all women" and "all prostitutes" is reproduced at all the significant levels of social reaction to Sutcliffe. It is not until the first non-prostitute is killed (his fifth victim) that the police investigation assumes an identity of its own. A statement announces that "an innocent young woman has been slaughtered. The next Ripper victim could be anyone's wife, daughter, or girlfriend." A national media scare activates public opinion for the first time: "All women are now at risk." It is then and only then that the feminists of Northern England are mobilized, and the tradition of "Reclaim the Night" protest marches is begun. The same marks of difference are observed during the trial, when repeated references are made to the "blemished" or "disreputable" victims, as opposed to the "innocent" victims, implying, of course, that the former deserved to die, while the "innocent" did not.

Perhaps this is hardly surprising in a legal system which obliges its officers to refer to particular women as "common prostitutes" as a matter of course during court proceedings: here, the legal term, "common," primarily denotes "universal" availability (as opposed to a "proper" individual, the property of one individual, albeit always a man). It must be pointed out, however, that the law does not operate systematically under any criterion that recognizes the **universality** of a particular category of women. In other words, the same person can be judged a "common prostitute" for certain social purposes and under certain legal circumstances, a "woman" in others, and a non-sexually specific "individual" or "subject" in still others. (Indeed, it is precisely because the law does not operate universally upon female subjects that it cannot, and never will, recognize, let alone entertain, claims made on behalf of "all women"). Nonetheless, even though the law, potentially and theoretically, recognizes the difference of each individual, the particular social purpose of Sutcliffe's trial is actually to re-instate the difference between two categories of women, to re-define a difference that Sutcliffe is perceived to have recognized in intent, but to have confused in deed and action. Sutcliffe is thus, in a sense, "punished" for confusing theory and practice, for failing to observe the universal distinctions that govern such categories.

Prostitutes, as a category, after all, are assumed to be universally recognizable. Not only are they themselves supposed to exhibit a visible difference, but an entire social history has been exclusively devoted to various attempts to **essentialize** or **naturalize** their difference, even to the extent of calling upon medical opinion to ground this difference in physiological evidence.² Of course, the

dominant political aim of this history has been to sanction upper-class male vice while repressing shows of feminine sexuality, but that is hardly a "fact" that is available to popular consciousness. On the contrary, what passes into popular consciousness is the concept of a difference that is essential or universal (prostitutes and all other women), and it is that concept of universality which speaks through Sutcliffe's actions. In effect, his moral mission is to eliminate a social category of women as if it were a natural category. He therefore kills according to this conceptual universality, and his mission, incredibly enough, is recognized as a "natural" one for a respectable man to pursue: notwithstanding the fact that this category of women has no "natural" constituents (the additional irony is that many of his prostitute victims were not "full-time" prostitutes, but rather women who temporarily turned to prostitution in order to stabilize a fluctuating family income). Furthermore, Sutcliffe does not kill in the name of "all men," he kills in the name of all men and most women, that is, all women, except for prostitutes. Indeed, the particular configurations of his own psychic history as revealed at the trial, would suggest that he killed for, or in the name of, only certain women: his wife and his mother. In effect, what emerges from Sutcliffe's case is much too much complex to be reduced to essentialist claims about the status of "all women." On the contrary, the lesson of Sutcliffe, and others like him, calls for a full-going cultural critique of the codes of necessity that depend upon those very concepts of universality that support statements about "all women" and "all men", for such statements belong to the very conceptual apparatus that makes Sutcliffes into killers.

But what of Sutcliffe himself as a man? And what is his God? Firstly, his legal culpability rests, finally, upon a logical problem worthy of scholastic wrangling. God could indeed have entrusted him with the mission of killing "all prostitutes," but God could not have inveighed against "all women." God, after all, is not responsible for sexual difference (indeed, there is a long history of "divine intervention" against evidence of sexual difference). God is, however, responsible for sexual or biological division (the creation of anatomical men and women), and so he could not want to undo his own work by destroying all women. In view of Sutcliffe's fatal "discrepancy" in this matter, and in view of the fact that his plea for diminished responsibility (i.e. divine guidance) is dismissed, we could say that it was in fact God's plausibility that was upheld by the verdict. For Sutcliffe, however, whose social venom issues from a different realm of necessity, it is God's fallibility that is at stake.

For Sutcliffe, every woman he kills must be a prostitute -- "God didn't make mistakes, the newspapers did" when they reported that he had murdered an "innocent" woman. And when asked in court whether this vengeful God did not invalidate the miraculous God of his Catholic childhood, he replied, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, perhaps not, that it seemed similar to the "contradiction between the Old Testament and the New."³

The man who said this was not the bachelor, loner, outcast, underprivileged wretch, or psychopath for which the police had been searching for over five years. The Ripper turned out to be a good-looking man, soft-spoken and courteous, intelligent, with a loving family background, a religious education, a good job, a nice house, a pretty wife, and even a mistress -- in short, the perfect, virile man, socially, sexually, and emotionally well-integrated. Born and bred in the shadow of steel mills and smokestacks, his drive towards bourgeois respectability had also put him in the thrall of certain moral imperatives -- hence his social mission of cleaning the streets, working for society and not against it. As an exterminating angel, a guardian of the respectable social order, he is more "efficient" than the police, or at least he represents policing better than the police do, which, of course, is why they fail to recognize, let alone apprehend, him for so long, despite having interviewed him nine times in the course of their investigations. Sutcliffe kills according to, and not in contravention of, the logic of a system sustained by its "categorical" imperatives in matters of moral and sexual difference. But clearly not all men are "possessed" by these codes of necessity to the point of committing such base crimes. What, then, is particular rather than universal about Sutcliffe?

Two very brief incidents must suffice. Sutcliffe's first encounter with a prostitute is a shambles. She mocks him for his show of sexual impotency, pockets the money he has given her, and sends him away without "recompense." Somehow it is Sutcliffe, or rather his lack, which is forced to occupy the feminine position as an object of exchange. Thus feminized, he acts to redress the balance, for his subsequent killings all reclaim a woman's body as compensation for this personal debt that he has incurred in the sexual economy. Only the body is involved in this exchange, there is no sex (which is not to say, however, that these are not sexual murders). So too is he feminized when he is penetrated by God's voice, issuing from a gravestone on a hill.⁴ It is as much a social voice, berating him for his private lack of public virility. To respond to this charge, and to reaffirm his masculinity, he must act and kill in the name of that

voice, a voice which articulates what "all men" are supposed to have in the way of socialized masculinity.

There are more details and other examples, but it is time to make my concluding point. It is important to recognize that there is no more of a determinate relation between the physical level of Sutcliffe's "impotency" and his criminal behaviour than there is between the social imperative of virility (which speaks to him from billboards and gravestones alike), and his motivation to kill: in fact, that there is no determinate relation at all between the "natural" (or "sexual") and the "social." On the contrary, what I have suggested is that Sutcliffe's case reveals a gap, discrepancy, or conflict between the natural and the social, a discrepancy which is socially intolerable because it demonstrates configurations of sexual difference that are not anatomically supported. As I have argued, this is something the law does actually recognize, and quite literally, since it is the judge's perception of this difference that creates the need for a trial in the first place. In the course of recognizing Sutcliffe's sanity, however, while condemning the "sanity" of his crimes, the law resolves the point of "conflict" it has isolated, and thereby re-affirms a logic of universals that holds sway in the realm of social action that produces the likes of Sutcliffe. In pointing this out, my intention is not in the least to absolve Sutcliffe of any share of his repugnant acts. Rather, it is to reveal the incriminating silence of an entire social logic bound over to the necessity of predicating men and women as fixed sexual categories.

Andrew Ross
University of Illinois

NOTES

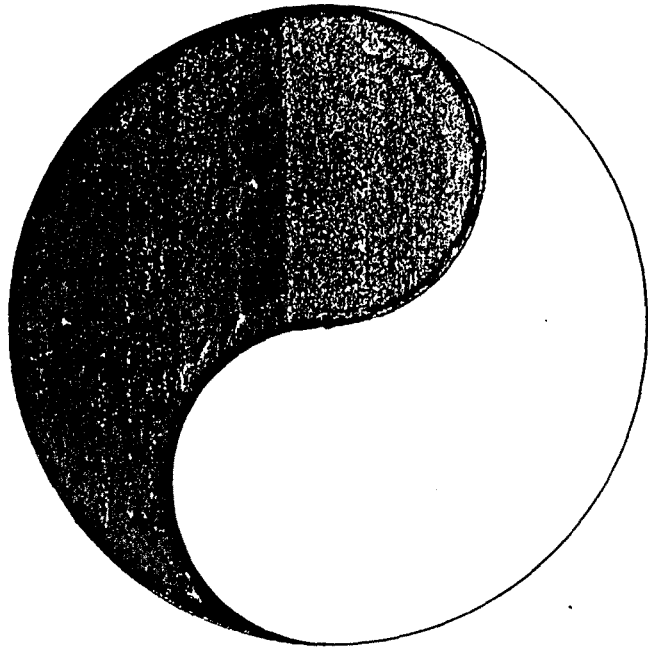
¹My paper generally draws upon media accounts of Sutcliffe's trial, journalists' discussions of his personal history, and Nicole Ward Jouve's remarkable reflections on the whole case, published by Editions de Femmes, under the title, *Un Homme Nommé Zapolski* (Paris, 1983).

²A fascinating account of one particular episode in their history can be found in Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and State* (Cambridge U.P., 1980), which examines the attempted state regulation of prostitutes under the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, in Britain, and the ensuing

alliance of prostitutes and feminists against the medical and police authorities. In the course of the legal, social and political upheaval that sprang up around the crusade on both sides, the difficulty of defining what it was to be a prostitute became a crucial factor. The "ideological" pathology of medical opinion was frequently called upon to support the state case; presented with the argument that "all women," prostitutes and non-prostitutes alike, could both contract and communicate gonorrhoea, "Inspector Slogget and Dr. Moore of the Royal Albert disagreed. They vehemently denied that the two categories of women could be medically confused. Instead, they argued that "in a prostitute there is a [purulent] discharge from the uterus which is never or seldom present in a virtuous woman..." (p. 228). However, the polemical insistence on the case for "all women" generated equally undesirable consequences: "The vaginal discharge of virtuous women could also generate 'disease' in men, thereby contradicting the ideological association of disease and sinful habits. This virtuous source of infection also challenged the sexual-moral code that rigidly segregated 'pure' women from the 'impure.' By designating all women as potential pollutants of men and reservoirs of infection, it evoked instead a more general hostility and dread of females and female 'nature'" (p. 56).

³Quoted by David Yallop in *Deliver Us From Evil* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1982), a book written by a muckraking dramatist-cum-journalist which, although it unremittently accuses the South Yorkshire police of gross incompetence and criminal negligence, otherwise assumes the staple generic form of a follow-in-the-footsteps-of-the-Ripper narrative.

⁴Jouve's virtuoso discussion of the cemetery "revelation" rests upon an analysis of the operative S/Z distinction in the names Sutcliffe/Zapolski (Zapolski is the name on the tombstone), an analysis which extends into her interpretation of other linguistic details of Sutcliffe's case history. Indeed, in view of the abject failure of psychiatric opinion under the pressure of court circumstances, her interpretation might stand as cogent alternative testimony to the nature of Sutcliffe's "schizophrenia." See in particular, the chapter "S/Z: le cimetière sur la colline," pp. 103-121.



**MEN IN FEMINISM:
ODOR DI UOMO OR COMPAGNONS DE ROUTE ?**

ALICE JARDINE

The general title of these two sessions, "Men in Feminism," sent me scurrying for cover—in fact, between the covers of several dictionaries, our concrete records of patriarchal meaning. "Men" I didn't really need to look up in the clear-cut context of these two panels. "In" still hangs in the air as quite mysterious to me, if a bit less so since this morning's discussion: (why not men as feminists? for example). And then, looking up the word "feminism" led me to reflect on the very structure of this encounter: two sessions organized by a man, with women once again responding, reacting—as always, in the negative position, inevitably interjecting: "That's not quite it"—or "You're not there yet." What if the men had responded to the women? But it's even more complicated, for while looking at my dictionaries, I suddenly realized that we have here: three men who are British and four women - in - French. Hmmm, I thought.

Now, "feminism" is a 19th century word: The *French Littré* indicates that in 1892, the word "feminism" was used to refer to a man exhibiting feminine characteristics. More precisely, it states: "feminism"—a break in the development of a man which gives him certain feminine attributes. And, unbelievably, the 1980 edition of the *Tresor de la langue française* gives: "Feminist: a man who is attracted to women"! Hmmm, I thought again. And so what, at the other pole, does the *Oxford English Dictionary* say? Very different. No mention of men, simply: (1846) "Feminism: the state of being feminine" or "a woman's locution"...We are clearly dealing here with two different traditions, the French and the English. And since I have tried to deal with the French one elsewhere (in my book *Gynesis*), here I will concentrate solely on the Anglo-American context. Feminism: no mention of men; a woman's locution.

Anglo-American academic male critics do seem to be very into feminism these days. Younger...older...gay...straight men. What is striking is that most of these Anglo-American men tend only to speak of "women" or "feminism" in order to speak about "something else"—some "larger issue"—and then "women" are either reduced to bodily parts, abstract wholes (wh), or are spoken only in relation to other men. Elaine Showalter's perceptive and indeed very funny article,

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"Critical-Cross-Dressing" provides us with a cast of characters where this is especially so: for example, Wayne Booth emphasized bodily parts in order to talk about "larger questions" of Interpretation, Bakhtin, and Rabelais. Neil Hertz, to talk about the iconics of revolution and war. Robert Scholes meditates on the clitoris to talk about Semiotics; Jonathan Culler, taking the more abstract route, needs "woman" to talk about deconstruction and Terry Eagleton needs women to talk about Marxist theory. There are some French Pre-Texts here, but these remain very Anglo-American texts.

But then, it seems quite mean of me to single out and categorize in this way. Should we not be talking here rather about new discursive formations in the Foucaultian sense — formations producing very different feminist effects? Discursive formations which we will not try to interpret (what do they really mean?) but, rather, whose functions we must try to interpolate with regard to power, institutions, and the disciplines — heretofore of MAN?

Roughly — and everything I say here will be rough, very pragmatic — roughly, I think there are three groups of male critics in the academy today:

1) First, the Silent Majority: those who neither read nor take into account the enormous body of work produced by feminist intellectuals over the past twenty years. Some of them are our most eminent and supposedly radical critics. I won't mention any names...

2) Then there are those who plug in and out of feminism without changing anything in the overall itinerary of their theory or practice. Three discursive strategies are particularly evident here: what I call "authoritative" writing on women from guys who already have authority; men who express sympathy towards feminism and then turn around and pan women's books in the NYRB and elsewhere; those who operate one of the oldest male seductive strategies around: Divide and Conquer. To women they say: I like your work, but not hers; or: Feminists theorists are smarter than women's studies advocates; or: Only feminists **outside** of the academy are really radical.

3) But then there is a third group—there are those men who are really trying, really reading and changing. And they are the ones I'm addressing today. Our allies—the three men on this morning's panel, for example.

Bacchereto, Italy
12 August, 1984

My dear Rosi,

I have just finished reading Paul Smith's paper, "A Question of Feminine Identity..."

What strikes me most generally is how complex the question of untangling the enunciation from the utterance becomes when it is a question of our male allies—the men who have taken the time and energy to read much of the corpus informing our own work. A question of untangling the dancer from the dance? Something like that. What are the mechanisms, linguistic and otherwise, whereby these men are able to evacuate questions of their sexuality, their subjectivity, their relationship to language from their sympathetic texts on "feminism," on "woman," on "feminine identity"?

Most difficult of all is that these few men, our allies, have learned their lessons well. The actual "content" of their writing is rarely incorrect per se. It is almost as if they have learned a new vocabulary perfectly, but have not paid enough attention to syntax or intonation. When they write of us—always of us—their bodies would seem to know nothing of the new language they've learned...

Dearest Alice,

I hesitate.

The paper you sent me bears witness to the historical significance of the emergence of women as speaking, writing, desiring subjects. As a "sign of the times" I enjoyed it very much; I mean—here's an aware, sensitive, concerned, intelligent man addressing one of the key feminist questions: feminine identity! In the midst of the ideological backlash of the 1980's, should we not be grateful to have such political and intellectual allies? Yet I hesitate...

What I've just shared with you are short excerpts from letters between myself and Rosi Braidotti—an English-speaking feminist theorist working in Paris—letters in response to a particular paper by Paul Smith. But as Paul Smith pointed out this morning, while addressed to a particular context, the issues raised in this exchange are of general concern nonetheless.

What are some of these more general concerns from a feminist point of view?

(1) As formulated by the Seminar on Feminist Literary Theory at

Harvard, the first issue might be articulated by the question, "Why Now?" What is this "Bandwagon Effect" whereby, in the academy, men are jumping on the feminist theory bandwagon at a time when it is experiencing a certain success in the academy and—paradoxically—at a time when the larger political context in which we are living gets more reactionary for women and others every day? A political context which is, among other things, devalorizing the work all of us in this room do in a technocratic culture?

(2) Is what we are witnessing the appropriation of a struggle, with men telling us how to be "more sophisticated" and warning us not to fall into theoretically "regressive" traps? From my point of view, this is sometimes awfully close to the imperialist gesture of telling the Third World to stop worrying about their agriculture and make computer chips—even though their people are starving...

Or maybe not, maybe it's not about appropriation at all. Maybe—as Samuel Beckett puts it—it's just the fault of the pronouns: she/he/us/them. The inevitable struggle over discursive and political territories that has always surfaced historically for radical movements: can blacks trust whites; Can Third-World women trust bourgeois feminists. Can women trust men?

(3) What is it about these men's texts that irritate so many feminists: Is it that we are being legalistic and exclusive as Paul Smith suggested this morning? Or is it maybe that what for many of us has been, above all, a private struggle has only very recently gone public, and we feel threatened by men's rather easy transformation of our private struggles into public exchange? Maybe. But perhaps we are also irritated by the prescription and reduction of complexity that has so far governed so much of men's interventions into feminism...

Alice: "Rosi, How long before it becomes no longer a question but an answer, a prescription about how women should go about what they're doing, saying and writing... There is then a kind of streamlining of feminism—a suppression of the diversity and disagreement within the movement itself..." Rosi: "yes, in our work we've all tried to come to terms with the complexity of these issues... don't you think we could ask our male allies to respect this complexity and try to cope with it themselves?"

Or maybe what irritates us is simply the a-historicism of much of men's work on feminism. As Rosi again puts it: "it's easier for any man to forget the historical fact that is the oppression of women: it's one of their favorite blind spots."

Finally, in thinking about this irritation with men's interventions

into feminism thus far, we could get more micro-political: are we not irritated simply by their professorial when not professional tone so often sandwiched between sharp critiques of one woman writer after another? By their tendency to descend into pathos and apology as soon as they're threatened?—a definite *Odor di Uomo*.... By their general discursive strategies which indicate that they've heard our demands but haven't adequately read our work?

Rosi: "It just goes to prove, Alice, that our struggles are far from being over—in fact, they are just beginning for real..."

Struggle. The inscription of struggle. When the members of the same feminist theory group mentioned above tried to articulate how we can recognize a feminist text—whether written by a man or a woman—it was this that was found to be necessary. The inscription of struggle—even of pain...

Why then would men want to be in feminism if it's about struggle? What do men want to be in—in pain?

The three papers we heard this morning vary in their inscriptive response to this question. All were in their own way important and all deserve our close attention. Andrew Ross's paper, "Demonstrating Sexual Difference," focused on how the conflation of natural and sociosexual categories is actually what leads to phenomena like the Yorkshire Ripper in England. His point is well-taken: biological categories do not equal social ones. Feminists have been saying nothing else for years. But this now rather familiar argument against "essentialism" does not go further; for example, it cannot work with and through what I find to be one of the most thought-provoking statements of recent date by a feminist theorist: Gayatri Spivak's suggestion that women today may have to take "the risk of essence" in order to think really differently. I'm afraid that the signs of struggle, suffering, and pain in Ross's and the Ripper's "demonstration" are elsewhere—they're buried, literally and in history.

Paul Smith's paper strikes me as more helpful. There is a struggle there—and it is signalled by his questions. There are statements I personally have a lot of trouble with, some of which were discussed this morning: for example, that "women's studies has by now been quite fully integrated into the academy." I'd like to know where this is so—in a time of massive budget cuts, marginalization and ideological pats on the head. Nor do I think that "feminist theory doesn't exist outside of the academy," nor that it is "inseparable from the 'theory' that has muscled its way into the humanities over the last, say, 20 years." But disagreements about

these statements aside, Smith's questions are genuine enough. For example, Smith suggests that men can understand feminism—that the problem lies elsewhere: "if feminist theory is really claiming that a man speaking or writing on feminism cannot or simply does not include his body, I'd want to ask what are the signs that are missing? What would a male writing his imaginary actually produce?"

Smith's questions are important, indeed central. It is troubling, therefore, when he goes on to block the kind of work he'd have to do to begin to address them. He finally assumes that men who thought through their bodies would only be able to do what they did before feminist theory. Smith therefore posits men's function in feminism only as "a reminder to feminist theory of the material fact of difference, the real consequence of which is feminism's material." While I found this an intriguing strategy, it is also a familiar one. Reminding us, judging, scolding us by their presence. End of Struggle. Odor di Uomo.

I must admit that I found Stephen Heath's paper (the one circulated to us a few weeks ago as well as his remarks this morning) the most inscriptive of struggle—a struggle with the "impossible relationship of men to feminism." I stopped at length over his insights and questions: "Is it possible to wonder whether there is not in male feminism, always potentially a pornographic effect? Do I write from desire/fear, to say simply in the last analysis 'love me'? But what can I say from day to day, teaching, talking, just generally around?" Heath wants men to learn from feminism, to try to be as feminist as possible. He, too, argues against essentialism, and against male writers who would not leave us our space, while worrying about their place. But two reflections near the end of Heath's original paper (one of which he re-articulated this morning) seem self-defeating: first, he doubts that men could tell the truth about their bodies; and second, he valorizes "admiration" by men of feminist theory... He recognizes the problems with that stance, but poses "admiration" nonetheless as an ad-hoc posture for feminist men...

Feminist men. Male feminism. Is this but an exercise in oxymorons? or perhaps a promising utopian vision? I think that that depends on what men want. What do men want? Assuming, at the very least, that they want to be in feminism...

And what do feminists want? If you will forgive me my directness, we do not want you to mimic us, to become the same as us; we don't want your pathos or your guilt; and we don't even want your admiration (even if it's nice to get it once in a while). What we

want, i.e. what we need, is your work. We need you to get down to serious work. And like all serious work, that involves struggle and pain. As guide to that work, I would like to remind you of a sentence by Hélène Cixous—a sentence which, to my knowledge, has not been taken seriously by our allies at all: "Men still have everything to say about their own sexuality." You still have everything to say about your sexuality: that's a challenge, if it helps you to think of it that way. And, in closing, since none of the three men's papers today addressed that question, and, indeed, posited it as unanswerable, I'd like to offer a short and pragmatic agenda for beginning this vast work which has yet to begin.

First, some general suggestions. I think that you—our male allies—should issue a moratorium on talking about feminism/women/femininity/female sexuality/feminine identity/etc. It is much easier to speak about women than to speak as a body-coded male—to imagine a new Man. And secondly, I do not agree with Smith or Heath that to work through your male sexuality would only reproduce what's come before, reproduce the phallogocentric imaginary. Not if you've really read and lived feminist work, which I think some of you have. Also, let me address Heath's question directly and, again, very pragmatically: what can you do as teachers, writers, and critics—everyday, just generally around? Well:

(1) Echoing Heath, you can stop being sophisticated in theory and politically naive in practice—for example, you can help stop the killing of women's books in reviews...Or stop your colleagues—when not yourself—from leaving them out, or simply dismissing them.

(2) You could read women's writing—write on it and teach it. (By the way, at the risk of sounding like I'm granting Heath an honorary degree in feminist criticism, on of the few such efforts I have read with interest and great pleasure is Stephen Heath's "Dorothy Richardson and the Novel.")

(3) You could sponsor women students (as long as we're going to remain in the institution).

(4) You could recognize your debts to feminism in writing.

(5) While doing so, you could watch out for the "shoulds" and "should-nots" and especially stop being so reductive. Please don't make a mythology—in the Barthesian sense—out of feminism.

(6) You could critique your male colleagues on the issue of feminism—although I warn you that this is likely to make you very unpopular.

(7) And the most important, you yourselves could stop being re-active to feminism and start being active feminists—your cultural

positionality as men allows you to!

And what about in the realm of theory? Here the list is endless. You have at least 20 years of feminist theory to take seriously. For example, at the most general level, you could take on—as men after feminism—some of the symbolic fields most addressed by feminist theory: for example, from cinematic theory, the symbolic hegemony of vision as organizing metaphor of patriarchal history; or men's relationship to technology, weapons, and war. Or Sports—what is going on in the male psyche with these bats and balls and nets?

In the deeper realm of psychoanalytic inquiry,...you have not even begun to think about your mothers. Nor have you rewritten your relationship to your fathers. For example, how would a male critic after feminism rewrite Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*?

What else? Well, there's men's relationship after feminism, to death, scopophilia, fetishism (we've had a beginning today), the penis and balls, erection, ejaculation (not to mention the phallus), madness, paranoia, homosexuality, blood, tactile pleasure, pleasure in general, desire, (but, please, not with an anonymously universal capital D), voyeurism, etc. Now this would be talking your body, not talking about it. It is not essentialism; it is not metaphysics, and it is not/would not be representation. As Luce Irigaray put it, "The bodily in man is what metaphysics has never touched..."

On a more literary note, do theories of narrative structure in the male realm always have to be modeled upon traditional male desire: beginning, middle, end? Can you think through the heterogeneity of the subject without putting the burden of the demised universal subject onto the female? And most important, when you're reading men's books, whether new or old, are you up to taking Nietzsche seriously?:

"What has the Man not been able to talk about?

What is the Man hiding?

In what respect is the Man mistaken?"

You see, you have all of your work before you, not behind you. We, as feminists, need your work. We don't need your *Odor di Uomo*. We need you as traveling *compagnons* into the 21st century...

Alice Jardine
Harvard University

"TIGHTROPE" AND MEN IN FEMINISM

JUDITH MAYNE

In this morning's discussion, theory merged with feminism so as to suggest that if there is a relationship between men and feminism, it is across and through theory. The focus on theory is not particularly noteworthy in and of itself, particularly since considerations of theory tend to characterize virtually every contemporary discussion of criticism and ideology. I am surprised, however, that another term, equally in evidence at the contemporary critical juncture, has been conspicuously absent in the discussion thus far. That term is narrative. I note the absence in part because the way in which I will respond to the papers from this morning's panel is through a single narrative which deals, somewhat obliquely but nonetheless instructively, with "men in feminism." But I also want to suggest that theory has been posed thus far as a reiteration of familiar and somewhat tiresome oppositions. Narrative offers not so much an alternative to theory, but rather a more productive way of engaging with a field of oppositions.

In *Tightrope*, Clint Eastwood portrays a policeman, Wes Block, who is investigating a series of murders of women, all of them sex-related. *Tightrope* is a film obsessed with division, with separation, with the tension of opposition, most graphically portrayed in the spatial opposition between the Tenderloin district of New Orleans where many of the murders occur, and the suburban neighborhood where Block lives with his two daughters. The film is equally obsessed with sexual difference, and with the difference between two kinds of women, or more precisely, two kinds of females—sexual partners and daughters. Wes Block walks a tightrope in that the separation of the two worlds is fragile, and the narrative of *Tightrope* is the threshold space between the two realms. For the killer sought by Block is not out to get all women, or even all prostitutes (in any case, the film is unsure what the difference is). The killer is out to get Wes Block. He knows Block's fears and desires better than Block himself. Block's investigations lead him to sexual liaisons with several prostitutes, where a fancy for bondage in handcuffs becomes particularly evident. The murderer is an omnipresent voyeur, and each woman with whom Block makes contact becomes a victim of the killer. Block's double eventually trans-

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gresses the boundary line separating the two worlds of the film, penetrating the suburban house and assaulting Block's older daughter. Block's pursuit of the killer is an encounter with his own repressed—and some not-so-repressed—desires, until the final, inevitable showdown between the two men when the murderer is killed.

What makes **Tightrope**, if not an exceptional film, then at least an interesting one, is that this is a Clint Eastwood film "with a difference." **Tightrope** is a confessional film, and to which a formula evoked in some discussions of pornography is particularly appropriate: **Tightrope** is the theory, Dirty Harry the practice. And even though **Tightrope** is not explicitly about pornography, but rather about the network of relationships of which pornography is one expression, and even though Clint Eastwood is hardly one of the "legions of feminist men," the film addresses more convincingly than many other texts the question raised by B. Ruby Rich: "if the legions of feminist men want to do something useful they could undertake the analysis that can tell us why men like porn..."

As a self-reflexive Clint Eastwood film, **Tightrope** ponders questions and connections that might be unspeakable in another kind of film—between pleasure and danger, between heterosexual and homosexual desire, between paternal affection and incest, between sexuality and violence. More precisely, **Tightrope** problematizes the connections. The problematizing takes on a particularly interesting narrative configuration. For the obligatory romance transpires with a woman (portrayed by Genevieve Bujold) who as director of a rape crisis center is concerned about the status of the investigations, and concerned in the name of "all women." It's worth pointing out here how unusual this designation of a female lead is in the contemporary Hollywood cinema. If feminism has been mainstreamed into Hollywood, it is usually in terms of female heroism, or the conflict between love and career, and rarely in terms of a discourse that can be even remotely described as feminist. I mention this not in order to praise **Tightrope** as a progressive film, but to ask what is served, within the narrative logic of this film, by such a naming of feminism.

Tightrope is a love story of sorts, or more precisely, a heterosexual romance, between a man and a woman for whom desire leads, in however different ways, to connections between sexuality and violence. What Eastwood does in practice, Bujold ponders in theory. The connection between sexuality and violence is for Wes Block a symptom of the split between the two worlds of the film and it is the function of the Bujold character to heal that split. The

feminist here is defined not only as the woman who defends female sexuality against male violence, but also as a figure who presumably comprehends the links between sexuality and violence.

If **Tightrope** is the theory and Dirty Harry the practice, the Dirty Harry film which comes immediately to mind is **Sudden Impact**, in which a woman artist systematically kills off a number of men, and one woman, who had gang-raped her and her sister some years before. In that film, the sexual relationship between the woman and Dirty Harry leads to the somewhat predictable conclusion that the woman may be guilty of the murders, but innocent of any crime. Her real crime—or disease—is man-hating, for which Dirty Harry provides the cure. Dirty Harry thus protects the woman in the name of a higher law. Seen against the background of a film like **Sudden Impact**, the narrative logic whereby feminism is "named" in **Tightrope** becomes clear. The feminist becomes a principle of law and order unavailable in the tightrope configuration of Wes Block's identity and identification with the killer. Feminism as it is represented in the film thus allows a reshuffling of the polarities of desire and violence.

The function of the Bujold character, when defined in this way, rings stereotypically true: woman as a principle of morality, the icon which, in a long history of Hollywood genres—the Western comes particularly to mind—allows the passage to resolution of one male identity crisis or another. But in the narrative of **Tightrope**, woman alone cannot function to this end: feminism is required. Put another way, the film needs to introduce a working proposition between "female" and "feminist."

All females—and again, one can't really say "woman" here, since the detective's own prepubescent daughters figure so centrally—are potential objects of the conflation from a theorist's point-of view. **Tightrope** appears to resolve quickly the distinction by having Block come to the rescue when the Bujold character is attacked by the killer. She defends herself—she teaches self-defense classes, after all—but it appears as though she is about to be killed when Block arrives on the scene. This is the first woman Block has been able to "save."

If it appears as though the film introduces the distinction between "female" and "feminist" only to collapse it quickly into heterosexual formula, it is important to note that the rescue is not quite as clear-cut as my description might suggest. Indeed, for all of the classic straightforwardness of the binary oppositions in **Tightrope**, the most distinctive overall tone of the film is confusion. To be sure, **Tightrope** has the proverbial happy ending, but virtually

every step towards that resolution is marked by such uncertainty that it is not always clear what is being resolved. While Block tells the press that the murders are sex-related, and while several of the women are clearly identified as prostitutes, it is uncertain in several instances. Nor is it made clear the extent to which sexual abuse is a part of the murders. The most devastating violation in the film is the assault on Block's daughter, yet an easily overlooked aside by a police inspector assures that no sexual assault occurred.

The very premise of *Tightrope* is a kind of confusion: Wes Block doesn't know who he is, doesn't know how his desires are different from a killer's desires, doesn't know what a woman is. But in attempting to set right that confusion, *Tightrope* plunges deeper into another kind of confusion concerning male sexuality. Block's younger daughter—the only female in the film who escapes a sexual identity—asks a question, intended superficially as comic relief, which serves as a kind of pivot to the film: "What's a hard-on, Daddy?" The daughter speaks from a position not unlike that of the feminist. The film has no answer for the question she asks. Wes Block sleeps with women, and the murderer kills them, but what indeed is a hard-on? Is it the desire to kill, or the desire for sex, and is it possible to resituate the polarities of violence and sexuality in any but either-or terms? The daughter asks the question again, when her father is about to go out with the Bujold character: "Are you going to have a hard-on, Daddy?" Again, the question reverberates through the entire film. If the director of a rape crisis center is a sexual being, how is she sexual? The only time we actually see this woman in the context of the crisis center is when she demonstrates attack points on a dummy to a female self-defense class. With a final swift kick to the groin, the dummy's eyes light up—a hard-on of sorts.

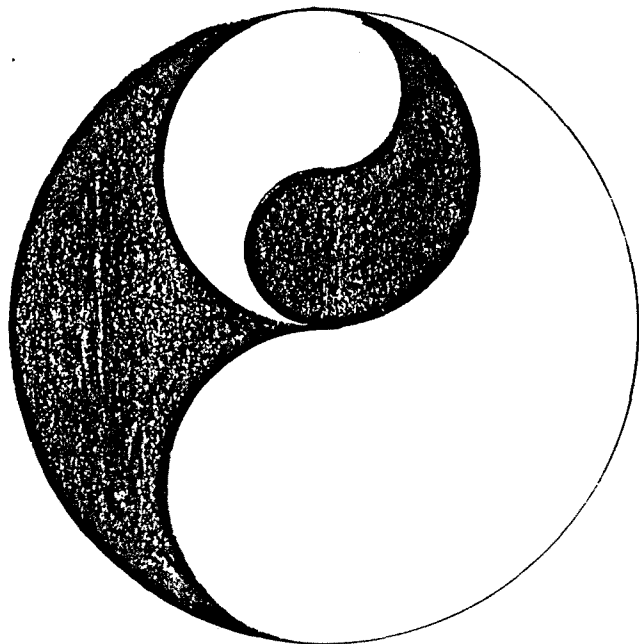
Tightrope is as unsure of what rape is, as it is of what a hard-on is. Now the assertion that a Clint Eastwood film shares an affinity with feminism might seem somewhat delirious, but the confusion in *Tightrope* is analogous to how rape has been a theoretical issue in feminism. One feminist argument is founded on the incompatibility of sex and rape, and thus defines rape as a crime of violence and not a crime of sex. Another argument claims rape to be the very paradigm of male sexuality, or of male heterosexuality. But in both cases there is the desire to rescue sexuality—whether in the name of lesbianism as a moment outside of patriarchal relations, or in the name of a utopian heterosexuality between free and equal agents.

Now in coming around to the issue of rape, and to feminist positions on rape, I've made a leap into feminism of a different kind than what seems to be the focus of this discussion of men in feminism. Rape has become a theoretical issue in terms of "radical feminism," and radical feminism seems to be somewhat of a spectre haunting this discussion. Radical feminism, in its attempt to rescue sexuality, to resurrect the duality of oppression and emancipation, has been much criticized in recent years. If, a decade or so ago, the charges against "radical feminism" were reproaches against separatism, in the contemporary context those charges tend rather to focus on the sin of essentialism.

It is almost inevitable that a discussion like this one will lead, sooner or later, to essentialism. Current debates about sexuality and pornography in particular have polarized feminists, and the terms of the polarity are often reduced to essentialist claims about the purity of female experience, versus anti-essentialist positions which, while diverse in their points of emphasis, stress the difficult and contradictory nature of identity, whether male or female. To agree to participate in a panel like this one assumes then a kind of ritual, where one of two positions will be occupied: one that excludes men, presumably in the name of essentialist claims about the purity of female experience; the other, that welcomes men (perhaps in a conditional mode, perhaps not) in the name of a fundamental, or at least a potential bisexuality.

While I don't question the necessity to be on the lookout for rampant essentialism, and while there are in some feminist work untenable and problematic connotations, what I do question is the narrative logic served by invocations, conscious or not, of the "radical feminism." The discussion, today, of men in feminism, has an implicit "other," the other of radical feminism, separatism (whatever that may be construed to mean), theoretically suspect, constructing a public sphere in which men are not addressed, and thus unwilling to engage with real men or masculinity. That there may be or have been historical reasons for separatist activity, or that the term "radical feminism" may include more diversity than the often-repeated slogan "porn is the theory, rape the practice" would suggest; that radical feminism might be about something more than, other than, the exclusion of men—in short, that radical feminism may be part of a complex narrative rather than the bad object of essentialist theory, is thus obscured.

Judith Mayne, Ohio State University



A MAN'S PLACE

ELIZABETH WEED

My comments are made in response to this morning's papers and comments by Paul Smith, Andrew Ross, and Stephen Heath. In principle, I am happy to be a respondent. The question of the relationship of men to feminism is, after all, men's problem--insofar as it is a problem--and it is good to see such a session at the MLA after all these years. Yet, being a respondent does itself pose problems, in that the papers of Paul Smith and Andrew Ross have produced a discursive battlefield, which, of course, produces my position of respondent as one already in the fray, a position I would not otherwise choose. One reason I would not choose it is that the fray which has been produced involves some disturbingly familiar issues which do not take us very far in our look at men and women and feminism. That said, I will start with some comments on Andrew Ross's paper.

Ross uses the so-called Yorkshire Ripper's crimes and trial to display the danger and pathology of "an entire social logic based on the necessity of predicating men and women as fixed social categories." The court's ruling on Sutcliffe's apparent confusion about whether he was out to kill all women or on a divine mission to kill just prostitutes is taken by Ross as a way of demonstrating the twin ills of essentializing and totalizing. He argues that in finding Sutcliffe "sane" (meaning that he was out to kill all women and not just prostitutes), that in finding Sutcliffe not "mad" but just "bad," the law chooses to resolve the conflict by reaffirming the very "logic of universals that holds sway in the realm of social action that produces the likes of Sutcliffe."

I find some internal problems with Ross's argument, but for now my interest is elsewhere. It is with a detail of the paper which comes to assume inordinate importance within the argument as a whole. Near the beginning of his discussion, Ross mentions one of the feminist groups involved in the heated public reaction to the Sutcliffe case--a feminist group holding the position summarized by Ross as a syllogism: "Some men rape and kill women. All men are potential rapists-killers. Therefore all women are potential victims." After the syllogism, Ross pauses between parentheses to say that under other circumstances he would be tempted to argue that the

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logic of these feminists is just as false, just as reactionary as the puritanical persecution of prostitutes. The parentheses close but matters don't end there. Like inadmissible evidence, displayed but stricken from the record, the potential guilt of these feminists is not forgotten. Every mention of "all women" calls forth implicitly or explicitly "all men" and when Ross indicts an "entire social logic" at the end, we need only think of the syllogism at the beginning to give full closure to the paper. In short, Ross takes this opportunity to make it clear to all of us, in the name of radical theory, that the participation of certain feminists in a universalizing logic can be dangerous to our health.

This all too familiar gesture of indirectly implicating the victim is based on another all too familiar manipulation of the opposition universal/particular. The totalizing or universalizing operation that Ross censures is not, of course, an abstract problem; it has a history. And that history tells a story we all know of an operation performed in the interest of privilege, power, and domination. To universalize, in the West, has indeed been to erase difference in the name of, for example, Mankind. When feminists, speaking from the position of women, repeat the universalizing operation, no matter how problematic it may be, it can never, because of the circumstances of enunciation, be the same operation. Ross employs the universal/particular argument in the service of his demonstration of the danger of confusing the natural and the constructed, but in doing so he undermines his own radical project and repeats what can only be called the liberal gesture of arguing from the particular. And the history of that gesture is also well known. In the last two hundred years or so we have seen well how a dominant class or group can secure its power precisely because it has access to both poles of the universal/particular opposition. When arguments from the universal cease to work for whatever historical reason, there is always recourse to the particular, to the rights of the individual as against totalizing forces. And as long as the circulation of power remains closed, the ends are the same. Witness the recent phenomenon of accusations of reverse discrimination.

The point is not to repeat the argument of the universal and the particular as if one were living in an open field of power, but rather to articulate the positioning of the subject within the existing social field. By way of pursuing that argument, I want to move to Paul Smith's paper. In a gesture curiously similar to Ross's, Smith quickly establishes a certain feminism as the culprit. In his case, the guilty feminists are not vulgar, or theoretically incorrect. He

quickly excises that part of the feminist project, naming it women's studies and declaring that it is quite fully integrated into the structures of the academy. Having thus inscribed the boundary separating good and bad feminisms, he accuses good feminism—feminist theory—of having erected its own boundaries, its own law which keeps him from breaking and entering. What follows is a series of moves designed to turn the tables on feminist theory, accompanied by what one can only assume to be a series of ironic displays of the phallic as against the feminine. The tables turned, we are presented with a savior, a third term, the male theorist whose presence in the margins of feminism will provide the material sexual difference that will keep feminist theory radical and subversive.

There are problems with Smith's argument. Taken, first, at its face value, it doesn't work. For just as women, in the name of women, cannot perform the same universalizing operation as men, so men cannot play the subversive role with regard to feminist theory that Smith, at least, sees feminists playing with regard to what he calls theory in general. And for the same reasons. Such reversals do not work because, as we well know, the reversal of the constructed opposition male/female only exposes the excess of the female. And the male—or at least the white Western male—as things stand now, cannot be excessive and cannot occupy the margins. For all the talk about excess is not just theoretical, because what we are also talking about is access to power—or at least our different relations to power.

Smith's argument is even more disturbing when read through its rhetorical display and presumed irony. To what end does Smith reinscribe the problematic opposition of inside/outside, portraying feminism as a discourse intent on legalizing itself, naming transgressors, banning all but the authorized? He says he does so in the service of a struggle against institutionalization. But how to fight institutionalization when the very terms of the argument foreclose the possibility of thinking a different feminism, a feminism that might be a discursive strategy and not simply a self-authorizing institution?

It is interesting, in this context, that Smith's language about "men in feminism," "entering feminism, actively penetrating it" functions as a citation of Jacques Derrida—of the published proceedings of a seminar held last year at the Pembroke Center in which Derrida commented that "as the research in women's studies gains institutional legitimacy, it also constitutes, constructs and produces guardians of the Law. It induces men from the country who

come before the Law to try to accede it, to see it, to touch it, to penetrate it."¹ Derrida was talking about women's studies—making no distinction between women's studies and feminist theory, by the way—in the context of his reading of the passage in Kafka's *The Trial* entitled "Before the Law." What Smith's citation leaves out, of course, is everything else, including a comment by Derrida that the most rigorous struggle to resist the Law, to dismantle it, inevitably entails another construction of the Law. As Smith himself says, there is no discourse without the operation of the law. Indeed, signifying practices are the Law, including the signifying practice of subversion. That is the law of the Law.

Thus, the question becomes that one's relation to the law, in this case to the relative institutionalization or legislation of women's studies and feminist theory. And, at this point, I have to say that I don't find Smith's distinction between women's studies and feminist theory either useful or accurate. That is not to say that there is nothing reductive or essentializing going on within feminism. It is just that women's studies are not dominated by essentialism and as long as that is the case, I see no reason not to appropriate the whole field—that is feminist theory within women's studies—for radical ends. Thus, I use the terms "women's studies" and "feminist theory" interchangeably—which still addresses Smith's points, since both are subject to the same process of legalization.

Looking, then at feminist theory's relation to the law, Smith is right in a sense: Women's studies/feminist theory have become somewhat institutionalized, more so than other studies of the Other. And, to a certain extent, they have reinscribed conservative structures and claimed institutional territories. The relative success of that project can be gauged by institutional reactions to it by those who see women's studies as illegally appropriating someone else's ground. The recent report by an NEH committee on the state of the humanities, a report aptly entitled "To Reclaim a Legacy," certainly has nothing friendly to say about what it calls special interest politics in the curriculum.

In fact, women's studies are not nearly as established as the NEH report and Paul Smith would have it. Nor do most feminists aspire to erect an edifice to the Truth and Beauty of Woman. If that were the case, we could certainly demand centuries and centuries of equal time. The challenge for us, of course, is to do two things simultaneously, trying to make even conservative gestures as subversive as possible, trying to keep subversive gestures as really radical as possible, constantly displacing the meaning of feminism.

That endeavor is, of course, an impossible one—impossible like the relation of women to Woman. For if, as Stephen Heath says,² the relation of men to feminism is an impossible one, so, in different ways, is the relation of women to feminism. These are impossible relations, as Heath says, because although as individual human subjects we live our heterogeneity, we also live our positionings in the social field and have to assume both sets of operations. It is thus that men are carriers of the patriarchal mode and it is thus that women have to negotiate both essentialism and lack.

Understanding feminist theory, mastering it, is not, as Smith asserts, I hope ironically, the ticket of entry into some supposed inside, or into the place of the woman. It is not because of the well-known difference between women's place and men's place. As we indeed all know, the white male theorist who understands that the subject is not identical to itself has the relatively straightforward task of resisting the imaginary lures of the historically constructed fiction of full male presence. The task of all the others is less straightforward. Certainly the situation for women is additionally complicated by our need to struggle against the lure of Woman as privileged figure of undecidability, particularly in the texts of male theorists. For the many feminists both inside and outside the academy who work to transform systems of domination, the immediate task entails constructing a female subject in order to obtain for women a better, and in many cases a less oppressive and literally safer place in the social field, while at the same time always displacing boundaries, always shifting positions to work against the erection of the same old phallographic structures in the name of identity and the unifying subject.

As Heath says, the impossibility of men's (and I would add, women's) relationship to feminism does not imply that we can do nothing, but rather that the contradictions cannot be resolved. Accepting that, the challenge, it seems to me, is to develop political, theoretical strategies, all the while keeping in mind to what extent our radical project is a utopian one. The utopian vision, so necessary as the always receding horizon of any political project is, in the case of sexual difference, the realizing of real difference, of real hetero-sexuality, and not the imaginary, constructed, determining two sexes with which we live.

I find it interesting that Heath refers to at least two different utopias. One is the utopian a-topia of continually deferred places. The other—radically other—is Heath's evocation of Luce Irigaray's notion of "admiration." Because it is suggested in the context of an

ethics (Irigaray's *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*), "admiration" could provide a possible interim utopia for a possible politics. Interesting to think about. However, because ethics are dangerous, precisely because they are inscribed in the binary, it seems safer to opt for theory.

If we accept, then, the utopian vision of "real" sexual difference as our working utopian horizon, what will be our strategies along the way? I would like to suggest, for the sake of argument, that the relationship of feminist theory to so-called "theory" is not, as Paul Smith would have it, constructed by a warring field of interpretation, but rather that feminist theory and other theory operate within a field of intersecting critical practices. If that is the case, where then do some of those intersections occur? I will suggest three points.

The first is at the problem of the subject and its relation to existing systems of power. At a very fundamental level, feminists have the advantage of a long acquaintance with the notion of the personal as political. Indeed, it may be worth mentioning that historically feminists learned many of the lessons of undecidability and irresolvable contradictions from the Civil Rights movement. That is, from blacks who articulated what it means to live simultaneously as subject and also to be positioned in such a way as to make one complicitous with white power. It is true that feminists have at times fallen into a simple personalization of the political and into a simple confessional mode. But neglecting to account for one's position can also lead to excesses. Andrew Ross's choice, for example, never to address directly the question of men and feminism, while at the same time including in his discussion a textually manipulated anger against certain feminists seems to me an odd displacement.

With many feminists, at least, the need to textualize the subject is neither displaced nor neglected. It can't be. For throughout the entire feminist project runs the problem of experience. And if we are to theorize the female subject and textualize that subject, that is a problem we can't avoid. And that, of course, is a theoretical scandal. We know how women always seem to occupy the place of theoretical scandal. Years ago, when everyone was busy doing away with the referent, remember who was figured as the referent? In a text like Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur* it was, indeed, the girl Violet who occupied that absent place--the place of violation and murder. Today things are a bit rosier. At least Woman can be respectable as the privileged figure of undecidability. But there is always the other

side--the unacceptable place of experience. For women there is no choice but to assume both positions. What we need to do, as Teresa de Lauretis has recently written, is to theorize experience on our way to theorizing and textualizing the female subject.³

A second point of intersection is with sexuality and its relation to sexual difference. We know that the problems of sexual difference are not contained by the discourse of sexuality. And yet the discourse of feminist theory is often taken to be coterminous with that of sexuality. As Heath says, signification is certainly bound up with sexuality, but our societies have produced sexuality as "the meaning, including the meaning of feminism." The result for feminist theory is that it is then entirely spoken through and by the various well-known operations of the family drama. By thus always reinscribing feminism in the familiar, by keeping it in the family, we contain and trivialize it. In institutional settings of this sort, for example, we can fall so easily into the same old patterns, the same old battlefields. We dance so well the same old steps choreographed for us. The limiting of feminism means as well, the limiting of the problematic of sexual difference. For if the history of the discourse of sexuality is a complex one, the history of the operations of sexual difference is even more so, and in order to interrogate those operations in a way that is not ahistorical or completely culture-bound, we need to attend to the specificity of women's relation to those very operations. It is not unusual to read cultural criticism involving problems of sexual difference from which women have been completely evacuated. For some of us, that is a curious practice.

The third point at which feminist theory intersects with other theory is around the ever-vexed question of theory and political practice. As one of the most recent large-scale discourses of oppression, feminism has raised again in different ways all the theoretical and political problems posed by the reinscription of the ethical and the just. In writing this response, I was constantly annoyed by its sententiousness--an annoyance I immediately displaced onto Andrew Ross and Paul Smith for having raised issues that I consider rather tired and from which I couldn't take much pleasure. But the sententiousness also comes with the whole discourse of oppression. The problem with oppression (in addition to the over-use of the word) is that it has a compelling descriptive power; it often seems very right. And yet, its limitations are well-known. So, what to do with the part of feminist politics that is an ethical imperative, that constructs Woman as the subject of an ethics, that takes us back into the discourse of oppressor and oppressed, domination and

liberation—a discourse that has limited usefulness in a post-modernist situation of radically altered relations of subjects and objects and an ever more complex circulation of power in the social field? At the same time, what to do with theory from other quarters (usually not feminist quarters) that confuses the utopian and the present, that takes the ability to theorize a utopian heterosexuality for a solution to the woman-problem of today? How to deal with that sleight of hand by which "real" sexual difference takes over and women disappear? How to keep utopia in its place?

The point, finally, is not to set up a polarity that can somehow be resolved, but rather to continue working with sometimes unresolvable, and always interlocking problems. That is something that I think both men and women can do from our different positions.

Elizabeth Weed
Brown University

Notes

¹In *Subjects/Objects*, 1984, a journal published by students at Brown University. The comments attributed to Derrida are part of an edited transcript of a seminar he gave to the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. The editors of the journal make it clear that the comments are, thus, "authorized but authorless."

²I refer here and elsewhere to a paper of Stephen Heath's, "Male Feminism." The paper was read by the participants of the "Men in Feminism" sessions, but was not actually presented at the conference.

³"Semiotics and Experience" in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

FEMMENINISM

PEGGY KAMUF

In answer to a question:

Yes, I'm giving a paper at the MLA—in a session titled 'Men in Feminism.' You see, there is 'Men in Feminism I' where some men, some supposed men, are supposed to talk about men in feminism, and then there is 'Men in Feminism II' where some women who are supposed to be women are supposed to talk about men in feminism too, that is, as well. Now, guess which one of the two I'm in?

Would this exchange—it is an answer to a question—be funny if spoken by a man? If spoken from this same place but slightly in the past, this morning? Yes, of course, why not? The answer's a quote, so perhaps I'm quoting Stephen Heath or Andrew Ross or Paul Smith. There's no way to tell in this context because the "I" of a phrase like "I'm giving a paper" does not state its gender, much less its proper name. What is more, in the quote, the dual structure of gender is reproduced and repeated by the dual structure of the roman numerals I and II of "Men in Feminism" (which I'm going to propose we try to pronounce according to the graphic rebus "femmeninism," although this runs the risk of introducing a new shibboleth, a word with which to discriminate insiders from outsiders merely by one's ability to pronounce it). Within this symmetry, how can we—you and me, you plural and you singular, me singular and me plural—how can we be sure who's speaking here? Fortunately (but also unfortunately), a certain organization of rules and exclusions, a whole institutionalized, incorporated legal apparatus of convention is in place to provide some measure of certainty. But what are we supposed to think about the certainty of the "I" as conventionally structured, for example by the procedural rules of the MLA convention? The question is that of the spatial limits of conventional metaphor which it is crucial to set out, to posit or suppose if one is to be able to state, with any reliability, where one stands with relation to "femmeninism," inside or outside, for or against, left or right, in rejection or projection. If the decisive question to be put

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here is "where do I, where does the 'I' stand," then at most we have a thread to follow through this crush of conventional spatial metaphors, obligingly given an incorporated reality every year by the MLA, and which this year we celebrate—but by what kind of coincidence?—in Washington, D.C. I'm proposing to follow the thread from a conventional question such as "Are you giving a paper at the MLA?" to watch how the "I" answers when constrained by place and by time to decide where it stands. If you like, I will say I am borrowing—or quoting—this way of reading from *A Room of One's Own* where the narrator is both an admiring and an admirable reader. "All this was admirable. But after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I.' One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it . . . Back one was always hailed to the letter 'I.' One began to be tired of 'I.' Not but what this 'I' was a most respectable 'I'; honest and logical; hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. I respect and admire that 'I' from the bottom of my heart." As you can see or hear, perhaps, such a reference has already considerably complicated the thread to be followed. Woolf's "'I'/'I'" is not a beam of theoretical light, but "a straight dark bar, a shadow . . ."

Who, when, what, and where is the "I" that has to answer all these questions, that also has to answer for all these questions?

At the moment of writing—today, December 13th—"I" already must address this moment of reading my paper, performing it here (there) now (then). At this moment, I have before me three texts to which to refer, two of which, at least, assume with more or less insistence the "maleness" of their first persons, of their signatures and their performances. So, as I write, "femmeninism" gets its spatial contours from three very fine papers, contours which, I hasten to add, do not correspond mimetically with men's bodies nor do they in any simple way represent men's bodies. The same must be said of that particular piece of the text called the signature. By convention, of course, texts and signatures have and will be projected into this relation of representation. By convention, as well, one writes of a future present in which body is made to coincide with text, or rather to punctuate it or interpret it as one says of a theatrical performance. By convention, there is an "I" addressing an absent "you," but as if this "you" were already or still present. All of this, already, just by convention.

(As I write, back on the farm in Ohio, the only other animate bodies in the room are two cats, male and female, one neutered and

the other spayed. However, it is true (although you're just going to have to believe I'm not making this up) that earlier in the evening, I got a phone call which, if forced to guess at its intention, I might call obscene—a brief, anonymous, disembodied voice asking me a question. And now I'm wondering if—in two weeks—I can recount this in such a conventional place without making you wonder what the question was and how I answered. But who, "you"? There is still no "you" yet, the address remains as anonymous as an obscene phone caller's.)

If "I" is like an obscene phone caller in its mode of address, does that mean I can say anything whatsoever here? "n'importe quoi" as one says in French to indicate the general interchangeability of a thing? I say no, but what does the "I" of our convention say? Is it not posed—for example by the conventions of our double session, but by at least 80 other sessions as well—to be interchangeable, substitutable according to the characteristics of sex? If one attributes the "logic" of this conventional "I" to the strict biological or genealogical or genetic code of two-sexes-reproducing-each other, then this "I" will be read as human female no matter what it says about itself—it can say, in other words, n'importe quoi.

Well, I could try to follow the paths of the various "I"s which are deployed by these three very moving and mobilizing papers. They certainly deserve more response, more responsible response than anyone can expect to give in fifteen minutes. A conventional time constraint here on all our "I"s, theirs and mine, ours. How can "I" act responsibly, then, given such a limit on response? Does not the reduction to such strict temporal and spatial limits constrain one to speak almost at random of this or that feature traced in shadowy outline by "the straight, dark bar"? As in Hegel's night, where "A" looks just like "not A," in this night where all cats are black and crossing paths, doesn't one take a chance whenever one tries to read in the dark?

Another question here: is reading in the dark a mode of writing the imaginary? Paul Smith asks "What would a male writing his imaginary actually produce? I am, I must confess, stumped by that question. The only answers at which I could guess seem unlikely to be 'correct.'" I notice that the "I" here says "I must confess" and thereby enters—however ironically, however rhetorically—the confessional or autobiographical mode at the very place where what it confesses to is being "stumped" by the question of, exactly how one can enter an autobiographical mode "correctly" as a man. We may see here an "I" in a double bind, circumscribed by a demand which it is as impossible to read as it is necessary to understand. For this reason,

one may expect that the "I" cannot not write what it calls the "imaginary" and which it defines as "a pornographic defense against the mother's body," but by its own prediction it will do so "incorrectly," out of place. I realize that the "I" realizes or understands its predicament in terms that are not all that different from the ones I have just used. But it should not be presumed that this understanding—his or mine—constitutes or effects a resolution. As Paul Smith reminded us this morning, there is a risk of things seeming to settle too quickly, giving one but an imaginary resolution of the problem of the "imaginary," settling too quickly the question that stumps the "I" every time. He writes: "within the context of feminist theory, men can do something like the same thing as women do/did within theory itself; they can help to subvert, unsettle and undermine the (seemingly rather fast to settle) laws of that discourse. This they can do purely by virtue of existing in it as a kind of irreducible difference." Why am I retained, held back by the "purely" and the "virtue" of the claim made in this last sentence? What have purity and virtue got to do with "men in feminism"?

Unless we are talking already, but without knowing it, about the immaculate birth of a thing to which we have had to give the monstrous, stuttering name of "femmeninism"?

By announcing such an untimely, uncertain (unwanted?) birth, am I being "ahistorical and irresponsible"? Does not the forced reproduction of this unutterable stammer defer the referent which the correct title, "Men in Feminism," might, as Smith writes, help keep in view? "From the point of their impossible position in feminism, [men] might help to keep in view the referent which most of our current theory is all too eager to defer." I cannot disagree with this idea, but I am prompted to wonder about the reappearance of a representational clarity which passes by way of a visual metaphor once again—to "keep in view the referent"—and which, at the very place where it discerns "most of our current theory" deferring the referent, nevertheless performs a theoretical construction of space along the fold or turn from inside to outside: "when feminist theory turns to confront or to construct its public sphere, or when it has done with codifying itself in the contested but limited sphere of the academic, that is the point where we can really talk about alliances between feminists and men, between people engaged in a political struggle which is carried out on many fronts." In this passage, the metaphoric turn follows a clearly dialectical path, passing through the roadforks or signposts marking off opposite one-way streets ("feminists and men"), turning (left or right?) onto main highways

("alliances," "people") which feed into the final term bringing together identity and difference ("political struggle carried out on many fronts"). In keeping with my own pattern of spatial metaphors, I suggest we can take this final term to be something like a cloverleaf over a four-lane interstate where traffic is permitted to move in at least four different directions at once.

A cloverleaf, of course, is a symbol—a kind of metaphor—for good luck, "the luck of the Irish," as one says. The question, however, is always to know whether the cloverleaf has three leaves or four, since it is only the four-leaf clover that is supposed to bring good luck. So, if the dialectic of "Men in Feminism" promises that its complete operation will be carried out under a good luck sign, that the cloverleaf will cover all the bets and all the guesses one has to make reading the exit and entrance signs in the dark, then it must have some reliable way of counting these exits and entrances.

Whether the cloverleaf of the dialectical promise has three leaves or four cannot be said to be seen in the same sense as one sees—and can therefore simply count—the leaves on a real cloverleaf, or even the exit, entrance ramps on those all-the-more-real-because-more-dangerous traffic regulators called cloverleaf overpasses. Everyone knows how these things are supposed to work, but nevertheless many accidents happen when the concept is realized in concrete. Is there any rule, then, that can allow us to count the number of ins and outs of this promise? What is the rule—or the law—that stands outside that which one is trying to count? Smith makes this suggestion: "When [feminist theory] has had done with codifying itself in the contested but limited sphere of the academic, that is the point where we can really talk . . ." If, at that point, one can begin to talk really, it will be because some codified principle can be counted on to exclude uncertainty from our numbers. The question, however, of whether this codification has had done with itself or not takes up our other question of whether the concept has three or four leaves. If it has had done with itself, then it is outside of that which it serves to count. There are, then, three leaves to be counted, the fourth having excluded itself. If, however, it—"feminist theory in the contested but limited sphere of the academic"—has not had done with itself, then there are perhaps four leaves but no way to count them.

Has feminist theory had done with codifying itself, giving itself the law so that we have a new, truer convention for counting our numbers, counting off the ins and outs? Or are we still trying to read in the dark? Is there a law—or a rule—that directs blind

reading?

By convention, the answer might be yes. For example, PMLA practices an editorial policy of "blind reading," a policy which was instituted largely because of successful pressure from women's caucuses on the legislative mechanism of this association. Does this rule always work? That is, does it have general applicability as a principle for discounting the signature in order to count more safely and surely, which is to say, by multiples of three? By convention, the answer seems to be no. There are other sets of rules governing the omission of signatures, for example the rules which governed the omission of Andrew Ross's name from the program of "Men in Feminism I". (By some coincidence—or chance—Ross's paper is also the only one of the three that does not assume the "maleness" of its signature.) Thus, counting mistakes can still occur because the rules for counting (or discounting) signatures are themselves, between themselves disjointed.

To project a codification of feminist theory in any sphere—even the limited, apparently trivial sphere of the MLA—is to imagine, it seems to me, a body of law with no internal contradictions, a rounded-off form that has everything sewn up, leaving no hidden pockets or recesses. Such a projection might be called a devagination, or, since a fourth term drops out, collapses or lapses, a prolapse—here, the prolapse of a feminine signature. Has feminist theory given itself—and us—the law of how count signatures, of how to count with signatures that are both inside and outside what counts? Do we now know how to stand on the signature without jumping from one leg to the other, do we have a leg to stand on that lets us count past three, at least up to four, or, like Mr. Ramsay, are we still stumped by the letter "R", his initial, unable to get to "q"? Has feminist theory figured out how to stand the signature up as a ruler against which to measure a new hierarchy of values or to lay it out on the ground like a tape measure that will point exactly to the limit beyond which out is out and in is in? Has feminism learned to absorb its "own" difference, the unreliability of its signature, so that it can sign for everything else?

I'll end, abruptly, by returning the reference to Irigaray's "admiration." As Stephen Heath notes, the term comes from *Les Passions de l'âme*, where Descartes makes admiration the first of all the passions. Specifically, Irigaray reads this passage, as I translate it: "When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new or very different from what we have known up to then or from what we might have supposed it to be, we are then

caused to admire it and be astonished by it; and since this can happen before we have any sure knowledge whether or not this object suits us or not (*si cet objet nous est convenable ou s'il ne l'est pas*; that is, whether it is appropriate to us, adequate, conform, expedient, pertinent, favorable, decent, etc., etc., from *venir*, to come, *con*-together), it therefore seems to me that admiration is the first of the passions, and that it can have no contrary; this because, if the object that presents itself has nothing in itself which surprises us, we are not moved in the least and can consider it without any passion." Admiration has no identified contrary, it does not, in other words, already depend on a binary or dual repetition. It is thus both before the appropriate binary convention and gives the law to that convention but as the rule of a perpetual newness, perhaps the lawless rule of the monstrous.

With admiration, have we found a four-leaf clover or have we, rather, broken the mirror? If the latter, is there not a sense in which breaking the mirror has to be counted on to bring, not seven years bad luck, but to bring into view something other that is not yet or still a contrary, an opposite, a complement, an appropriate, that is, a (necessarily) *convenable* object? It seems to me that both Heath and Smith find themselves constrained (but by whom or by what?) to locate "admiration" on a more or less imaginary map. Heath moves or is forced to move to the side of utopia; Smith leaps or is forced to leap back because he reads warnings of dystopia, a pornographic production. Each move, each jump—forward or back? onto the left leg or the right?—constructs a contrary of admiration, divides it between two scenes—best possible and worst possible scenarios. Is there any surprise in this?

To take a leap of my own here, but one which lands again on the path of road metaphors, such scenarios bring *Road Warrior*—the movie—to mind. There the utopic/dystopic fold of represented space over visual, narrative time depends on an impossible frame narration from a child's point of view. The frame doesn't hold together, is impossible because, for the child to tell the story, it has, in effect, to coincide (spatially, temporally) with "Mad Max," its spiritual father and the hero of the film. This feral child, the foundling born of "mother nature," as they say, tells the story as if he were his "own" father. The narrative works only if one agrees to disregard its frame, one which in this case is laughingly incoherent—it's child's play to see the joining cracks. Elsewhere than in the movies it's more difficult, I'll admit, to see the cracks that break up the father's dream of immortality through a son because, having been repeated

generation after generation, it can now seem to be imputed to the child as his own dream. But isn't it time we all began to break up whenever we hear talk of or from an oedipal imaginary?

So, maybe there's something pretty funny going on here. I'm tempted to understand it according to one of the first principles of feminist consciousness—the notion of the double standard, the double measure or rule. When an imaginary line is being drawn, dividing precisely what will be called the imaginary from the rest, who is going to be ready to sign on the dotted line guaranteeing the reliability of all other signatures? And if we're still asking whether the authorizing signature will itself be masculine or feminine, even male or female, can we ever expect to be surprised again by the advent of what counts differently?

Peggy Kamuf
Miami University