

## The Problematic Piracy of Masculine Feminism

Let's talk about gender<sup>1</sup>. As it is, man is the *gender quo*. What does this mean? For the man, it means the same thing it does for the white, the wealthy, the Christian and the able: *privilege*. Significantly, and interestingly, it means the man does not understand an unwelcome space due to gender<sup>2</sup>, or, really, the concept of a gendered space at all. Some man may encounter it, if he is somehow academically exposed to the idea, but he is not in general *forced* to; his privilege enables him to be blind to the system of modernities in which he identifies himself.

Now, on to the woman. We might say “true” womanhood, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, is the recognition and acceptance, even, of the woman's own alterity, her own Otherness. This is not a statement of anything natural about a woman, or as something intrinsic to the female person, but as something imposed; this is in the face of the phrase “true woman” and “real woman” which has existed for centuries in Western thought now. Now, how does a woman, who understands herself as, tautologically enough, a self, respond to her own imposed alterity, the fact that in a social or societal context she is a foil, an antithesis to the masculine thesis? There seem to be two main reactions which can occur. The first, of course, is to be made object: acceptance, passivity, and *immanence*. The second is to resist.

The first option is essentially the subsumption of oneself into the male modernity; the latter is to consciously construct a modernity of one's own. The difficulty with the second option (we return to the wisdom of de Beauvoir here) is that woman is tied to man before she is to other women: in her family, in her sexuality<sup>3</sup>, in her day-to-day life. She lacks the large-scale cohesion of a certain race or the proletariat consigned to one location, and therefore it is a much more daunting task of raising the kind of race or class consciousness, the counter-modernity, that other oppressed groups more readily can. The second difficulty, and one that is shared by all of these groups, is that even when this counter-modernity is made, it is just that: *counter*. It is in reaction to, and therefore cognizant of, the oppressive hegemonic modernity, while that oppressive modernity may (and likely does) completely ignore or disregard the counterfeit—the piratical<sup>4</sup>.

So: we have, with some difficulty in practice, established the counter-modernity: the feminist space. This space is, largely, defined by the experience of its inhabitants as the Other: it is a space of Other, made into Self. It is a space of inversion, and, therefore, a space of destabilization and uncertainty. It has, in this sense, the same features as a neutral space would. In defying the form and content of gender, the feminist space creates a relative anarchy of gender. One could (and many have) simply invert the existing *quo*: marginalize the masculine and centralize the feminine. Or, one could buck the structure and create a new constitution—Leeson, assuming he could find some profit motive in this (and, since he's an economist, I'm sure he could find a profit motive in a blizzard in Greenland,) would be proud. But, in any case, whatever constitution is created is fragile. It is untested and must stand in the face of (an)other constitution(s) older, bolder, and more ingrained in the minds of all those involved.

As examples, take Dr. Livesey in the pirate camp on the Treasure Island. His mere presence, a physical necessity for the injured pirates involved, radically alters the counterfeit constitution of the pirates. Conversely, if we understand Long John Silver to stand for the pirate constitution in the English sphere, it is *he* who bends in response to this dissonance, and not the other way around. In fact, the one on whom Silver has the greatest effect is Jim Hawkins—likely due to the fact that Hawkins, in his youth and naiveté, has not yet bought into the English social contract. In the same way, consider the presence of the woman in the men's space, and that of the man in the women's. She, of course, posits her own subjectivity, and can very well do so in a way that makes the masculine arbiters of gender in this space uncomfortable, but not, on her own, in such a way that can directly destabilize the modernity in which the interaction takes place<sup>5</sup>. At most, like Silver does, she can use subterfuge—she can pirate—within the underneath of the masculine modernity to make her point. Meanwhile, a man in a feminist space, like Livesey, can alter the codes by his mere presence—and his words, given the fact that they are backed by a full hegemony and central modernity, have powers of constructing his own legitimacy significant even in the counterfeit constitution made against him.

This raises the question, now: can a man be a “feminist” *per se*? There is no clear answer among feminist groups. The other option is for the term “ally”. Allyship is not something unique to feminism: today, there is controversy over allyship for the LGBTQ<sup>6</sup> community, given the numerical realities of sexuality today: while, even if every man were a feminist ally, there would be as many women as allies, it only takes minor support from the outside to swamp the LGBTQ community. Like a man in a feminist space, straight, cisgendered (i.e., not-trans\*) people are not the Other which is made central in the counterfeit, pirate space. It is necessarily an act of being on the outside—even though, in a significant way, these privileged people are looking outwards from the inside. No matter the intent of thx+-e allies, they have not been posited as the Other, and so are not the focus (and, as described above, are very likely disruptive to,) of the counterfeit space.

Further complicating matters, we must return to the reaction made to one's own alterity. If one chooses to resist, another choice arises: to change the hegemonic modernity, or to construct and exist in the counterfeit one? This duality appears in all piracy: for the swashbuckler, one must exist both on land and on the pirate ship, and one must be able to both take gold, as a pirate, and exchange it for other goods, as a capitalist<sup>7</sup>. In feminism, this duality exists as well: “feminism” is not merely a creation of anOther space, but it is also a movement to *change* the space of men into a space of ... well, the hope is, more than men. This might be called the external, to complement the internal, feminism. The interaction of these two feminist directions can be fascinating: take, for example, the mid-twentieth century, when many white, upper-class feminists were looking for equal rights and, notably, equal participation in the workplace. Ironically, at the same time, there was a significant desire amongst black, lower-class feminists to *exit the workplace*, into which they had been forced against their will by their own poverty.

But this is a digression: given our both outward and inward feminisms, we create two distinct feminist spaces: the first, as already described, being the “safe space”, in which the otherwise made-Other is codified as Self, and, by the push for change, the “encounter space”. This latter space is not necessarily a place of women or

even necessarily a place for allies and women together, but is rather a place of interface, a neutral space between masculine hegemony and (the already somewhat-neutral) safe-space. While this is indeed somewhat of a neutral space, it is not so much akin to the anarchic high-seas Murphy speaks of in hushed tones: rather, one might model it much more closely as a gender-based analogue of Johns' Enlightenment-era public sphere with a twist of 20<sup>th</sup>-century patent arguments, in that the individual author is not as emphasized as the group consensus (given that contributions made are in general sociological and/or scientific, and not artistic or philosophical). This is a space of rhetoric, debate, and the mutuality-in-conflict that may come of a space constructed for education and debate with the intent of educating and advancing the whole. It is also a place of hyper-acute awareness of the woman's own Otherness. And, in a sense, this is a place of perhaps the relativity and inorganic nature of man's centrality; in short, this is a place of tension.

The encounter space is not a place meant to be exclusive of men. The safe space is meant to be. Because of this, many times, a man's understanding of a feminist space is wholly that of an encounter space. This is compounded by the fact that a man may not understand the constitution of a safe space he has stumbled into, himself not being place at its center. He may debate this, understanding a feminist space as an encounter space, disrupting the safe space with his style of rhetoric. This happens often (and oh how I do feel dirty citing things from the Internet, but) on the Internet: a space designed by-women, for-women, or similarly for another marginalized group, is impacted by outsiders who want "debate" or "explanation" when, in fact, the space does not have these things in its focus. Then, adding to this the *by-default* centrality of men even in a critical space (as the critical modernity must recognize the hegemonic modernity as central to be critical!) we have a clear case of a bull in a china shop. Masculine presence in a feminine safe space pulls the feminism inherent in the space from an inward one to an outward one. If this is a pervasive phenomenon, there is an intimacy and mutuality-in-discussion lost from the safe space: we go back to the *status quo ante*, with women lacking a gender consciousness and robbed of the opportunity to construct one: by accident, well-meaning masculinity has not only pirated feminist discussion space when the very marginalization of feminine voices *created* the feminist discussion space itself, but also destroyed the continuing development of the feminine consciousness. We might also look at another thing on the border of feminism: male (especially white male) homosexuality. In common thought, relationships and marriage are a union of complementarity: a Self with an Other, one who interfaces with the outside with one who manages the inside, a mind with a body<sup>8</sup>. When two men are in a relationship, it sharply denies this complementarity: it is viewed as two Selves together.

Now, up until this point I have been discussing in general a very micro set of phenomena: an *archetypal* man and *archetypal* woman, and *ad-hoc* groups thereof, to the order of magnitude of less than, say, a thousand people. We now should get large-scale. The overarching form of civil society is, of course, capitalism<sup>9</sup>, so we have to start examining women and feminism and their interaction with the capitalist system. Capitalism is, primarily, a masculine expression (as most things, honestly, are). As such, it is exploitative and marginalizing of women: In its present form, prostitution is probably the most visceral example of this<sup>10</sup>. From a straight, masculine viewpoint (that is, the default,) woman is uniquely valuable above all other

things for her body. Because of this, woman is uniquely valued for her body. Because capitalism has no regard for externalities such as “human dignity”, this valuation can become all-encompassing, and the act of prostitution is regarded not as an exchange of goods between people but as temporary ownership of the body and the guarantee of personal satisfaction. This, in short, is the crucial moment of the commodification of the female body, the primary mode of the commodification of the woman.

So we have the woman interfacing with not only the masculine default in itself, but also in the masculine default implicit in the system of capitalism. So, as before, she revolts, and creates her feminist space. Because capitalism is an ever-expanding body uncomfortable with any modernity outside of and not including itself, it butts against the feminist (and often avowedly anti-capitalist, for reasons like the commodification described above) modernity. Because of this, capitalism to an extent integrates feminism into itself, but not fully and not without adulteration: we, again, have a commodification, making feminism and “enlightened womanhood” a product to be sold to those looking for a non-marginalizing space. That is, we have created a copy of feminism to be sold to the masses—we have pirated the piracy itself.

Now, we get all the questions of the “piracy of copy” in Johns: is this counterfeit feminism, the counter-counterfeit-majority, *genuine*? It is easy to answer “no”, since there is no authenticity in the capitalist intent to pirate feminism. However, there may be at least some good to be had in commodified feminism. Often times, it is through something with an economic bent that we interact with others: in this context, commodified feminism is often the only feminism. This, of course, has its own set of issues: the disappearance of the public sphere, the kind endorsed by Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers, leads to the environment of pure commodification. In this form of the public sphere, it is *only* this type of feminism, which is likely masculinized (as the primary capitalistic movers are men,) and otherwise mollified for greater profitability among the whole market.

Thus, capitalism, a method of inadvertent control and structuring at a macro scale, represents a similar but more systemic threat that uninformed and intrusive allyship might cause.

## Endnotes

1. Specifically, let's talk about the binary gender system of Western modernity and (in general) antiquity.

I should also take a moment to disclaim: Yes, I'm aware of the fact I'm dancing on a thin line of irony with this paper. For much of this quarter I've wanted to bring up topics that I have later realized I'm not qualified to talk about (for instance, "Macklemore is Pirating Race in Hip-Hop", which I wanted to do for a P&P) but since I'm not dominating an already-existing space, but only filling one already allotted for me, I'm going ahead with this. Plus I'm trying to write largely about men, which I like to think I know something about.

2. Of course, the man may know exclusion based on other principles: race, ability, etc. These will not be very much accounted for by this paper. This endnote must serve as the disclaimer that I do, in fact, recognize that intersectionality is, in fact, a thing.
3. Again, the dynamics of sexuality and gender are incredibly complex and fascinating, but are outside the scope of this paper: this is an analysis of reactions to traditional heteronormative gender constructs, primarily in America and, more broadly, the West.
4. Ah yes, the feminist: enemy of all mankind.
5. Take, for example, a woman being catcalled—what exactly can be done here, that can affect the catcaller fundamentally?
6. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Queer: primarily Gay in this context, considering the other groups tend to be ignored even by those involved in the present sexuality civil rights battle.
7. To be honest, these roles, of pirate and as capitalist, are not as distinct as I make them out to be in this sentence.
8. Check Aristotle onward. Men are the rational, intellectual beings of the mind and women are the irrational, emotional things of the body.
9. We could get larger and talk about global feminism and how femininity coincides with world systems theory, but I am NOT AT ALL qualified to make coherent arguments about that.
10. Theoretically, prostitution can be something un-fraught with danger and problematic gender dynamics—men and women can both exchange a service, that is, sexual pleasure, for money. Not requiring a great deal of capital, it can also be liberatory for those otherwise exploited in capitalism! But this is in general a *could be*, not an *is*.

## Word Work

*Natural*: Like in nature, or default; without distortion by action or perception (which is action as well). Often (and often fallaciously) conflated with “correct”.

*Space*: A defined extent. May be physical, but is always psychological (as implied by “defined”). A ship, for example, is both a physical extent and a psychological location—though the paradox of Theseus' Ship shows us this relationship may not be exactly straightforward. I will often also call it a *context* in certain uses.

*Form*: Appearance or structure, or a type of construction. Perhaps the interaction and relative makeup of component pieces within a whole. We may say the form of gender differs from the form of nationality, in that it is binary, while nationality is polynary (that is, of many nodes).

*Status quo*: From the phrase *in statu quo res erant ante bellum*, meaning “in the state in which things were before the war” – the state of things; the way things are, as opposed to the way they could be. The *quo*, in short, is the default-way-it-is.

*Other*: Not oneself, nor in the group including oneself. But more profoundly, not-onself *in relation to* and *in opposition to* the self. A deep component in psychology, capitalism, and gender. The Other is within the system of *alterity*; the antagonistic co-dependence of the concepts of Self and Other; much like the creation of a modernity necessarily creating an oppositional modernity. The establishment of Self or Other creates, automatically, the Other and the Self and the Alterity in which both reside.

*Hegemony*: The dominant group or class. Could be, and often is, the state, the rich, the clergy, men, etc.

*Modernity*: From Latin *modernus*, “now existing”, a *status quo*; a manifestation, in a moment, of hegemony. A social space which assumes itself as natural, essential, central, and/or correct. Generally an implicit phenomenon, rather than an explicit one; however, as soon as a modernity becomes understood, it is defined, and thus has an exterior, immediately assumed by the Other in a counter-modernity.

*Observer*: One who views. Observation is not as that of a camera, but is active, and involves judgment based on the modernity through which they observe.

*Critical modernity*: A modernity which is outside of and is incompatible with the hegemonic modernity. The Other's observation of their own Self. Often one which is actively opposed to it.

*Neutral space*: a space with no dominant or present modernities; the Frontier, either conceptually (as with policies surrounding a new technology) or physically (as in the Treasure Island). Also, the “in-between” in any alterity or other oppositional/complementary system.

*Constitution:* The formal or informal system of principles regulating a government or other space. A codification of a social contract.

*Identity:* One's psychological and social location within a system of oppositional or complementary modernities; the way one understands and embodies their Self.

*Privilege:* The condition of being in the hegemonic or central modernity; to have one's modernity (relatively, this will be addressed in the paper) undisturbed by the presence of oppositional or critical ones; *further*, to be able to assume one's own identity to be *quo*: to not understand the psychological and social dynamics of one's own identity and believe it and the system in which it resides to be *natural* and *essential*, to be undisturbed by the alterity of one's own location.

*Sex:* The system of physiological properties associated with reproduction; often misunderstood as the relative presence or absence of the Y chromosome, is in fact much more complexly the hormonal and physiological expression of these genes in the *habitus*. (To see the incompatibility of sex and "Y-presence" one needs only the examples of intersex people and those with androgen insensitivity syndrome.)

*Gender:* The psychological and social phenomenon analogous to the physiological notion of sex. In Western thought, traditionally divided into the binary set of groups *man* and *woman*. Explored more in the body of the paper. Gender is a powerful, deeply-rooted system of modernities, even stronger and more psychologically fundamental than capitalism.

*Objectification:* The process of turning a person into an object; making them into a means to some other end, as interchangeable, as violable, and as lacking a subjectivity or Self. The result of objectification is immanence (in an existential sense), the condition of being, but only as an object. A removal of agency.

*Marginalization:* The process of making something (or someone) insignificant or irrelevant.

*Value:* From Latin *valere*, "to be strong, be worth"; being desirable or having importance. Value can exist in different spaces and contexts, and can be different according to different observers.

*Commodity:* Something with value both in use and in exchange; money is not a commodity (unless one has a use for the paper, I suppose?) but, say, a kitchen utensil is.

*Commodification:* To grant something value in exchange or to impose exchange-value on something. In a larger-scale sense, to integrate something into the capitalist system; can have other, cascading effects on both the new commodity and its surroundings. Even if something is merely observed in a capitalist context, this is often a (perhaps subtle) act of commodification.

*Capitalism*: An economic system (and way of life) emphasizing the role of private ownership as the primary arrangement in the organization of goods and people. More specifically, can refer to a dual-actor method of production: the owner provides capital and material to be transformed into the product, and the laborer performs the actual transformation.

*Product*: Something physically transformed into a commodity. The thing transformed (ante-product?) may have had trade-value previously, of course, or it may have been purely imaginary (for instance, software.) In a sense, commodification, with a physical component built-in.

*Counterfeit*: From Latin *contra facere*, “to make against”. The second make, the copy; often created in opposition (*counter*) but in an attempt not to complement or contrast, but imitate—or surpass.

*Piracy*: A usurpation of modernity; a utilisation of a neutral space for personal gain; one's construction of *themselves* as counterfeit-authentic in some context.