

Male role and father role¹

From power to care

In the past thirty or so years, I have spent a lot of time contemplating the concepts named in the title and the possible relationships between them, both from a professional and a personal perspective. I am the father of two daughters and a son (all of them adults) and grandfather to two granddaughters and a grandson. In my life, I have gone through various phases of making sense of being a man and being a father. I have also had the opportunity to listen to many men who shared their experiences with me in men's groups or in my psychotherapeutic practice. Meanwhile, a large portion of my work that supported people and families in crisis situations was about the injuries suffered in childhood from abuse. My commitment to stop the abuse was a further motivation of the research whose results I am trying to provide to the reader here.

Thoughts and the practice

I would like to reach as many male readers with this writing as possible with the aim of bringing about changes in their everyday lives. This intention includes a contradiction, or at least it seems so at first glance. Writing, by its nature, serves to clarify thoughts (by the author) and its desired effect is usually the rethinking of things (by the reader). Consequently, transferring the thoughts into practice usually lies beyond the author's realm unless the writing in question is a manual. Naturally, I could have written the opus "How to become a caring father and supporter of equality in twelve steps." Some other time, if ever. For the time being, I will stick to the rethinking of concepts, but in a way that promotes the reorganisation of the practice of their everyday application.

Concepts are definitions of what is what, who we are, and what we have to do. Often, they do not become conscious thoughts but they still define our lifestyle and actions. We leave the majority of our concepts unquestioned because we do things the way they are usually done, and consequently the way they must be done. This is called tradition.

Conversely, new thoughts can be the engines for new processes. Or the other way round: new social practices and contracts undoubtedly create a fertile soil for the development of new concepts and the disappearance of old, earlier deeply rooted ones. This is called historical change (but only afterwards).

Tradition is like a story written in invisible ink, which its characters follow word by word although it is uncertain whether they are aware of the existence of the script at all. Change is like the process that takes place in rehearsals where the characters continue to learn their new roles until they identify with them. In order to have a more stable footing in this marshy land of tradition and change, the invisible ink needs to be made visible. This is the only way to decide whether we follow the role we were given or whether we want to rewrite the story.

The primary intention of this writing is to introduce to the reader the pictures that these roles stem from. By "pictures" I mean not only visual depictions but also any products of the ability that makes us so human: imagination. A part of them, we acquired through socialisation, another part, we ourselves created but always based on already existing depictions: from models we acquired during our growth, from ancient legends and the modern media. The composite of these makes up the personal and collective mythology of the father role.

The word "myth," just as "father role" has numerous readings. On the one hand, "myth" is "allegory," "legend," or "fable," on the other hand "tradition" and finally "lie," "cheating" and "fiction." According to the most eminent expert of the field, Joseph Campbell, "mythology is the music to which we all dance although we do not always know the tune." Myths are often treated

¹ The following lecture has been held and published in several places and in several versions since 1997. The writing published here is an enriched version of the lecture at the international conference The Rhetoric(s) of Masculinity (Universidad de Sevilla, March 2000) (translation Bianka Hajdu).

as an immutable heritage. My starting point is that we have a choice between various interpretations of the myths. This way-out imagination need not be the mere reproduction of inherited depictions but it can be a creative force able to change even social reality.

What is this social reality? Here are a few news items that reflect the concepts of the majority of men related to the father role: "Men participate in the housework only in eight out of a hundred Spanish families"; "A judge thinks that parents have the right to slap their children"; "1.4 million children are abused by their parents in Spain."

A theoretical and historical framework

Child abuse is one of the deepest rooted heritages of the social order and fundamental culture called patriarchy. It is a specific and dramatic manifestation of the fact that the father role pervasive in our culture is a product of the patriarchal and sexist understanding of personal and social relations. The fundamental values of the "traditional" father figure so created have become the pedagogical values of the whole of culture through the power relations of patriarchal society. These values are "law," "authority" and "distance," even in the case of physical presence, and not care. Child abuse is therefore a historical product that was created by the compound and mutually reinforcing effects of the various aspects of the father role.

The father role was compounded of two factors during the development of patriarchy: on the one hand, those values that derived from men's gender role (that is the social roles attached to biological sex); on the other hand, from the position that men had in the social division of labour. This way, the father function coming from the *biological* sexual identity (that is the ability to procreate) was separated from the social gender identity. For women, the reproductive ability to have children and the social role have equal weight in defining femininity.

The function of being a father became identified with the power of controlling others during the development of the patriarchal order. This, together with violence (which is one of the constitutive elements of the male role) is the basis for the father-child relationship being defined by contradictory concepts (power/subjugation, limits/narrowing down, punishment/obedience) as opposed to complementary concepts (fragility/protection, dependence/care, growth/support).

In the patriarchal division of labour, it is the woman's responsibility to take care of children (and other dependent persons). On the sexist value scale, "female" became the synonym of "contemptible," "inferior" and "beneath my dignity" (in every case from the men's viewpoint). Consequently, caring about persons and objects has become an activity that is contradictory to masculinity, what is more, irreconcilable with it.

In the patriarchal economic and social order, the male-centred approach became the dominant mode of operation and way of thinking for culture. This way, male viewpoints became the so-called neutral and at the same time unquestionable manifestations of general human values and practices. The look of neutrality makes invisible the fact that men have been turning, with the use of force, their own viewpoints into the frameworks of social cooperation. The mother figure, seemingly elevated to the skies, is really injured in patriarchy beyond measure. The mother's role is to rear children for the father. She does not define her own role; men say what she has to be like and how she has to behave. The above mentioned father role of course leaves its mark on our understanding of what a child is and what the parents' and every adult's role is in relation to him or her. This understanding of childrearing has become the predominant pedagogical doctrine, which has lost its genderedness for the gender blind onlooker, with the help of tradition on the one hand, and on the other hand through the reinforcement of influential institutions that form cultural values (church, school, medical science, psychology, etc.), and so even mothers practice it. What is more, it seems that mothers practice it more than fathers do, since mothers' responsibility includes not only conception, pregnancy and giving birth to the children but usually following the childhood up to a certain point. This is how one generation passes on the culture based on the brutalisation of childhood to the next.

The theoretical and historical framework depicted here is the starting point for my invitation to the reader to discover the spacious area between the concepts of male role and father

role, two broad areas in themselves. From now on (to make the area more familiar), there will be less theoretical discussion and I will be using more (old and new) pictures. But before we enter the area to be discovered, it is worth clarifying our basic concepts.

Biological sex or social gender?

What do we talk about when we say “masculinity”? According to the dictionary “masculinity” is the ‘*sum of male characteristics.*’ But which are these characteristics? Is it unambiguous what we mean when we say “man”? In everyday parlance we continuously use and confuse two meanings of the noun “*man.*”

One is included in the dictionary, which is illustrated by the expression “*male person*” with the following sentence: “*man’s anatomy differs from woman’s.*” The same is apparent from the definition of the adjective “*male*”: “*a specimen having organs necessary for insemination.*” In both descriptions, being male means having male sexual organs, male biological identity, which does not change unless hormones or anatomy is changed. A person is born a man, period. However, this does not take us closer to understanding what masculinity is and how it relates to being a father.

The other meaning is more relevant for the subject of this paper. This appears when synonyms and antonyms are examined. “*Masculinity*” is a synonym of “*bravery, influence, audacity*” and he who is “*masculine*” is “*brave and influential.*” The latter two adjectives are in turn synonyms of the words “*valuable, heroic, energetic, strong, stable, massive, fierce, persevering, decided, determined.*” “*Audacity*” at the same time, is not used only as the characteristic of the above mentioned brave and audacious man but also coincides with the words “*integrity, honesty, honour and honourable.*” Opposed to all this is the antonym of “*masculinity*”, “*femininity*,” which, apart from being the synonym of “*softness, tameness, kindness, grace, fineness, affection, timidity*” can also characterise someone who is “*a coward, is weak and pusillanimous.*”

That is, being a man includes having an identity that is not based on biological difference but on the division of the roles between the two sexes and the different values attached to them. In recent years, the term *gender (social gender identity)* has come to be used to denote this identity. In what does it differ from the biological sex we are born with? A sentence by Simone de Beauvoir, in which she phrased women’s situation at the beginning of feminist theory, is capable of highlighting the difference between social gender and biological sexual identity: “You are not born a woman—you learn to be one.”

The direct and indirect learning of the various roles related to each sex—socialisation—continues from earliest childhood and manifests in almost all aspects of our lives. From this complex process, I want to concentrate on the factor that is probably the most relevant for the father role. Thinking logically, the ability to bring offspring into this world should go together with another ability that is not part of men’s world traditionally: the ability to take care of persons and things. The differences between little boys’ and little girls’ toys, the role models seen in their homes, their customary activities in youth, and later the expectations of the labour market all coincide: they expect men to build and destroy, while women should take care of all that falls between these two poles, the beginning and end, of life. This difference needs to be created; we are not like this by birth. The Argentinean cartoonist Quino,¹ creator of Mafalda and other characters well known in Spanish-speaking countries, illustrates this by the following:



In the cartoon, Mafalda is speechless when she is directly faced with the dutiful female role as exemplified by the mother who is overwhelmed by housework: “Mom, what do you think about the future of this movement called the women’s lib... er. You know what, forget about it.”



In the other cartoon, she is talking to her friend Manolito: “Cool lorry. Did Santa bring it?” “Yes,” says Manolito. “This is what Santa is expected to do” says Mafalda. “Yes. What a shame I have already done what a **boy** is expected to do” Manolito answers as he leaves with the broken toy.

Quino directs our attention to sexism, the mixture of gender-based prejudices which serves as the basis for women’s discrimination and unequal share of power at both the level of society and of personal relationships. But how does sexism influence the relations of the two sexes in the area where we believe they should be as one: in child care?

Fertility or productivity?

As biological beings, the life of men and women is divided into the same cycles. First we are babies, then children, adolescents, adults, and then we get old and finally die. The same happens with the life cycles are related to procreation. First we are unable to procreate, then we can, finally there is a third phase (for women earlier than for men) when we become infertile again. Yet, depending on whether we are looking at sex or gender, the ability to procreate has a very different role in the lives of women and men.

For women, there is no difference between sex and gender when it comes to these cycles. For a woman, it is enough to become a mother for self-realisation. Thus she fills not just her biological role but at the same time she can consider herself a “full” woman in society.

For men, this is very visibly not so. By accepting their social roles, men’s cycles centre not on fertility but productivity. A man can have twenty children, one in every corner of the country, yet he will only be considered an incorrigible Don Juan. In order for him to be acknowledged as a “dependable and stalwart” man, it is not enough to have and bring up children, not even if he is a caring father. For acknowledgement, he has to create something “in the world” (that is, outside the home); he has to participate in adventures there (whether war or business adventures).

It is worth examining men’s responsibility (or more exactly men’s infamous responsibility) for their fertility. In biological reality both parties are equally part of the sexual act. When the concept of (possible) fatherhood is separated from this reality and is merged into the male role, the

amalgam so created infects the relationship and creates unequal relations and consequently ill feelings.

Identification with productivity instead of fertility is only one part of the patriarchal father role. The other identification with the power hierarchy (which means both control over those subjected and obedience to those above) is more important than the protection and care of children.

Power or care?

Again, Quino² helps to illustrate this. In this cartoon, the sculptor tells the politicians who are dissatisfied with the work they ordered: “But you asked me to emphasise that he was a man of action and an example of a good father!”

The picture of the stern, abusive father is strongly related to another myth deeply rooted in us: the image of the man as a fighter. Patriarchal gender identity creates a father figure this way as well, a figure in which the father identifies with power instead of caring.

This is intertwined in everyday language, too, for example, when we say that children “won’t give us any peace.” In reality, this is nothing other than victim blaming. Children really want peace, not fighting. If they are forced into a fight, they only struggle to protect themselves against assaults by adults, using their inborn vitality and intelligence. These manifest in the most apparent way in the large or small, physical or non-physical, abuses of power that children are regularly exposed to. The essence of the war against children means forming the basis of everyday existence from those concepts which historically represent the “man’s” activities in the organization of society: production, control, etc. **Thus children’s genuine needs go unheard, since in this way, social order is not to be questioned, it is timeless, and it has grown by accumulating non gender-specific values.** This is exactly why it is necessary to make clear what the origins of this point of view are.

I will begin my illustration of the close link between the father role and power with a painting by Francisco de Goya, an artist who is considered the forerunner of the break with true masculine values. On reconquering the country, Ferdinand VII asked Goya to immortalize the Spaniards’ heroic deeds in the war against Napoleon. Goya did indeed paint two universal (that is, non-culture-specific) paintings, “May 2, 1808” and “May 3, 1808” which show that in war there are no heroes, only cruelty and victims.

Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Son*³ brutally illustrates one of the most ancient of the dominant myths of fatherhood, the story of the Greek Cronos (in Roman mythology, Saturn). As with every myth, this one can be interpreted in several ways, for example: Cronos, time, ruthlessly devours all.

The way I read it, the picture draws attention to a central point in the development of patriarchy, which is nothing more than the power struggle of the fathers whose mothers—speaking in historical terms—have told them what they discovered about the male role by observing domestication of animals and the impregnation of their own bodies. Then, the mothers still attempt to fend off the fathers’ attempts to conquer, and that is why they side with their children. But the male children, though children—and themselves young fathers—become victims of their own fathers when as adults they follow in their fathers’ footsteps.

This central figure, Cronos/Saturn, castrated his father Uranus



when the children of Uranus and Gaia rose up against their father. Gaia was the Earth Mother, the first deity to come into existence out of Chaos. Uranus himself was Gaia's son, created from her own body without male intervention. Reaching adulthood, Uranus, the Sky, covered his own mother and united with her many times. Both boy- and girl-children were born, among them numerous monsters. Uranus hated the monsters, and, abusing his power, he forced them back into the womb of the Earth—or rather, into their mother's bowels, but Gaia loved her children just as they were, and encouraged them to rebel.

Cronos/Saturn played the role of leader in this rebellion by cutting off his father's testicles (that was one time when the empire of the phallus was unable to prevail). Yet, when he assumed his father's throne and learned that one of his children by his wife-sister, Hera, was going to strip him of his power, Cronos killed the children one by one—and not in a common way: he ate them, cannibal style. Just one child escaped with the help of his mother, who turned him into a stone. Cronos/Saturn, being blind, could not distinguish a child from a stone. (The typical situation of the distant father who is taken up with his power struggles out in the world and whose relationship with his children is restricted to seeing them only occasionally—or not at all—but then by chance does he touch them, caress them, perhaps even hold them in his arms?).

This surviving son becomes Zeus/Jupiter, who is the founder of patriarchy. When he grows up, he deposes his father and lives in Olympus as ruler of the gods. Throughout Greek mythology, at times in Olympus, at times in the mortal world, he systematically kidnaps and rapes women (goddesses or not), and begets male and female children everywhere, thus guaranteeing himself future alliances. There is no trace in mythology of his paying the slightest attention to the children; his adventures are what preoccupy him. As Victoria Sau writes in her book *Dictionary of Feminist Ideology*, "his wife is vanquished, overpowered, and disappointed by her constantly unfaithful and jealous husband; Zeus is the genuine father, who begets children through rape, bribery, deception, and tyranny. (...) In Zeus, the world of fathers is solidified. Mothers hardly have a life. They are forced to take in the male product, 'bake' it, and bring it forth as if they were living cooking pans, and the fruit of their labors is owned by men."

(Parenthetically, let me jump to one of the modern manifestations of this myth: one reaction to the initiatives of men who demand women's equality, the pro-feminists, anti-sexists, and those opposed to inequality, is the movement called "men's movement for the new male role." To help you imagine what is new about the new male role, I direct your attention to the fact that this mythical-poetical turn of phrase refers to men winning back for themselves the "power of Zeus.")



Further outlining the tragic relationship between the father role and power (one's own or a higher power), an example that is culturally familiar to us can be found in the Old Testament.⁴ Abraham was prepared to follow the command of a higher power and sacrifice his son, and ultimately an angel had to rescue the child in the absence of fatherly sympathy or instinct.

There are illustrations that are even closer to us in time, illustrations that not only surround our everyday lives, but actually form the basis of our culture.⁵ There may be other interpretations for the image of the father who sacrificed his son for

humanity, so to speak (and I hope I am not insulting anyone's religious feelings): a grown man, for the sake of a project he wants to complete in the world, sacrifices his own son without even discussing it with the child's mother, although in the end she is the one who must mourn as "mother of sorrows," wipe her son's wounds, take him down from the



cross, and wait three days for him to rise from the dead. All this while Jesus' cry on the cross (Father, why hast thou forsaken me?) goes unanswered.



I am not so much speaking of religion itself as of certain images which make up the deepest levels of our conceptions. Similarly, there is yet another well-known image in religion which could be the archetype of the caring father.⁶

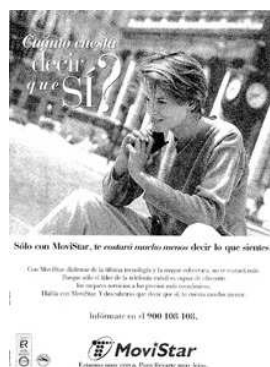
The job of caring for his child falls to Joseph, despite the fact he is not the biological father. When, like the rest of the men in Bethlehem, he finds out that Herod plans to have every first-born son killed, he is the only one who says: "I will leave my job, leave everything, and we will go away in order to save the child." In this picture Joseph, in an action that means humiliation, travels the long road with Mary and the child, thus fulfilling his mission as protective and caring father.

There is a cult of God the Father, a cult of Mary, and a cult of Jesus, but surprisingly no cult of Joseph. (Excepting Father's Day, which much more represents worship at the altar of consumerism than a common search for new concepts and practices in the father role.)

Where are the models that say a father can care and nurture? Why are caring and nurturing identified with the mother and not with the father? Why is it difficult to imagine men who have these characteristics? In order to find answers to these questions (if only partial ones), we must first analyze the visual codes of masculinity and femininity. Nothing lends itself better to understanding these codes than the visual world which came into being just in time for today's mythology, advertising.

Masculine and feminine

The world of visual advertising is deeply sexist. Previously, it was said that sexism is the sum of those prejudices related to one sex or the other, whose foundation is discrimination against women and unequal sharing of power, both in society and in personal relationships. According to the visual code system of advertising, masculine means looking outward from the picture, having eye contact with you, the viewer; feminine means looking at some point within the picture. These codes are in constant use, for example, in the two parts of a mobile telephone ad campaign, below.⁷



Before reading the text (itself quite expressive), it is worthwhile to notice the differences between the two pictures. What makes the woman a woman is the fact that she is looking inward, contacting her inner self. The man is looking outward and connecting with some external object. These powerful codes carry within themselves information about what is masculine and what is feminine, not in the biological sense, but rather as roles, as social gender. The text serves to reinforce the messages of the pictures.

The woman: "How much does it cost to say yes?" "Only at Company X, it costs much less to say what you feel." In other words, a woman is so involved with what she feels that it is difficult to express it. Since she is the object of others' wishes and not the base of her own life, the only thing she has to say is one "yes."

Likewise, they sell a telephone to the men with this text: "I was working when my son was born. But I heard his first cry."

In a way, these two ads shamelessly underline the old, inhibitive distribution of roles between the sexes. On the other hand, they are an outstanding example of the counterattack against the modestly successful attempts to raise awareness about equalizing career and child-rearing between the sexes, as well as fair division of housework.

During the last few decades, in Spain more and more fathers have demanded the right to be present at the birth of their children. Now, the mobile telephone is used to sell the idea that the man's only mission is to work. This is the truth behind yet another modern myth: do we need these things because they bring people closer to each other? Incidentally, in spite of great progress in eliminating violence in childbirth, this poster tries to sell us the misguided myth that says a newborn baby has to cry. It seems as if that is the reason for the violent elements of the advertisement: the mother giving birth in the hospital, her body in a passive position, lacking the physical and emotional support of the father and other people she knows, surrounded by strangers wearing masks. Shall we add the ring of a mobile phone to the glaring lights and noise that "welcome" the child emerging from its mother's womb? (I speak not only from convincing arguments and theories. I have had the privilege of being at the births of my own son and daughter, as well as several other home births. Thus I am able to confirm that there is no reason for a newborn to greet the world with crying. Furthermore, besides being born in the least violent circumstances possible, these babies' first experience of the world was the warmth of their parents' bodies.)



The same codes can be used, of course, if we want to show a man with nurturing characteristics.

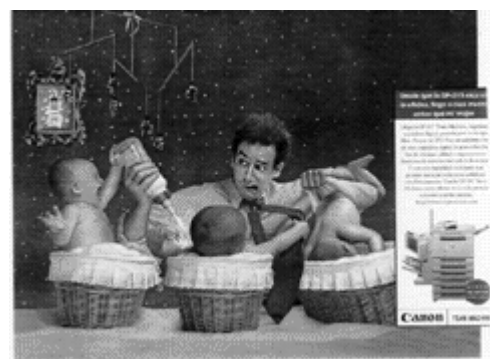
The composition of this picture is worth considering.⁸ If it is feminine to gaze inward (towards one's home, oneself, everyday life) here we have a man who is interested in what is inside the picture: his grandchild. It is very reassuring to see that it has always been possible for a man to look into a child's eyes this way. It would fill me with joy if I could see this look on more men's faces—and not only when their children are asleep, or when they are very small, or when the man has passed beyond his "productive years" and become a grandfather. I would use such pictures to illustrate a different concept of what it means to be a man and a father.

The new father?

But apparently other issues are at work here. Here is a recent photograph in which the man is looking inward—and one should look carefully at what is being communicated here.⁹

The caption in this Canon advertisement is significant: "Ever since we have had a GP215 in our office, I get home much earlier than my wife." The ad is clearly aimed at men. No explanation of what a GP215 is, since it is taken for granted that every man knows. However, the man cannot differentiate between a child's mouth and its bottom, and he is not able to aim the baby bottle in the right direction, either. (Chances are, the widely reputed ability of men to take aim at something only works while they are hunting, not in more domestic heroics such as feeding a baby or urinating—at least not as long as women clean the toilets.)

Once more the false myth of advanced technology appears: thanks to progress, there is more time for human relationships. But there is more than that in the Canon ad. The perfectly clear message is this: "Man, if you gain time from using a machine, the best thing you can do is head for the corner tavern and chat about football with your buddies, because if you get home before



your wife, look! This is what you'll do!" In this way, the image of the man incapable of caring for others is reinforced.

On the other hand, these days such a picture offends many men, and they want more complimentary representations of themselves in the care-and-nurture area. In reality, the past few years have seen a new media concept, the *New Father*. The *New Sensitive Man* and the *Family Oriented Man's* nearest relative, this would be a man who is capable of developing emotional relationships with his children, and being involved with them. The figure of the *New Father* has been slipped cleverly into the media discourse. The media clearly claims that to love children is to be involved with them, to share the job of bringing them up and all that goes with it. Insisting that you care is not enough, and besides, just because someone is capable of caring does not mean he really is involved with the children. In actual fact, often the new fathers are *with* the children, but not there *for* them. They only take on certain elements of child-rearing, usually the most pleasant ones. These activities, which are to some extent overrated, are generally rituals which concentrate on feelings (being present at the birth, diapering, evening bath, bottle feeding, playing together before bedtime, rocking the baby to sleep). Meanwhile, the woman is still overloaded, because the housework is still not shared equally; the everyday routine tasks, which are the hardest, stay with her. The number of Spanish households in which the man takes part in housework is not more than ten out of several hundred. Furthermore, it is not unusual that the new father position goes hand in hand with a revival of the old "childrearing expert" status, followed by severe critiques of the mother's "mistakes" when they are discovered.

In general, it can be said that although certain men, or small groups of men, resemble the new fatherhood model in practice, the real increase of "new men" is not as large as the one the media and advertising campaigns (which have aimed at a social concept), and the optimistic rhetoric have created. These hardly represent the desire of men for equality or the statistics of genuine sociological change, but rather they reflect men's self-congratulation, women's desires, strategies for the "modernization" of patriarchy, or the needs of the market. Here is a representative example of the latter.¹⁰



At first glance we might think we have an image of the tender "new father" in this baby bottle ad. Actually, it is lies and tricks. To realize this, we must once again observe the visual codes before reading the text.

Earlier I analyzed the codes of masculinity and femininity which are embedded in advertisements. This example uses not only those codes in their entirety (although in a contradictory way, it seems); it goes even further and includes visual codes of pornography.

In another study dealing with the characteristics and influence of pornography, I have thoroughly analyzed these codes and explained the difference between erotic art and pornography. The main thesis of my analysis is that pornography and sexuality have very little in common, in spite of the fact that pornographic pictures are heavily sexualized (a better term is genitalised). That is because the essence of pornography is not the subject or the content (in this case, sexuality); it is the relationship of the performers, partly with each other, and partly between them and the audience. Erotic art represents people who have sunk deeply into their own shared experiences. In pornography, the experience is faked, but that is not the main difference. The real difference is that in pornography, the real participants are the unseen spectators, not the actors whom they watch. Furthermore, the main relationship is not the one that might exist between the partners, but the one that the pornography wants to establish between the spectators and the performer- or performers-cum-objects. This is precisely the relationship that our advertisement is trying to establish between the customer and the item to be sold. It is worth mentioning that the word *pornography* is of Greek origin and means simply "prostitute" (*porné*) "description (*grafia*)," in other words, the

description of a person who has been converted to an object for sale. For this reason, when we classify pictures, the designation pornographic always refers to this type of representation, irrespective of whether it contains sexual material or not.

The baby bottle ad has been positioned at the intersection of the sexist and the pornographic. It was said that in the language of pictures, masculine means looking outward and having eye contact with the viewer of the picture, whereas feminine means fixing the attention on some point within the picture. This advertisement uses this visual code in a paradoxical way: here is someone whose biological attributes belie masculine gender, but whose culturally assigned behaviour and posture are feminine. This male Madonna gazes at the baby inside the picture, and the baby in turn gazes at me, the potential baby bottle shopper. Beyond its physical contact with the man's arms, the baby has no connection with him. Neither is a connection necessary for the purposes of the advertiser, who uses the language of pornography as a means to an end, since the adult is not in the picture because he has some link with the child, but because he wants to sell the product to us.

For this same reason the "Nuk Man" was given several complementary visual codes which are simultaneously in the languages of both advertising and pornography. (In a culture where advertising is no less sexist than it is universally influential, and public places are sexualized—made pornographic, to be more precise—it is really difficult to distinguish between advertising and pornography.) Thus the male Madonna is naked, and this serves two purposes. First, it links the product to the ideal of beauty demanded by the dominant culture, in this case a male body with muscles sculpted for hours in a fitness centre. Secondly, the two figures are not only naked, but they are shown with a bare background. The idealization is not disturbed by extraneous references, which is intended to make the advertisement more persuasive. Every element of the picture is real, and at the same time nothing in the picture is real.

The text only underlines the lie. "They can nurse, too" and "Because Nuk duplicates the perfection of mother's breast". In fact, men can not nurse, only bottle-feed, and plastic cannot duplicate nature, whose perfection lies in the fact that it is not plastic; every woman's breast is unique.

The advertisement subtly speaks to the needs and wants of men who would like to join the "New Father" club, and at the same time capitalizes on those needs and wants in order to sell the product. (Either way, the business cannot lose. If the new fathers club is too selective to justify the advertising costs, there are always the women—in the end they are the ones who buy baby bottles—and they like to think that some fine day they may share at least part of the child-rearing with the men.)

Nowadays, every woman knows that if she enters the job market or public life, and does the same work as her male colleagues, she will probably be paid less. The majority of women do not even come close to the glass ceilings that block their professional advancement. Likewise they feel the incompatibility of their being women in the "man's universe" (for example, how many places have been adapted for the needs of women who are menstruating?) And every woman knows that just because she has become a "working woman" she cannot leave behind the traditional tasks of women, child-rearing and housework.

The baby bottle advertisement, however, broadcasts the fact that men certainly can cross the impermeable boundaries between men and women. All they have to do to stand in for the women is buy a product and be careful to choose the right brand. The sound masculine body also symbolizes the fact that men do not have to give up their supposed masculinity, nor must they relinquish those advantages and privileges that go with being born a man. The only way that the advertisement might cause a little discomfort to the collective male psyche would be that it shows a manly man in a feminine pose, performing female behaviour. The creators of the ad compensate for this by carefully placing a phallus masquerading as a baby bottle in a starring role on the right side of the picture.

Now here is another picture with the same elements: a man and a baby together.¹¹ This is a non-commercial advertisement whose purpose is to promote balance and harmony between

work and private life, encouraging men to take their part in caring for others. Earlier I stated that the baby bottle advertisement not only applied the codes of sexist masculinity and femininity, it also incorporated a “pornographic look” in the interest of its deceptive message. In contrast, this picture could be used to illustrate the principles of erotic art.



To begin, consider the difference in the primary code, that is the figures’ connection firstly to each other and secondly to the viewer. In this picture, the man and baby are completely involved in a trusting, mutual relationship, and we, the viewers, are merely witnessing it. In terms of the additional codes, the man and baby are ordinary people, not models, dressed in ordinary clothes, and the atmosphere is homelike. Similarly, the text of the ad (“We are growing in equality”) is the motto of a campaign to popularize the type of relationship seen in the picture, so the text invites further thought. The text reinforces the message of the photograph: people can only grow if they grow together, and equality makes everyone better. Now all that remains is to complete the journey between the words and their realization in action.

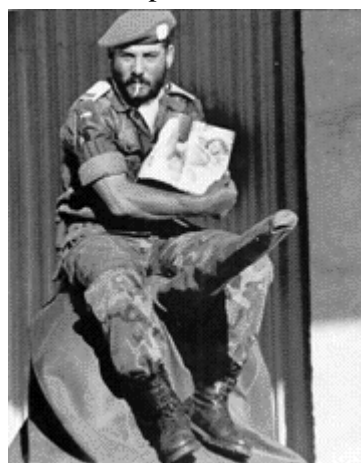
The patriarchal mavericks

At the beginning of this paper, I referred to the contradiction between my responsibility to clarify my thoughts as a writer, and my desire to promote their realization in practice. With the help of pictures, I have showed old and new myths which maintain the association between power and patriarchal privileges in the father role. I said that myths are not perfect; they are not laws, and they can be interpreted in various ways—indeed, I stated that the decisions we make today depend precisely on these diverse interpretations. What follows from all this, what must we do to break with tradition?

There are no simple, easy prescriptions, but nevertheless we can know what not to continue doing if we want to avoid injustice. In other words, as participants in the men’s movement for changes in the father role and relationships with women, men must confront their own positions related to male power and control—patriarchal control. The patriarchal maverick role becomes us, even if it is less pleasant and enjoyable to be “new sensitive men” or “new fathers,” even if we lose privileges and gain insecurity. Because these roles undoubtedly provide a certain security. We know that many young people today chose extreme gender roles, because they think they will find confidence by belonging to a group that plays a specific role, so they need not search for themselves for the answers to confidence-shaking questions: Who am I? What am I?

For this reason, I close my paper with two pictures which could be the archetypes of confidence and doubt, applied directly to my topic.

Here is the picture of confidence.¹²



There is no place for doubt here. This is a “real” man. Every single detail refers to his gender: the beret, the facial expression, the cigarette in his mouth, the boots, the pattern of his clothes, and the way he holds his arm with his sleeve rolled up. We could think all this is just harmless scenery, a series of various symbols that define certain men, joining them together as a group (one that ultimately classifies them as not being women). If someone should doubt that the symbols mean action in the world and a way of forming relationships with others (women), there are two more elements that are definitely not typical. One is the pornographic magazine, in which you can see women in flesh and blood, converted to objects. The other is the phallus, and it is significant both because it is essentially a cannon, and because of

its size. At the same time, it is no symbol at all—it is a weapon that serves to lengthen and multiply this type of male role's power to rape and destroy. Nothing is missing. No room for doubt. The picture may seem disgusting, but it is coherent—and coherence grants confidence.

In conclusion, here is the picture of uncertainty¹³. This picture is just as genuine as the one of the Balkan soldier, and it too illustrates a hormonal aberration. But why should we not take it as a representation of the incitement to renewal? What is it? A bearded lady? A man who really can nurse? And who am I? What do I not want to be any more? What do I want to be?

I want to stop my writing here. Not as an end, but rather as a point of departure. I wish the boundaries of men's and women's roles would blend together even more than this!

Not only are myths inconclusive, but we are expected to make a tangible creation of them—not those myths that are violent, not a child-eater myth—the myth of the caring man. I could find no better place for Antonio Machado's much-quoted lines—suppose that you read them as though for the first time:

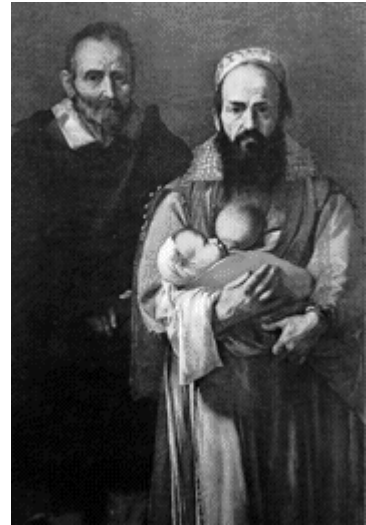
Wanderer, your footsteps are
the road, and nothing more;
wanderer, there is no road,
the road is made by walking.
By walking one makes the road,
and upon glancing behind
one sees the path
that never will be trod again.
Wanderer, there is no road--
Only wakes upon the sea.

From Selected Poems of Antonio Machado¹

Suggested readings and expression of thanks

In addition to the literature in the footnotes, which is taken from all the material that over the past 30 years has formed in me the thoughts expressed here, I would like to single out Phyllis Chesler's book *About Men* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1978), and Victoria Sau's *Diccionario ideológico feminista* [Dictionary of Feminist Ideology] (Icaria, Barcelona, 1990 vol. I., 2001 vol. II.).

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¹ Translated by Betty Jean Craige, University of Georgia [published by Louisiana State University Press, 1978]

Pictures

- ¹ Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado): *Todo Mafalda*, Lumen, Barcelona, 1992
- ² Quino (Joaquín Salvador Lavado): *Potentes, prepotentes e impotentes*, Lumen, Barcelona, 1989
- ³ Francisco de Goya (1746-1828): *Saturn Devouring His Son*, Museo del Prado, Madrid
- ⁴ Unknown artist: *Abraham Sacrificing Isaac*, floor mosaic in a 4th century synagogue in Israel
- ⁵ Unknown artist: *Majesty*
- ⁶ Beato Angelico (1395-1455): *Flight to Egypt*, Museo di San Marco, Firenze
- ⁷ MoviLine advertisement
- ⁸ Domenico del Ghirlandaio (1449-1494): *Grandfather and Grandson*, Musée du Louvre, París
- ⁹ Canon advertisement
- ¹⁰ Nuk advertisement
- ¹¹ A campaign picture by the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
- ¹² Photo by Miguel Berrocal
- ¹³ José de Ribera (1591-1652): *The Bearded Woman*, Museo Tavera, Toledo