Socialism, Feminism and Men

Peter Middleton

Feminism has been both welcomed and resisted by socialist men in the past twenty years. As a critique of exploitation and inequality, feminism has been easily recognisable to socialism. Women can be added on to its emancipatory project as another oppressed class to be liberated. In practice this has often meant that feminist politics and socialist politics have managed an uneasy co-operation, a co-ordination that breaks down when specific issues highlight the consequences in priorities and strategies of their seemingly incompatible fundamental analyses of contemporary society. Feminism has been resisted when these fundamental differences have become central to political strategy. The respective emphases on the primacy of patriarchy or the relations of production have created a split between feminists and socialists. Socialist feminists have found it very difficult to articulate Marxism and feminism together within a coherent framework. Men, even socialist men, have largely remained silent on the issue of their own gender and its political imperatives.

Socialism was assumed to include the political interests of women, as it worked towards a society in which the means of production were controlled by the working class who through that process of transformation became the whole of society. The classless society was the end point of a self-transformation of the working class, which immanently contained that future. Feminism's emergence over the past two decades has challenged this assumption. Feminism, by definition, asserts that socialism has not represented women's interests adequately. A socialist revolution would not necessarily end the oppression of women because it might not alter the connections between gender and power.

Feminism has split socialism. Whatever their class or politics, *men* are agents of a system oppressive to women. Socialist men are suddenly split from within. They are both political activists working for a better society and the very instruments of exploitation. Socialism is no longer wholly radical.[1] Nor can socialist men simply become feminists, because feminism is a politics which defines only *women* as both *agents* and *subjects* of its action. No such comparable politics exists for men. They are assumed to be the beneficiaries of women's oppression as well as its agents. A men's movement which aimed to improve men's lives in any way could turn out to be a politics that enabled men to consolidate their existing power more fully and therefore even more oppressively. If we drop 'men' from the title of this essay, they return to either a divided socialism pretending to an imaginary unity, or an uneasy masquerade as feminists. Neither is tenable. Men can and should support feminism, but they cannot be its subjects, representatives or policy makers.

How can we speak of a socialist politics in which gender was recognised to be involved with its every aspect, that would make it possible for men to take active roles, and that would remain socialist and pro-feminist? That, I want to suggest, is one of the most pressing demands on the socialist agenda, and one of the hardest to respond to in both theory and practice.[2] In the remainder of this article I will discuss two areas of especial conceptual difficulty: the questions of oppression and of sexual difference. The confusion these have generated forms a major barrier to developing a socialist politics that could properly acknowledge feminism in its emancipatory critique. A discussion of these refractory concepts might also lead to better ways of understanding how socialism can negotiate new political practices around other apparently internal divisions amongst socialists, such as sexuality and race,[3] although I shall not try to develop that analysis here.

OPPRESSION

Since the early '70s feminism has made the term oppression central to its analysis of sexual politics. Unlike many other key concepts in feminist debate, the concept of oppression seems not to have emerged in the work of one theorist, but to have developed in the heat of public debate. There is no founding text where the concept is extensively analysed and demonstrated. As a result the concept of oppression has never been well defined in the way that other feminist concepts have. Its primary roots lie in the long tradition, going back to essays like Mill and Taylor's *On the Subjection of Women*, which links women's lack of rights to slavery. In the '70s the parallelism of liberation politics in the feminist and black movements made this term especially useful. For feminism the term did not need to be analytically exact because it operated as a basic evocation of the conditions which require a politics, rather than an analytic concept. Its universal use gave it the clarity of the obvious. The term 'oppression' is assumed not to need a definition because the oppression can be so readily demonstrated. Oppression is the historical condition that requires feminism. The term is usually understood

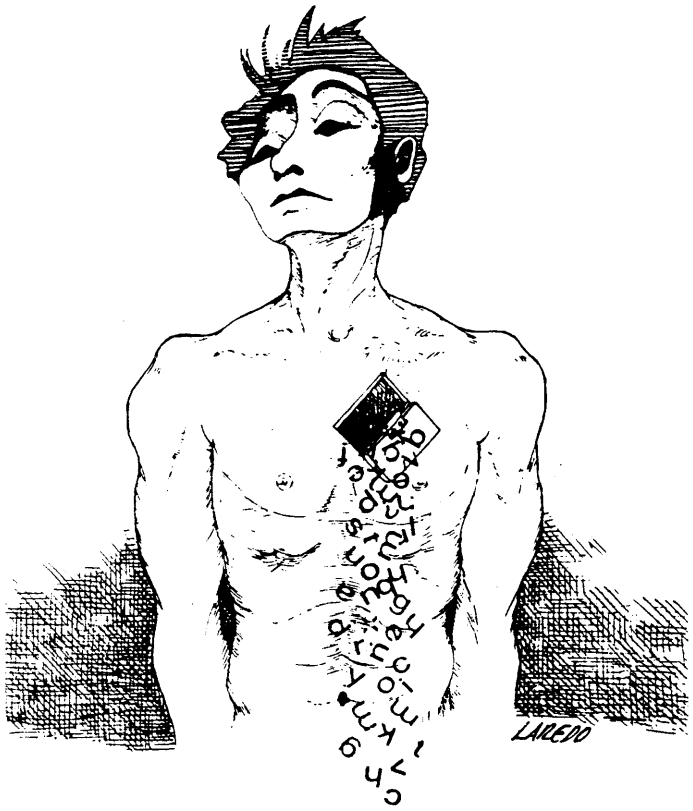
as the description of a condition rather than an analytic concept. Analysis is carried out in more specific terms than the general one of oppression. Hester Eisenstein, for example, in her study of the development of feminist thought, simply indexes the term oppression with a cross-reference to 'subordination', but the page references for 'subordination' take the reader to references to oppression as well.[4] 'Subordination' is understood as the conceptually more analysable, practical consequence of the undeniable existence of oppression.

The dictionary definition of oppression bears out the link to black politics and its roots in anti-slavery and civil rights campaigns. The Webster dictionary entry for the 1971 edition, which can be taken therefore as the standard meaning from which American feminism began its extension of the term, reads:

> 1a: unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power esp. by the imposition of burdens; *esp*: the unlawful, excessive or corrupt exercise of power other than by extortion by any public officer so as to harm anyone in his rights, person, or property while purporting to act under color of governmental authority'.[5]

Oppression is defined not simply as the exercise of power, but its misuse. The term is therefore a natural heir to the arguments about the exclusion of women from the legal rights enjoyed by men, arguments which extend back through the nineteenth century. In the '70s the term was extended to mean not just the misuse of power but the possession of power itself. 'Men have power over women' is a common formulation. The traditional use of the term 'oppression' was based on the acceptance that there were rules which applied to everyone. The extension of the concept has meant that in some cases the rules themselves have been assumed to be at fault, and the implication would then be that the oppressors had made some of the rules to suit themselves. This extension might seem unexceptionable from a marxist standpoint, because this description could be reformulated in the more familiar concepts of recent theories of ideology. That parallel is misleading however because the dictionary concept of oppression implies a *consciousness* of the rules that are broken. Oppression implies a standard which has been violated, and an intention to do so. Ideology does not. Consciousness of those rules will take the form of ideology amongst those who benefit from them, whereas the experience of oppression is the recognition that the rules have been broken. The extended concept of oppression results in a double bind for those who are accused of being oppressors, because they are both assumed to have intentionally violated rights which everyone can agree to, and to have constructed the system of those rights for their own aggrandisement. It is confusion generated by the combination of the two positions that is disabling for organising political change from within.

In its earlier form oppression meant that an appeal could be made to the rules which bound both oppressors and the oppressed, however much such an appeal was likely to fail, The oppressors could be condemned as intentional violators of rules that everyone should observe. Oppressors who were convinced by this appeal that they had indeed broken the rules could in theory facilitate political change by returning to a proper adherence to those rules, because their own will, which had been the cause of the breach, is equally sufficient for its remedy. The extension of the concept of oppression keeps the *form* of the judgement implied by the earlier definition but extends its scope far beyond the constitutive legal rules of a society to include many other forms of behaviour. This concept of oppression holds that the rules themselves are the problem, and the power they confer illegitimate, so the only option for the oppressor who wishes to reform is to abdicate altogether, relinquishing the power conferred by the rules which themselves somehow disappear at the same moment. The difficulty with this account is that there is now no set of rules or standards to appeal to. We cannot say to the oppressors that they have misused their power by breaking a rule which we can specify, but simply that their power is an abuse, without any qualification. Keeping the old structure of the concept means in the case of men and women that if we say 'men oppress women', instead of 'men oppress women because they deny them the vote', we thereby make oppression definitional of men. The result is that a judgement, which attributes an intention and implies the possibility of change, based on an appeal to universally accepted norms which have been allegedly violated, is retained in a new context, so that it appears that the oppressors intend the oppression they institute, and could therefore end it if they wished. They appear to be violators of accepted norms, but at the same time no such norms are specified. The oppressors appear to be refusing change that they are capable of, and to be accepting the violation of basic rights, yet at the same time no such rights are acknowledged by both sides.

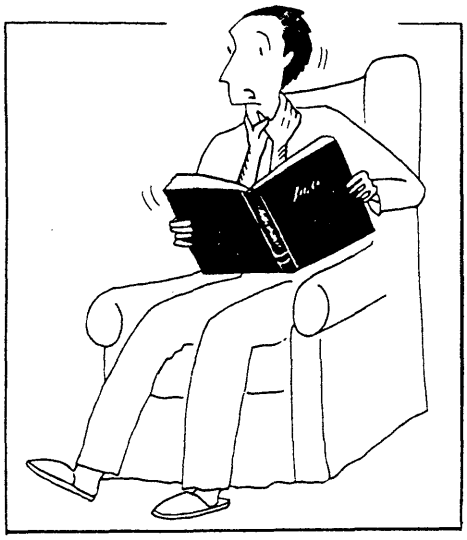


A recent study of masculinity by Jeff Hearn becomes enmeshed in the confusions caused by the uncritical acceptance of the concept as the basis for social analysis. According to the title of his book, men are 'the gender of oppression'. His book is unusual because it does try to define oppression, although the definition itself is too broad to be of much use except to call our attention to the kind of phenomena that need explaining.

> 'The term "oppression" is a shorthand for social practices, tendencies and relations that discriminate against, ignore, neglect, degrade or harm people, to *reduce* people to less than human. It is thus both a

specific term, as in the harming of another person, and global, in its implication of reaching out to a fuller humanity of greater ability, variability, flexibility, and commitment to labouring for all life. It also refers to direct actions, say of murder and torture, and less direct social relations, such as the oppression of the Third World by the neglect and the domination of the first two. Oppression thus rests on some form of unfair denial of or exclusion from a preferable alternative course of action, such as in the gender case, women's control over their own fertility or sexuality.[6]

Hearn then insists that men 'are the gender which routinely engages in the oppression of others, women, children and indeed animals'.[7] This definition of oppression, which is linked with the unproven assertion that such practices can be explained as the result of men's innate nature, is theoretically confused and politically sclerotic. The excessively broad scope of the term needs to be restricted if we are not to paralyse all hope of men engaging in a radical gender politics, by implying, as Hearn does, that men are defined by their tendency to reduce others to a less than human condition. Hearn's 'shorthand' even allows him to blur the differences between the treatment of animals and people, and to blur the distinctions between different social practices and the interpretations that human subjects make of them. Animals are mistreated, but they are not oppressed because they are not capable of recognising rights and their denial. Hearn has



replaced the concept of rights with the much more general phrase 'a preferable alternative course of action'. This definition is so broad as to make the concept of oppression apply to almost all the activities of daily life and to all those who participate in them. Yet Hearn's attempt at a broad definition is a necessary attempt to recognise that oppression cannot be defined purely in terms of rights since feminism has redefined the political sphere to include sexuality, which is not easily subsumed by the language of rights. I will argue that oppression is useful as an informal descriptive term used in the way Hearn proposes, but is a major obstacle to the participation of men in gender politics if it becomes a key element in political analysis.

From the start of its use in the early '70s there have been protests from men about its widespread use to define axiomatically the relations between men and women. Such protests usually took the form either of a denial that men oppress women, or of an argument that men, too, are oppressed. That latter argument was often used in the men's movement in the '70s and is still current in some branches of that movement. Recent books on masculinity by men have rejected both arguments and accepted that men do oppress women. R. W. Connell, in the Preface to his comprehensive study of gender, insists that the men's movement was wrong to say 'that men are equally oppressed. This claim is demonstrably false. Some of the relevant evidence is set out below ... as an introduction to the facts of gender inequality for those not already familiar with the issue'.[8] For Connell the facts can speak for themselves. Men are 'beneficiaries of an oppressive system'.[9] Connell largely avoids the pitfalls that Hearn encounters by focusing on system[10] rather than oppression. His fundamental argument is that 'the patriarchal state can be seen ... not as the manifestation of a patriarchal essence, but as the centre of a reverberating set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is both constructed and contested'.[11] His careful attempt to preserve the complex formations of social theory and practice marks a new stage in discussions of masculinity by men, especially his clarity about the distinctions between structural analyses and theories of praxis, but his concern to avoid talking reductively of masculinity (he refers to masculinities) and social practice results in a loss of clarity about the political imperatives for men who are committed to change.[12] The failure to analyse the fundamental assumption of oppression results in an avoidance of the very challenge that feminism has issued to men.

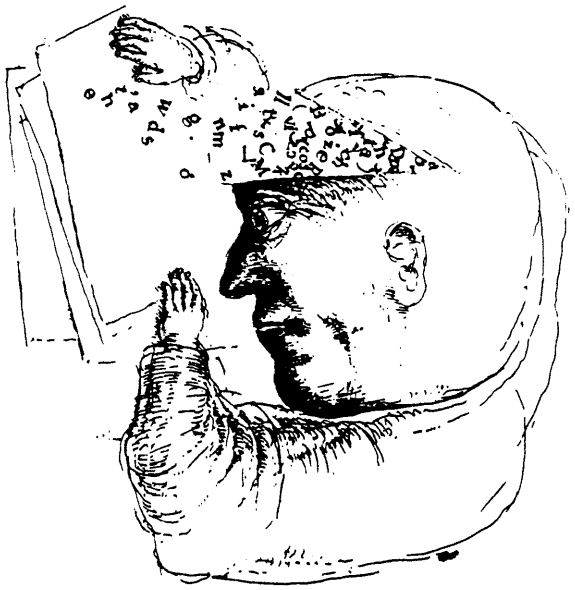
A particularly forceful version of that challenge can be found in Rosi Braidotti's recent essay for the timely collection *Men in Feminism*:

> It must be very uncomfortable to be a male, white, middle class intellectual at a time in history when so many minorities and oppressed groups are speaking up for themselves; a time when the hegemony of the white knowing subject is crumbling. Lacking the historical experience of oppression on the basis of sex, they paradoxically lack a minus. Lacking the lack, they cannot participate in the great ferment of ideas that is shaking up Western culture: it must be very painful indeed to have no option other than being the empirical referent of the historical oppressor of women, and being asked to account for his atrocities.[13]

Men lack the experience of oppression that women have. Women necessarily lack the phallus that signifies men's power. That incubus, the male, white, middle class intellectual lacks the experience of oppression several times over, through his gender, class and colour. To argue that since most intellectuals sell their labour they are working class, or to say that despite their middle-class life style many intellectuals come from working class backgrounds is obviously an insufficient response. Such arguments don't address the full force of Braidotti's argument that oppression cannot be known merely theoretically, it has to be experienced. Nor does it answer the demand that every individual man account for all men's atrocities. The concept of oppression makes the individual subject co-extensive with a collective singular subject. A man is a man (but not Man, i.e., mankind). 'His atrocities' are both an individual man's responsibility and all men's. Braidotti's blend of semiology, the concept of oppression and the appeal to an individual's experience of marginalized identity, is characteristic of the use of the concept of oppression. The painful lack of options, I will argue, resutls from the confusion of theory, not from history.

The root of the confusion here lies in the use of the term 'subject' both in a Kantian sense as the reference point for

theories of knowledge and morality, and as an empirical figure entangled in contingency or history. In the Kantian sense the transcendental subject is an abstract structuring principle of experience, but even in Kant's work there are signs of the difficulty of maintaining this idealizing fiction when discussing issues similar to oppression. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* Kant presents his 'categorical imperative', or universal moral principle that one should 'act



only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law',[14] in a way that could give grounds for reading his concept of the subject in historical terms.

> A rational being belongs to the kingdom of ends as a *member*, when, although he makes its universal laws, he is also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as its *head*, when as the maker of laws he is himself subject to the will of no other.[15]

People should treat one another as ends in themselves and not merely as means to an end, and a society where that actually occurred would be a kingdom of ends. The paradoxical position of being both sovereign and subject at once arises because the subject is both the paradigm for the unconditioned self able to choose to follow the moral law, and in practice bound to follow actual social rules in specific cases. Kant's image of the sovereign who is also subject has the effect of identifying the sovereign with the entire populace. Historical contingency is implicit in the idea of a rational being who is subject to the laws, because that subjection must occur at specific moments when the person finds him or herself subject. In Kantian terms oppression occurs when this perfect translation from member to head breaks down, when subject and sovereign are not interchangeable. In other words oppression is a disorder of the very founding concept of the subject on which the whole Kantian project depends. The existence of oppression seems to 'disrupt the notion of the white sovereign subject',[16] to use the words of the preface to *Unwrapping Masculinity*. At the most basic level the concept of oppression emerges from the Kantian framework as the sign of its internal contradictions which can only be thought of as the demise of a sovereign subject.

Braidotti's argument that men lack the lack depends on the validity of her use of the concept of the subject. She uses the concept to name both a transcendent structuring principle of experience and the empirical collective groups that live through the vicissitudes of history. In other words she conflates a transcendent subject and a historical subject, or a man and men. This conceptual confusion, which has antecedents in Kant, is centrally evident in much semiology.[17]

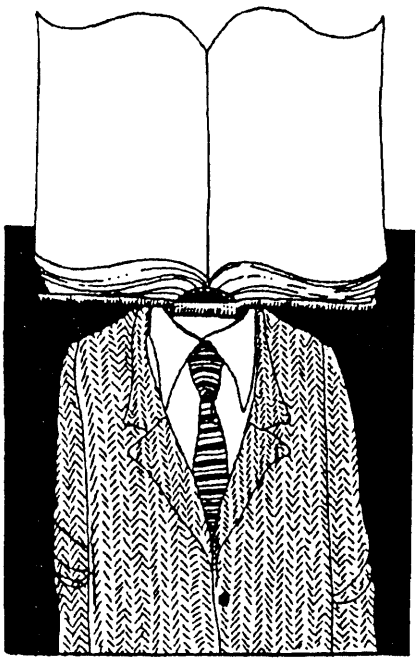
Braidotti's essay implicitly endorses what has become known as the theory of multiple oppressions.[18] In the past ten years the women's movement has been faced by a parallel dilemma to that of socialist men who wish to support feminism, a dilemma that has developed around the idea of multiple oppression. Black women have confronted white feminists with their complicity in racism. As a result white women have had to acknowledge that despite their feminism they might still be acting oppressively toward black women and benefitting from the general racism of our society. Women could not automatically assume sisterhood on the basis of gender. The theory of multiple oppressions assumes that an individual can be oppressed in an additive way. Someone with several oppressions could claim a kind of political priority and existential authority over someone with only one oppression. The tendency to do this, and also to assume the right to speak for an oppressed group purely on the basis of membership, has been criticised by some feminists, but its influence in political debate remains strong. To claim oppression gives one an identity and an understanding of one's own history. The difficulty arises when some members of a political grouping to which one belongs are claimed to be oppressors by another group with which one is identified. Multiple oppressions mean multiple scissions.

The concept of oppression thus involves several assumptions. It implies a wider social context. Oppression thus may be mediated through individuals but oppression implies that the individual is acting as a member of the oppressor group. Therefore the individual may act in an unpleasant or even cruel way and still not be acting oppressively, if their behaviour is not determined by their membership of the oppressor group. The difficulty with the concept of oppression is that it makes it hard to distinguish the origins and character of different types of relations between so-called oppressor and oppressed groups. All behaviour of whatever kind that takes place between members of the two groups cannot simply be assumed to be determined by that general group relation. If there are more than two groups in relation the situation is even more complex.

Oppression confers an identity. For members of a group that is oppressed, to recognise that they are oppressed is crucial, because that is the moment when they perceive that their experience is not the result of their own specific nature or the nature of the world, but the result of an alterable state of things (however difficult change might be in practical terms). It is the recognition of injustice, of the fact that their oppression is the result of a systematic treatment of the group with which they are identified by others but with which they may not even identify from their own conscious point of view. This treatment has physical, emotional, intellectual, economic and political consequences for the individual. Identification of the oppression is the first move toward organised resistance because it is the moment of recognising the possibility of change. As an organised group the oppressed can begin to act politically and at the same time identify the group(s) causing their oppression.

Oppression operates only in terms of collectivities. An individual is oppressed as part of a group. You could not be

oppressed if you were the only member of your group. The idea of an *individual* oppressor has little meaning, because the individual's action, however horrifying, is only *oppression* within the framework of the relation of collectivities. It is meaningless to talk of an individual's *intention* to act oppressively because oppression is a systematic determination (and interpretation) of individual behaviours. The concept is fundamentally interpretive of the relations between collectivities



and is not a valid description of specific instances or intentions. Oppression is a term that refers to a general structure, and in that way is very close to the concept of power that has gained wide currency in theories of sexual politics.

Oppression is similar to but not identical with power. Adults have power over children but that does not mean that children are directly oppressed by adults (although there is a case for arguing that some oppression does result from this). Power is a 'virtual' force. Power is not an action or a history, but a potential for either. The concept of power answers questions about the conditions necessary for events to occur. Power is a catch-all concept for an originating dynamic of historical change. Its widespread use today is the result of the disappearance of agency in post-structuralist theories of the subject, a disappearance which has left a conceptual vacuum. Where social groups were formerly theorised as singular subjects, the semiological critique of the philosophy of the subject leaves them without any potential for interaction. Power substitutes for this potential. The difficulty is that this model of society cannot account for instances of action in history, without taking the concept of power out of its legitimate field and misusing it as a means of explaining historical events. Power, however, cannot act.

The tendency to misuse the concept of power occurs for the same reason that oppression, another virtual concept, is taken as identifiable through individual experience. We tend to think of groups as singular subjects; man and men are seen as conforming to the same analytic and theoretic constraints. What we need to recognise is that groups are not united, singular subjects. Oppression and power are perfectly valid concepts within a restricted sphere of analysis. They explain the potential of groups to act in certain ways in relation to one another. They give answers to questions about experience by specifying not causes, but limiting conditions.

The consequence of the complex character of the concept of oppression is that, although it can be argued from women's point of view that men oppress women, it does not necessarily follow that a specific individual man oppresses women, nor that all relations between individuals from the two groups are oppressive. Men must recognise this while also recognising the anger and outrage that women feel, and which necessarily find individual as well as group targets. I don't mean that an individual man can disown complicity. Men do benefit from the oppression of women. As black women have pointed out to white feminists, the members of an oppressor group benefit from the oppression whether they are conscious of the benefits or not. They also lose out in certain obvious ways too. But this complicity is only part of the picture. An individual man is in some ways an embodiment of the group identity of men, as well as outside it in others. These changing relations to the group are not the result of different moments, as if now I am acting like men in general and now I am not, but different simultaneous elements of a particular moment or situation. Some of what I am doing happens because I am acting as a man and some of it has other determinations. This point can be seen even more clearly if we compare two apparently similar formulations: 'Men oppress women' and 'All men oppress women'. They seem very similar but are actually quite different. The first describes a structured relation between individuals considered through their group identity. The second implies that each and every man is an oppressor of women and thereby further implies that this oppression originates in the intentionality of individual men, to whom a male identity as oppressor is intrinsic. That formulation is politically disabling for men.

Thus the idea of the experience of oppression leads to conceptual confusion. It is not oppression that is experienced. Rather, certain experiences are made possible by oppression. There cannot be a direct experience of oppression because oppression only describes the conditions of possible group relations. Oppression does not 'occur' in the historical sense, and the experiences it makes possible cannot be interpreted as the meaning of oppression. The meaning of these experiences depends on the history of the relations between members of the group and others. That is why the appeal to group identity as giving political significance to an existential account of experiences of oppression is itself an illegitimate seizure of authority, however authentic and damaging the experiences to be recounted. We can go on using the terms of oppression and power in the ordinary way, but we cannot also assume that they offer coherent analytic explanations of sexual politics unless we recognise their restriction to virtuality.

Oppression is a concept of limited analytic value and a hindrance to the development of effective political alliances. It harks back to a consensual theory of law and therefore suggests both the abrogation of shared norms and the denial that the disputed norms have any validity at all. Those termed oppressors are therefore depicted as both intentional violators of these norms and the creators of false norms. Oppression is a structure that defines some of the possible relations between groups and is conceptually a virtual condition, one that delineates the bounds of possibility. Once there is talk of the experience of oppression what is actually being considered is the experience of events made possible by oppression. Analysis on the basis of shared political criteria would be needed to transform this into knowledge of *oppression*. Since the concept of oppression defines relations between groups and has a virtual status, oppressions cannot be added or formed into hierarchies.

The relations between men and women are and have been oppressive. The deprivations, cruelties, exploitations and misrepresentations that social and psychological structures enable men to perpetrate on women are pervasive and sometimes appalling. For socialist men to begin to respond politically to this, a theoretical and practical rethinking of the politics of oppression is needed. But the problem with the concept of oppression is that what appears to be obvious (the suffering, domination and deprivation) becomes the basis for a concept that is used as if the determining structure were itself the actuality. What is needed is a politics that begins with a study of the constitution of groups through their interactions with one another. Oppression is too undifferentiating a concept. Above all it divides those who need to negotiate their differences and relations. No one is 'innocent'. Everyone is placed in structural relations where they are at times members of an oppressor group. A socialist political practice has to begin there.

My argument can be summed up in this way. Women discover that they are oppressed. A feminist politics develops. What must men's response then be? To tackle their own role as oppressors? That is where the problems begin. A politics cannot start there for the reasons I have outlined, because the concept of oppression effectively entails the erasure of the oppressing group, at least insofar as its constitution as a group determines the oppression. If men are defined by their role as agents of oppression then all they can do is will their own demise, at least as men in any sense we understand it. Yet that is not possible if masculinity means anything more than a limited set of behaviours. If however the concept of oppression is understood as describing a precondition of the relations between men and women but not the intentions, aims or experiences of either sex, then it becomes possible for men to begin to differentiate the processes of oppression and other social processes of emancipatory potential. Discovering what is not oppression is one way oppression can be challenged.

The emergence of identity politics based on the concept of multiple oppression points to the need for a socialism that is constantly negotiating the constitutive differences that will fissure every socialist grouping. The project of socialism can only be based on alliances. General principles will always need to be reinflected at every level and at every point of that alliance. Otherwise the socialist project will become self-oppressive. As it has been practised, identity politics has too often been the left's unconscious internalisation of the multiple ways an oppressive social system identifies its subjects.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Sexual difference theory, like the concept of oppression, is widely used in public political debate, and is equally the result of collective discussions rather than the work of a specific theorist. There has however been much more written analysis of the ideas that underpin the theory, although recent accounts of masculinity have tended to take them for granted. One reason for this is indicated unconsciously by Paul Smith, the co-editor of *Men in Feminism*: 'Feminist theory broadly speaking sees ("through" phallocentric theory) that male-centred social and psychical structures place biological men as enforcing agents for those structures.'[19] He then asks whether mel ('male theorists') can understand and 'be of any political use to feminist theory' and decides that they can. 'The intellectual task of understanding feminist theory is not a problem since feminist theory is situated within the array of post-structuralist discourses with which many of us are now perhaps over-familiar.' Although many feminists have queried the validity of this link between feminist theory and post-structuralism, such connections have been historically important, especially in the academic world. Paul Smith, however, simply assumes that the two are identical, and that therefore a man with access to semiological theory has automatic access to feminist theory. The masculine imperialism of that assumption was immediately challenged by other contributors to the collection, but I want to argue that sexual difference theory itself poses some insurmountable barriers to the engagement of men working for social change.

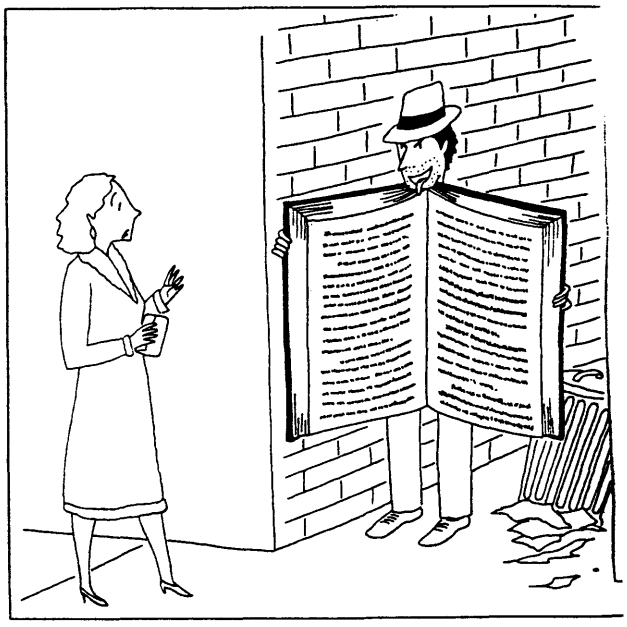
Antony Easthope's book, *What a Man's Gotta Do*, is an exception to the lack of specific accounts of masculinity in terms of sexual difference. Written from within a clear commitment to the form of theory that Paul Smith mentions, the book concludes that our society produces 'masculine myth' that is central to its functioning.

> The myth posits masculinity as natural, normal and universal... In terms of the myth masculinity wants to present itself as an essence – fixed, self-consistent, pure. In fact it has no essence and no core. Gender is marked in three areas or levels of human experience – that of the body and the biological; that of social roles; and that at which gender is defined internally in the unconscious. The myth aims to bring together all three levels in a perfect unity, the completely masculine individual.[20]

In practice this means that analysis must look at the way sexual identity develops in three different ways: through Freud's theory of desire, through the way popular culture enforces representations of masculinity, and by examining the most basic structures of all, those of 'patriarchy and the phallic system'.

> At every point this system turns on what is seen as the male symbol. Sexual difference is represented by having or not having the phallus.... But the phallus, however deeply wrought by the traditions of patriarchal culture, is nevertheless merely a symbol.[21]

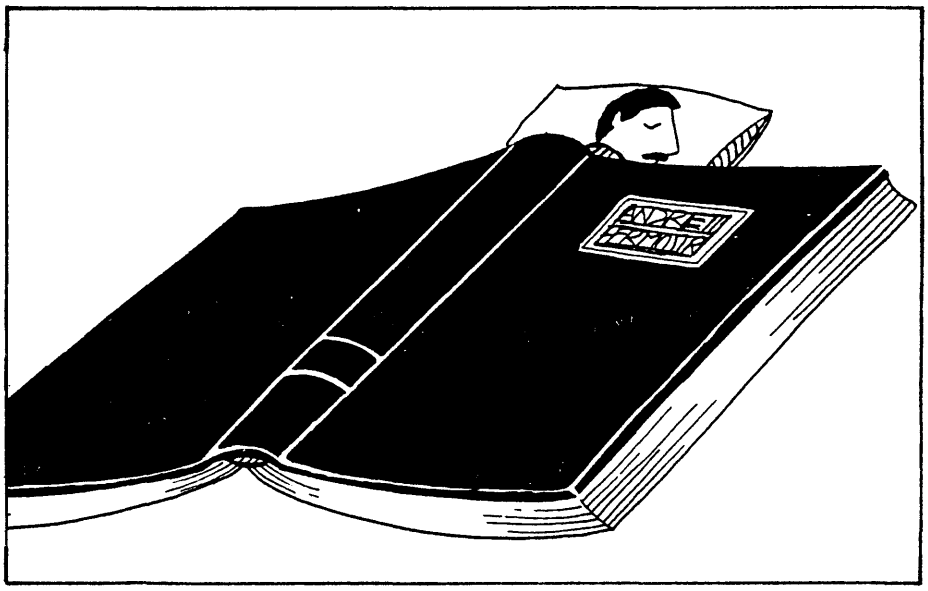
Easthope then refers this point to Juliet Mitchell's introduc-



tion to Lacan's essays on feminine sexuality for confirmation.[22] I will argue that there are serious difficulties with this conjunction of semiology, discourse theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, that has come to be known as sexual difference theory, when it is extended from feminism into a politics of masculinity, difficulties that lie in the fundamental assumptions of those fields rather than the exposition that Easthope offers.

Feminism has explored many different strands of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, but it is the development of this one specific appropriation of psychoanalysis as a theory of sexual difference that has most influenced the Left.[23] Emerging out of a conjuncture between British feminism, French semiology and Screen film theory, it has enjoyed a renewed authority in recent work on masculinity. According to sexual difference theory, gender is constructed within discourses and their work of representation, on the basis of the sexual difference that is only achieved through the oedipal process and the entry into language. The different sources for the theoretical concepts need to be separated out for the implications to become clear. Foucault's theory of discourse is used as the basis of the idea that knowledge and therefore gender are effects of discourses. The Kantian concept of representation that semiology has reproduced is used to indicate that what are produced are not real objects in themselves but cognitive models of them. Freud's conception of the polysexuality of the infant whose desire is only slowly fixed to an approved object choice underlies the assumption that sexual difference emerges after the oedipal transition. Lacan's rereading of that transmutation of desire as the process whereby the subject enters language (and by extension the symbolic, the whole array of culture understood as a series of sign systems), is used to produce an equation between the semiological concept of language as a system of differences, and sexuality. There is also an allusion to Derrida's anti-foundational founding concept of 'differance'.

The analytic functioning of this complex constellation of philosophical, scientific, linguistic and empirical concepts is not my main concern here, but rather its political implications and capacities. The constellation involves two different kinds of appeal to the authority of its founding concepts which have a crucial effect on extensions of the apparatus to the politics of masculinity. One is the appeal to the authority of psychoanalysis as both a science and a coherent philosophical anthropology. The other is an appeal to the authority of the work of Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, and more generally to semiology. The two forms of authority are very different, produce different analytic consequences, and offer different problems to the theorist of masculinity. Semiology has been widely assumed to offer fruitful methods for the study of masculinity because its status is not obviously compromised as the expression of a male standpoint. By contrast, the difficulties of the masculine bias in psychoanalysis have been generally recognised.



Psychoanalysis is an institution deeply complicit with men's authority and power. Any appropriation of psychoanalysis to theorise masculinity would have to begin by challenging the evidential, the structural, the institutional and the ideological formations of this institution. None of the recent attempts to extend psychoanalysis into the critical analysis of masculinity have done that. Feminism offers a misleading ease in *its* use of psychoanalysis, because, as I have suggested, feminism is able to work oppositionally through the already constituted marginality of women to the discipline. Feminism provides an immanent critique not dissimilar to Marx's critique of the classical economists.[24] The language of psychoanalysis has also provided a place for feminists to develop an articulation of silenced experience, because of its richness in terminologies for the desire that women had been historically denied public expression of. This language provides the opportunity for emancipatory dialogue, not an authoritative theory of the psyche. To develop such a theory would require both theoretical work on, and an immanent critique of, the whole range of modern psychologies and their social foundations.

We can begin to see how there might be a problem in using this form of feminist thought for analyses of masculinity if we turn to Jacqueline Rose's companion introduction to *Feminine Sexuality*. She begins with the assumption that there is no 'pre-discursive reality',[25] a formulation that alludes to both language and discourse. The conflation of the two creates a contradiction inimical to the analysis of masculinity. She writes:

> In so far as it is the order of language which constructs sexuality around the male term, or the privileging of that term which shows sexuality to be constructed within language, so this raises the issue of women's relationship to that language and that sexuality simultaneously.[26]

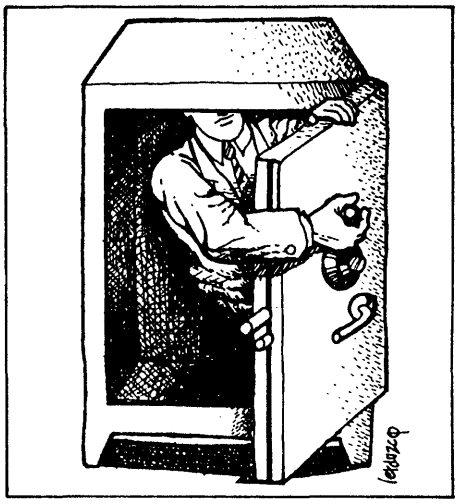
The English word 'language' is used here to refer to *langue* as a universal set of rules and structures (an 'order') which logically precedes any specific social practice. Therefore sexuality is constructed at the level of a structure that transcends discursive practice. The word 'language' is used three times in a sentence, twice without any article at all, implying universality, and the third time with the deictic 'that' ('the issue of women's relationship to that language and that sexuality'). This third appearance produces a distance between women and language. It could also be read as implying that 'the order of language which constructs sexuality around the male term' is not the only language, but this interpretation would amount to the acknowledgement that language is a practice, not a

categorial structure which is the necessary condition of all experience, independent of practice and history.

If language 'structures sexuailty around the male term', then we are dealing with terms, both male and female, which are given, a priori, since they are co-eval with this unified ahistorical structure, language. The terms are then empty, universal linguistic structures with no logical connection to behaviour, context, practice, nor any actual human beings. This form of idealism is especially obstructive of any attempt to consider the construction of masculinity, because it leads to the conclusion that masculinity is coextensive with language itself, and therefore fixed and unchanging. When Jacqueline Rose says elsewhere in the essay that 'the feminine is constituted as a division in language, a division which produces the feminine as its negative term', the word 'feminine' logically has no meaning apart from its use as the label of the division. It can't be used to refer to social practice because, if it were, *parole* would be mistaken for *langue*. Similar problems arise if we try to analyse the phrase 'women's relation to that language', for this phrase assumes that women are historically locatable individuals who can be known to be women independently of language. Yet women are allegedly an effect of language. The two positions are in contradiction. If we further analyse where it is that masculinity is 'constructed' ('sexuality ... constructed within language'), it is by means of psychoanalytic theory that both the privileging and the construction take place. Sexuality is represented as a phenomenon comprehensible a priori, and is therefore not a historical, contingent process. The metaphor of construction implies a process that takes time, and such duration is by definition excluded at the level of sexual difference theory and the *langue* on which it is modelled. It is quite different to say that masculinity is socially constructed, because that construction is precisely a historical and developmental process, continually occurring and itself being remade.

The assumption that language is a system leads to a model of sexual difference that confuses *a priori* concepts and historical practice. Masculinity is theorised as the inevitable primacy of the symbolic. The valuable emphasis on the social construction of sexual difference gets partially obscured by the use of 'masculine' and 'feminine' as structural terms at the level of *langue*. Sexual difference theory sets out to avoid essentialism but tends to reproduce that fallacy in another form.

Psychoanalysis can be seen as an immanent critique of the analysand's speech. The terms of an actual analysis derive from the analysand, and the analysis proceeds by revealing the contradictions within consciousness arising from the unconscious. It also has a normative dimension. The shared rationality of the communicative relation between analyst and analysand forms the basis for the analysis of the analysand's life, the fantasies and frustrations that it evidences. These conflicts are then interpreted by the theory in such a way that the painful contradictions can be healed. A feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis can question the processes of this resolution by reinterpreting the divisions as a result of social processes of gender based domination and therefore relocate the therapy as politics. The latent emancipatory project of psychoanalysis, its aim to understand self-division in order to heal it (a healing that at its most extreme may be simply a tragic reconciliation with inevitable division, as it is in some of Lacan's work), is made explicit, but then transferred from the domain of categorial reason to social history. Beyond the restoration of reflexivity, feminist psychoanalysis offers a transformation of such restorations which is revolutionary in scope. A project that would link psychoanalysis to an analysis



of masculinity aimed at *transformation* would have to bring to psychoanalysis a politics that could similarly reshape its latent imperative into a social, political process. Psychoanalysis cannot effect this transformation itself. Nor can feminism as such, because its appropriation of psychoanalysis identifies masculinity as the very process of conservation. Masculinity is the name given to the refusal of politics that is the positivist and therapeutic horizon of psychoanalytic institutions.

Political critiques of masculinity that have appeared in the past decade have often been based on the apparently radical possibilities of feminist appropriations of psychoanalysis. Yet the concept of difference has provided a formidable barrier to the development of a radical men's politics. I want to argue that such appropriations encounter theoretical obstacles that make the understanding of masculinity as a historical and social phenomenon more difficult, rather than offering the insights that feminism has achieved. Feminism is able to use psychoanalysis from points of both internal and external opposition, so that its very use becomes a powerful political strategy and analytic method. The asymmetries of power and knowledge make it impossible to simply extend or reverse that critical strategy to consider men and masculinity, without reinstating the very authoritarianism that feminism has challenged.

Theories of sexual difference have tended to elide the problems of the authority of Freudian psychoanalysis by the use of semiology, which does not present the same difficulties. Semiology, however, has the effect of transforming a theory whose claims to validity are ultimately dependent on the results of empirical enquiry, into a theory which is idealist and universalist. Sexual difference theory simply replaces theories of material determinism (or essentialism as it is often called) which it explicitly challenges, with a position reminiscent of Neo-Kantianism. The apparent success in exposing essentialist errors is paid for by the inability of the theory to conceptualise determination in any form. Odd circularities result from this. Consider the phrase 'sexual difference' itself. The meaning of the sexual is precisely what difference is supposed to explain. Its inclusion in this phrase suggests that sexual difference has to smuggle in a socially determined understanding of the sexual in order to give meaning to the process of differentiation in the first place. Otherwise we would not know what the word 'sexual' meant in this context.

Sexual difference theory is an unpromising basis for a politics of masculinity because of the effect of its semiological appropriation of psychoanalysis. History and society vanish from the analysis. This idealism is concealed by the apparent success of the theory in challenging widespread

fallacies about gender, those that derive gender either from biology or from an idea of universal sexual division, comparable to right and left handedness. Sexual difference theory explains both the biological fallacy and the universalist fallacy (whose structure does not need further elucidation because of its more familiar form) in semiological terms, as examples of a metaphysics of the referent. Both fallacies are alleged to be what Parveen Adams, writing in *m/f*, called the result of assuming that there is 'a prior and given state of social being', prior, that is, to the work of representation. Only what is represented for us is real in this account. 'The work of representation produces differences that cannot be known in advance.'[28] Michele Barrett seized on this assertion in *Women's Oppression Today* where she pointed out that such a position would make a historical materialism impossible.[29] Knowledge of class and the social relations of production would be inconceivable.

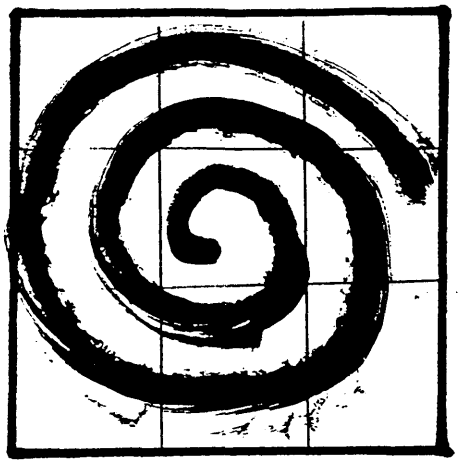
Sexual difference is contrasted by Parveen Adams with sexual division, which is her label for the biological and universalist fallacies. Sexual division depends on an absolutely prior reality which determines it, just as the metaphysical idea of the signifier depends on the prior and given reality of a referent outside discourse. 'Prior' is a term which here merges temporal precedence and theoretical precedence, and therefore makes a claim to temporal precedence or history appear to be a claim to logical priority. 'Given' conflates material determination and logical necessity.

A child is only slowly able to grow into or through the process of positioning that sexual difference effectuates. To say that sexual division was 'prior' in this context would mean that the child was born already wholly constituted as a masculine or feminine individual, whose traits simply had to emerge like the plant out of a seed. Contrary to this, sexual difference theory argues that the desire of the child confronted by the differentiation of the mother and father positions will, during the process of development, result in the child taking up a position in the system of sexual difference not determined by internal factors. If 'prior' did only imply such an assumption about the emergence at birth of a fully gendered individual, then this critique would be very effective but 'prior' can be interpreted in more ordinary, historical terms. There *is* a sexual division prior to the emergence of the child, if we mean that gender already has a history. The child is not born into a world without sexual division and could not take up a position outside it. The role of history has been elided in this attempt to assert the indeterminacy of the child's sexual character. Sexual division is prior to the child even in the very person of the parents, but not in the form of a fixed, absolute pair of identities. This division always has a history and is as varied as our class and multi-racial society can be. The denial of priority is a denial of history. 'Prior' elides the distinction between temporal precedence and logical precedence in order to argue that the former always entails the latter. That is not the case.

The term 'prior' is an abstraction from history. 'Given' on the other hand is an abstraction from material causation. It implies that any appeal to a material determination (for example to physiology or chromosomes) also makes a logical claim. If epistemological realism *were* the only form that reference to an outside world could take, this might be valid. An objective reality whose externality can be considered permanent and universal is not the only theoretical implication of 'given', if we step outside a narrowly realist framework. Material differences may be real, and therefore 'given', but need not therefore logically be determinants of sexual identity in social relations. The significance assigned to what is given is dependent on the history of both material differences and human meanings. Neither need be a sole determinant of sexuality.

The biological fallacy is a fallacy of causation. It assumes that a particular character trait which is allegedly widespread in one sex is caused by an anatomical or biological characteristic. The term 'biology' refers to a field of science, with its own theories, methods, objects of study and institutions. For the causal link to be established, an entity in one conceptual field, biology, would have to be directly connected to an entity in a completely different conceptual field. Such a connection would have to be established conceptually, and that connection would necessitate a negotiation between the two fields in their entirety. The biological fallacy consists of assuming that the body handled by the doctor is the same body that raises a family or holds down a job.

Sexual difference theory avoids this reductionism, but only by relying on some of the more extreme claims of semiology and psychoanalysis, and fails to be coherent, even if we accept those claims. It ignores the role of history in the formation of gender. Focusing on the synchronic sign system and the *ab initio* development of the child it loses sight of the way we all begin with existing, historically determined, sexual differences as we think, speak, mature and ourselves reproduce what we have learnt.



Another variant of sexual difference theory uses the concept of 'discourse' to analyse social structures of representation, especially in recent accounts of masculinity. It is common to hear people talk of sexist discourse and discourses of masculinity.[30] Such usage is misleading. Discourse theory was developed as a means of analysing the history of specific knowledges, especially legal and medical ones. In ordinary use the word discourse means speech. Discourse theory uses the term both metonymically and metaphorically, but not literally. Metonymically it indicates the variety of verbal forms a historical institution can instate. Metaphorically it suggests the conditions of actual practice as opposed to structural paradigms (which structuralists had set in opposition to '*parole*' or discourse, as the proper foci of cultural enquiry). The well-defined uses by Foucault and others give little support for unjustified reference to discourses of masculinity.

This is because Foucault's theory of discourses is a pragmatics: 'This field is made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written) in their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them.'[31] Analysis of intention or '*langue*' is irrelevant. Nor does discourse

analysis examine the logical coherences in these events. The nearest thing to an analysable logic that Foucault offers is the idea of a recognisable relation between a 'system of dispersion' and a 'number of statements'.

> Whenever between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation.*[32]

This summary is made in the specific context of an attempt to formulate general principles for the study of economics, medicine, and grammar. Therefore a legitimate extension of Foucault's discourse theory to gender politics would have to observe several conditions:

(1) It could not make statements about intention, whether individual or collective. You cannot talk about the intentions behind a sexist discourse, for example.

(2) It would have to identify both statements and a *system* of dispersion. The existence of statements doesn't prove the existence of a system.

(3) It would have to engage with pragmatics. Analysis would have to study in detail the structures of social relations in order to assign significance to the statements. The statements cannot be treated as self-evidently meaningful in the absence of such analysis of contexts.

Much of the attractiveness of what has appeared as an aestheticising linguistification of politics in recent cultural theory diminishes if these conditions are observed. The need for a political and historical account of masculinities cannot be sidestepped by projecting those relations from the analysis of statements (or representation in general) into a determinate structure of social relations.

To speak legitimately of a discourse of masculinity it would be necessary to show that a particular set of usages was located structurally within a clearly defined institution with its own methods, objects and practices. Otherwise the reference to discourses of masculinity is simply a reference to repeated patterns of linguistic usage, which may be significant, but cannot be theorised in the way some legal and medical discourses can. Masculinity is produced within some discourses in the stricter theoretical sense, but most examples of 'masculine' utterance are not structured discourses. They are not organised around specific knowledges. The presentation of men in popular cultural forms or the recurrent use of specific languages to describe men are highly significant and must be analysed, but we cannot simply call them discourses and assume we have established a link with histories of power and knowledge.

In an interesting series of papers distributed at the Southampton University Sexual Difference conference in 1985, the Representations of Masculinity Study Group from Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies argued very strongly for a Foucauldian version of the theory of sexual difference. They suggested that there are masculinities rather than a single masculinity, but then focused methodologically on the theory that these masculinities are 'produced in and by different discourses of *representation*'.[33] 'Male discourse' is a 'strategy' available to women as well as men, one that a woman can 'speak with its codes but as a biological female ... run rings round its assumptions and prejudices'.[34] This appealing notion of subversion reveals the same confusion as we saw in Jacqueline Rose's essay. Discourse is said to produce gender, and then through an appeal to experience a position outside it is embraced in order to allow the possibility of resistance. That resistance masks the way masculinity is assumed to be a fixed product of discourse.

My remarks about sexual difference theory, representation and discourse are not in fact intended as criticisms of their use in feminist politics, but of their unanalysed extension to the discussion of masculinity by men. Feminism can use these concepts strategically as long as they are appropriated in an oppositional mode. Once set up as general accounts of human society or extended to the predicaments of masculinity their inherent limits are transgressed. A circularity in the terms and theories available to us becomes evident once we start exploring masculinity.

CONCLUSION

Neither men nor masculinity can claim an emancipatory politics on the basis of gender alone. Men do not form a group constituted by a specific mode of production in the way classes do. The concepts of oppression and power describe the conditions of historical action in terms of potential and constraint, but do not make possible a theoretical basis for a socialist men's politics because the theory of oppression is not a theory of agency. Indeed a global theory of oppression has made it difficult for men to think of themselves as possible agents of a radical politics of gender. The recognition that as historical agents they need not be individual oppressors, nor be wholly defined as oppressors of women, can help make such politics thinkable. Recognising that sexual politics need not depend on a theory of masculinity as an effect of sexual difference makes it possible to recognise that gender relations are neither the result of discourses which wholly determine men's experience, nor merely the result of a process of emergence into language in the universalised oedipal moment. A new set of political strategies which will strengthen existing socialist practice can then emerge from the rethinking of the social relations that our societies determine.

This is not the place to detail the aims and practices of a socialism that takes masculinity seriously. Such work needs to be done by large numbers of men and women on the Left who listen to and negotiate with one another. From the foregoing analysis it should be apparent that certain issues are of central importance. A commitment to better social and personal relations within the Left and especially between men, perhaps in the form of consciousness raising[35] that early contemporary feminism was centred upon, or perhaps in some other form, would not only strengthen the Left and lessen the strains between men and women that so undermine us, but would also generate new ideas about social organisation and change that could form part of the larger political project. If, as many feminists say, men on the Left often set themselves into militaristic conflict with one another, and have little idea how to offer certain kinds of support which it is almost always left to women to provide, then there is much to be done.

That last paragraph seems both scrupulous and disappointing to me. If I were reading this essay I would be looking for more information, speculation, and proposals about men and socialism. In particular I would like to see more affirmation of the contribution that men have made and can make to human emancipation. A reorganisation of child care in the whole context of work would have, it seems to me, a revolutionary effect on our society. There is surely a great need for men to become self-reflective about their gender. How and why has their gender formed their experience, their identity, their very bodily place in the world? My experience of men's workshops suggests that the results of such reflection can be surprising to

men. The exhaustion that most men who work accept as the confirmation of their duty to work, the violence from other men that men come to expect from their earliest toy weapons to the actuality of gang or national warfare, the homophobia that most men experience as isolation and a driving need for female reassurance, the self-doubt and guilt about gender inequality, are pervasive. Becoming accustomed to unthreatening closeness and the possibility of emotional support from men as well as women, learning that a man's worth need not depend solely on productive labour and its undoubted rewards, and connecting hurtful experiences which arose from oppression with the role men play in gender oppression, can immeasurably strengthen men. Yet here I am using the term oppression myself in an essay that explains how obstructive it can be for a socialist politics. I think I could defend its use here as an informal usage of the kind that I hope I have indicated is valuable, as long as it is not taken as a basis for analysis and theory. That development of the understanding which analysis and theory can offer is the challenge we all face, and one that cannot simply be produced by individual intellectual endeavour. It requires a basis in widespread political practice. My proposals about men's strategies are a contribution to a debate that has only very tentatively begun. The discussion of the obstructions that some recent cultural theory creates for the practice of a socialist men's politics has focused on theory, not in order to produce the final form of some new theory, but to explore the relations between theory and practice. It is not so much new theory that we need as further exploration of that political engagement of theory.

There is no uniformity about men. The heterogeneity must be recognised, across age, class, race, religion and world view. These differences must form part of a dialectical process, in which socialist practice, feminism (and other emancipatory projects), and the reflexive engagement of men, are brought together, for our new politics to emerge stronger and freer.

We cannot go back to a pre-semiological or pre-feminist socialism. What male intellectuals on the Left can do is recognise that they have to do new theoretical work that begins with our new situation, but recognises the importance of the familiar goals of socialism, as well as the new understandings of feminism. Without feminism the Left would lose much of its energy. Without men who are willing to reflect upon their masculinity, socialism is likely to direct that energy towards self-defeating ends.

Notes

1 Heidi Hartmann put the dilemma bluntly: 'A struggle aimed only at capitalist relations of oppression will fail, since their underlying supports in patriarchal relations of oppression will fail.' Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in Lydia Sargent (ed.), *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, London, 1981, p. 32.

2 A similar point was recently made by Jeff Rodriguez: 'First of all we need to tackle the theoretical level. Underpinning much of the left's view of this issue is the notion that women's oppression is purely a class-based thing. It is to do with them being workers – being in production and part of the working class. And they naturally assume therefore that to be pro-women is to be pro-socialist. But I don't think that's true at all. They think that there is some basic alliance between women and the workers' movement. I don't think there is. So I think that at a theoretical level left men, with their marxist tradition, need to question this view in a fundamental way, and to recognise that they aren't going to hitch up women to the workers' movement unless they really try, unless they change their structures completely.' Jeff Rodriguez in a round-table discussion, 'Mending the Broken Heart of Socialism', in Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (eds.), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, London, 1988, p. 264.

3 The editors of *Unwrapping Masculinity* echo a widespread conviction on the left that 'socialism, as it is presently defined, cannot withstand the realities of feminism, nor the politics of lesbian and gay affirmation, with its critique of masculinity and heterosexuality, nor the presence of black politics; these all disrupt the notion of the white sovereign subject' (Chapman and Rutherford, p. 18). While I agree with their general picture I will argue in this article that the theoretical position implicit in their diagnosis of the 'white sovereign subject' is a hindrance not a help to the kind of analysis and political change they are calling for.

4 Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, London, 1984, p. 192.

5 *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, London, 1971, p. 1584.

6 Jeff Hearn, *The Gender of Oppression: Men, Masculinity, and the Critique of Marxism*, Brighton, 1987, p. xiii.

7 *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

8 R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Oxford, 1987, p. xi.

9 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

10 Connell disclaims the functionalist emphasis of the term but he still thinks in terms of interactive networks rather than individuals, political strategies or moral theory.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

12 Connell's comparison of the way gender operates in society to musical composition – 'a tangible, active and often difficult process of bringing elements into connection with each other and thrashing out their relationships ... a matter of the real historical process of interaction and group formation' (p. 116) – is an extreme example of this tendency throughout the book.

13 Rosi Braidotti, 'Envy: or With My Brains and Your Looks', in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (eds.), *Men in Feminism*, p. 235.

14 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton, London, 1948, p. 84.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

16 *Loc. cit.*

17 Mark Cousins, in an article which sums up much of the work of this kind (Mark Cousins, 'Material Arguments and Feminism', *m/f*, no. 2, p. 66), and typifies the position of the magazine *m/f*, argues that the concept of oppression is problematic, saying that the 'concept of the oppression of women often results in an algebra where one man's power is another woman's oppression', in a way that epitomises a common frustration amongst men at the use of the term, but his answer is unconvincing. He goes on using the term oppression while he argues that its 'referents' cannot be assumed to be 'an unproblematic totality of women as concrete individuals' (p. 70). Like other contributors to *m/f* he adopts an idealist theory that gender has no reality outside representations within discourses.

18 A good discussion of this debate can be found in Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan, 'Upsetting an Applecart: Difference, Desire and Lesbian Sadomasochism', *Feminist Review*. See for example p. 33: 'As we see it, there are two key ingredients: an analysis of the world as made up of a fixed hierarchy of oppressions (or a select collection of oppressions) around gender, sexuality, age and ability; and notions

of the "authenticity" of subjective experience – experience which can be understood only with reference to the hierarchy.... Within these politics there's little room for distinguishing between politics and those who speak them.... To speak experiences, to claim identities, is to be tied into positions, and everything is assumed to follow on from them. A lesbian mother, then, will automatically have certain postiions on men, women, money, sex.'

19 Paul Smith, 'Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory', in Jardine and Smith, p. 35.

20 Antony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture*, London, 1986, p. 166.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

22 Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the 'école freudienne'*, London, 1982.

23 The magazine *m/f* was the main forum for this development of feminist thought. It was one of the few feminist journals that not only published men, but aimed at a politics that would include men. To do so it had to address issues similar to those with which this essay is concerned, but did so in very different fashion. Mustapha Safouan, for example, argued that the oedipus complex was universal. Changing the pattern of childcare so that men were the main caring parent would not alter sexual identity at all. The implicit conclusion was that the present order contained an unalterable truth. Men were not destined to be primarily engaged in domestic labour.

24 Full discussion of this assertion would require more space than this article permits, and shift attention directly onto feminism away from the issue of masculinity and theory. An example of what I mean would be the work of Jane Gallop in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, London, 1982. An extended discussion of the way feminism can function as critique can be found in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, Cambridge, 1987. However, the phenomenon is pervasive and pushes critique of psychoanalysis to the limits where it becomes almost a new theory altogether.

25 This assertion is allegedly based on a remark from *Encore*, Jacques Lacan's *Seminaire XX*, which she translates as 'How return, other than by means of a special discourse, to a prediscursive reality' (p. 55). His comment occurs in a discussion of ontology where he says "Toute dimension de l'être se produit dans le courant du discours du maître, de celui qui, proférant le signifiant, en attend ce qui est un de ses effets de lien a ne pas negliger, qui tient a ceci que le signifiant commande. Le signifiant est d'abord imperatif. Comment retourner, si ce n'est d'un discours special, a une réalité prédiscursive? C'est la ce qui est le rêve – le rêve, fondateur de toute idée de connaissance. Mais c'est la aussi bien ce qui est a considérer comme mythique. Il n'y a aucune réalité prédiscursive. Chaque réalité se fonde et se definit d'un discours' (p. 33). Rose's translation is accurate but Lacan's context is a discussion of the idea of an ontology, and his general point seems to be that such philosophies tend to imagine that there could be a state of being which is known without language, rather like Hegel's state of 'self-certainty' in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. To conclude that reality is discursive is a definite extrapolation of Lacan's point, especially given that Lacan uses the term 'real' elsewhere to mean what is outside the symbolic order. Lacan's

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26 Mitchell and Rose, p. 53.

27 Mitchell and Rose, p. 55.

28 Parveen Adams, "A note on the Distinction between Sexual Division and Sexual differences', *m/f*, no. 3, 1979, p. 52.

29 Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, London 1980. 'Without denying that representation plays an important constitutive role in this process we can still insist that at any given time we can have a knowledge of these categories prior to any particular representation in which they may be reproduces or subverted'. Despite her critical stance she still uses the Kantian terminology of categories, knowledge and the a priori.

30 For example Wendy Holloway in "Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity", in Henriques et. al. eds., *Changing the Subject*, London 1984, says "several co-existing and potentially contradictory discourses concerning sexuality make available different positions and different powers for men and women" (p.230).

31 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, tr. Alan Sheridan, London, 1972, p. 27.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 37–38.

33 Carolyn Brown, Ann Cullis and John Mumford, "Laws of Gender. Concerning some problems encountered in studying representations of masculinity", Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University 1985, p. 1.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 3.