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# 1.

## Male Feminism

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Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one. This is not said sadly nor angrily (though sadness and anger are both known and common reactions) but politically. Men have a necessary relation to feminism—the point after all is that it should change them too, that it involves learning new ways of being women *and men* against and as an end to the reality of women's oppression—and that relation is also necessarily one of a certain exclusion—the point after all is that this is a matter *for women*, that it is their voices and actions that must determine the change and redefinition. Their voices and actions, not ours: no matter how “sincere,” “sympathetic” or whatever, we are always also in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered. Women are the subjects of feminism, its initiators, its makers, its force; the move and the join from being a woman to being a feminist is the grasp of that subjecthood. Men are the objects, part of the analysis, agents of the structure to be transformed, representatives in, carriers of the patriarchal mode; and my desire to be a subject there too in feminism—to be a feminist—is then only also the last feint in the long history of *their* colonization. Which does not mean, of course not, that I can do nothing in my life, that no actions are open to me, that I cannot respond to and change for feminism (that would be a variant on the usual justification for the status quo, men are men and that's that); it just means that I have to realize nevertheless—and this is an effort not a platitude—that I am not where they are and that I cannot pretend to be (though men do, colonizing, as they always have done), which is the impossibility of my, men's, relation. Nothing in the above is intended to suggest a kind of criterion of immediacy. Women are not feminists by virtue of the fact alone of being women: feminism is a social-political reality, a struggle, a commitment, women *become* feminists. Simply, the negotiation between lived experience and feminism is for them direct, feminism includes that experience as its material and its energy, producing a knowledge of it for action, for change. The contradictions that may exist between, say, a woman's experience in her family in the defined roles of wife and housewife and mother which may be felt by her as the authentic terms of her being, where she is really “herself,” and the perspectives feminism will give on that experience, those defined roles, on her position as a woman, are what feminism is about, what it looks at, works from, involves, allowing the move and join from woman to feminist. For a man the negotiation is blocked, doubly contradictory: his experience is her oppression, and at the end of whatever negotiation he might make he can only always also confront the fact that feminism starts from there. To refuse the confrontation, to ignore, repress, forget, slide over, project onto “other men” that fact, is for a man to refuse feminism, not to listen to what it says to him as a man, imagining to his satisfaction a possible relation instead of the difficult, contradictory, self-critical, painful, impossible one that men must, for now, really live. “I am tired of men arguing amongst themselves as to who is the most feminist, frustrated by an object feminism becoming the stakes in a displaced rivalry between men because of a refusal by men to examine the structure of the relations between themselves,” Claire Pajackowska.<sup>1</sup> There we have an expression of anger from a feminist, tiredness and frustration. And I accept that. But how? At a distance? Of course I think that *I* never have argued about being “the most feminist,” others, not me. Yet I can hardly stay at that distance, self-assured, as if I do then, exactly, feminism *is* an object, something I *can* simply position myself in relation to, like some academic study. But then again, if I take it up into me, into my life, calling into question the assumptions of the position of myself (as opposed to just “taking it up” like Sanskrit or Deconstruction), how do I develop a reflection on it, how do I think and talk and write about—*with*—feminism without falling back into the male argument, without producing another version of the object feminism up for grabs, “the stakes”? Pajackowska suggests an answer, by examining the structure of the relations between men, me in those relations. She says this, in fact, in an article on pornography, a response to two pieces by men on that topic; which reminds me of a remark by another feminist, B. Ruby Rich, again in an article on pornography, to the effect that if “the legions of feminist men” wanted to do something useful, “a proper subject,” they could “undertake the analysis that can tell us why men

like porn (not, piously, why this or that exceptional man does *not*).”<sup>2</sup>Pornography and the relations between men and liking pornography... That pornography *is* a relation between men, nothing to do with a relation to women except by a process of phallic conversion that sets them as the terms of male exchange, is now an established part of radical critical awareness; the analysis has been made many times. Which still leaves theoretical-political *issues*: even if a typical reality of pornography can be recognized, is pornography only that, are there distinctions to be made, different kinds? is all