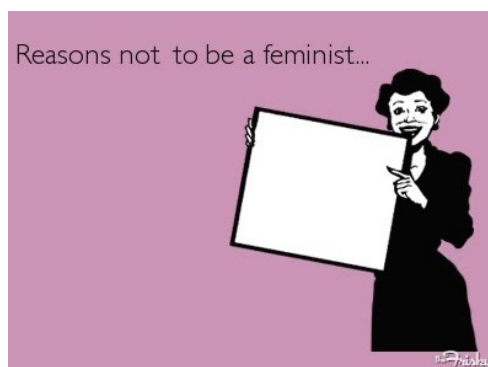


Nasty Feminism, Nasty Feminists

Nicol Thomas

Abstract: The question “what does a woman want?” has been asked by psychoanalysts in the past—particularly by Freud and Lacan—and is a question that has been taken up by feminist scholarship and epistemology. This essay addresses this complex question via both feminist research and enquiry and a Lacanian psychoanalytic praxis. The issue of women’s very speech is crucial, which is a cornerstone element of the feminisms of Spender, Steinem, Hanisch, Irigaray, Cixous, Felski, Jane and Ford. Lacan makes the point that feminine jouissance stands outside the phallic order and thus must be incorporated in the psychoanalytic consideration of what is the sexed position, woman. This essay argues that Lacan’s psychoanalytic considerations have great political and practical import for contemporary feminist practices and epistemology, via the positioning of women’s very speech outside of—but apposite to—a provably violent misogynistic patriarchy.

Key words: Anxiety, Biological Essentialism, Discourse, Feminine Jouissance Feminist Epistemology, Ethics and Praxis, Hegemonic Patriarchal Phallic Position, Hyper-Capitalism, Lacan, Patriarchy, Perverse Ideology, Phallic Order



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Kindly don't grab my pussy; she has teeth

Lacan once famously begged:

The plausibility of what I am claiming here—namely, that woman knows nothing of this jouissance—is underscored by the fact that in all the time people have been begging them, begging them on their hands and knees—I spoke last time of women psychoanalysts—to try and tell us, not a word! We've never been able to get anything out of them (Lacan 1973c 75).

Well, listen up now, I am going to tell you.

In May of last year—the infamous 2016—I had the privilege to go with my teenage trans-child to listen to Gloria Steinem speak in the Melbourne Town Hall (Steinem 2016). Steinem, who is of course a feminist foremother to me, articulated something that needs to be worked through, and which has been fomenting within my own feminist praxis now for a long time.

It was audience question time, and a woman from a youth feminist collective was invited to ask a question. Her question was: “Despite all of our progress so far, what has gone wrong with feminism today?”

Steinem's response was this: “We've been too nice.”

I could not self-censor, perhaps I'm so old I don't care to anymore. I stood up, whooped, clapped, jumped up and down and got maybe a few other (shocked) people responding as well. (The woman sitting next to me was not very impressed by my wild joy.)

My response game from the glee of a very sharp and public enunciation of something that has been at the heart of my own feminist investigation and praxis: the “difficulty” with woman's real voice, woman's unconscious words.

I noted that there was a brief silence, something of a shock for the

audience to have heard what Steinem just said. No-one knew how to respond—or at least, no-one seemed to respond as much from the unconscious as I did. This hesitance, the silence, and inability to respond to Steinem's words bothered me. The very signifier of "being nice" was touched, tainted perhaps, by what Steinem had just said. Was it too oppositional, too defiant, too raw?

This hesitation of the audience to react to these very words, indicated to me that there is *still* something rotten in the state of the way women are "allowed" to speak, *still* something that our foremothers have started that has not yet been processed by us, feminists and all. Steinem had just said something that to many in the audience seemed "radical", "impolite".

There is *still* something in the very way that women speak that is perceived as dangerous as there ever was, despite the many years of feminist theoretical research, and practice. There is *still* a problem with what a woman says, and *how* she says it. In fact, perhaps given the current climate of fundamentalist and conservative backlash, the issue of *speaking-well* as a woman is more in need of political examination and treatment than ever before, if we are not to be submerged under the heinous violence that women and people who identify as othered (to the white patriarchal system) are subject to these days.

For me, at least, this caused a return to a place where I had once begun: the issue of women's expression, women's words, women's voice. How to speak as a woman, how to *be heard* without gendered prejudice. How to say what you need to say without being subject to the violence of being called a bitch, a witch, told that you will be grabbed by the pussy, and ultimately that you need "corrective" raping even though you are too ugly to be rapeable.¹ That your very words are disgusting, intolerable and you need to be utterly destroyed.

Because nowadays it seems that it is allowed, even encouraged, to speak to women and others in this way. We have enough great examples before our very eyes every day. And that this behaviour exists is of profound concern: for what does it say about the people who are behaving, writing, and speaking this way?²

In a cultural climate that allows this level of (verbal) violence without impunity, and with a certain political (and definitely gendered) immunity, it is my belief that we don't have to "be nice" anymore.

We *must*, however, examine what an other of "being nice" actually is.

Because to fight violence with violence just degrades the whole issue, and *we are better than that and we want better than that. We want actual and profound change; an absolute difference.*

Anger is an energy: ever onwards to a feminist praxis and ethics

Well, they better watch out. This might just be a case of boys being boys. But pushing back against that bullshit? That's rapidly starting to become a case of girls being girls. And this time, there really isn't a damn thing anyone can do to stop that. (Ford 2016)

Once upon a time there was an essentialist demand placed on women; we were more "emotional", more "sensitive", more "caring", "nurturing" and just generally the "soft" sex. These traits were assigned to us, biologically. And should we depart from them in any way, we were judged as "unnatural" and therefore fit only for the mental asylum and/or serious "psychiatric intervention" such as electro-shock therapy and toxic psychopharmacological medication.³ We had to be isolated because our biology had somehow gone awry.

Gradually, however—and in no small part due to our feminist foremothers—this myth has been exploded, and the radical idea that women have feelings that are most definitely *not* "nice" is taking ground.

But the hangover of biological essentialism still lingers.

It lingers on the way women (and others) are *being spoken about* by the hegemonic institutions that are still in place.

Women—again, in no small part due to the work that has come before us—are no longer "soft" enough to accept being *spoken about* in this way, and the excuse that "boys will be boys" is no longer convincing.

To be thus disrespected is beginning to make us openly angry, an affect that has been well hidden in the essentialist schema of "what a woman is". But it has been so well suppressed (although women always have been angry), that no-one knows what to do with women's anger.

They never have.

"Feminine" anger comes in relation to the constructed imperative and demand to "be nice".

Women are not "supposed" to be angry, and if they are, they are to hide it well, perhaps take it to a psychologist, medicate it out of existence. There is no reason for a woman to be angry—if she is the well acted-out object that her very existence depends upon—and if she is angry, *she is sick*.⁴

This is not new. This is an old, old story.

We need to re-examine what anger is, in context of feminist practice and feminist epistemology. We need to see what to do with our anger, because now more than ever we have something to be so very angry about. We need to see if we can make our anger work for us, instead of immersing in it, or of ignoring it and hoping that by being nice about things, we can diffuse the bullies and make

them go away. (Neither strategies have, in my experience, actually made any absolute difference whatsoever.)

This is a matter of *jouissance*, and specifically, what Lacan calls “feminine *jouissance*” (Lacan 1972-1973).

We have not heard, really, of feminine *jouissance* since the so-called “French post-modern feminists”. Which is a great pity, because now more than ever we can use the concept of feminine *jouissance* to critique our reaction to the conservative patriarchal backlash of the current political climate, and to position ourselves in response to our own political/personal feminist practice. And to hold in mind that the world that we are currently residing in is termed a “post-truth”, “alternative fact” world.⁵

Won't make love to change your mind, no hippy chick⁶

I am going to back-track somewhat now, because we do not live in a vacuum and there is always a historical context to what and where we are today, and what perhaps we can take from those who have gone before us. Feminism these days seems to have fallen into the twenty-first century heap that is defined by globalism, technology and hyper-capitalism. Some of the worst things that are going on today, and which are so very very loud, are rooted in some of the hopes and dreams that our reasonably recent past held.

I am referring *specifically* to the technology of media and social media, which seems to be an imperative involved in almost all discussion and debate in contemporary life. I remember when (yes, I *am* that old!) the internet was intended as a radical site *away* from conservative and hegemonic cultural or economic discourse, intended as a platform of free speech and equality—those libertarian baby boomer hippy utopian ideals.⁷ So much has changed; but what is in place in the *hic et nunc*, the here and now? What ever happened to feminism?

Early, more utopian, technological progress has given us a platform; we can at least take that from our recent-ancient history. The globalisation of media technology allows us space to say what we have to say, to publicise our agendas, to inform and educate, and to be seen in a way that has previously been underground, alienated and alienating, secret, hidden, shunned. This, at least, is a positive effect of the original ideals of the internet. Those of us who before have been marginalised have grown stronger because there is a place where our voices are heard and recognized. Social media—which perhaps can be intertwined with Bey's notion of Temporary Autonomous Zones (1990; 1991)⁸—have given voice to many previously alienated groups of people who would otherwise have had to remain silent. These voices have caused great social and political awareness and change.

But, sadly, the imaginary aspect of technology—plus its overwhelming oversaturation of information uptake—has left an effect and an affect of anxiety. There is a dissolution of subjective meaning, and an overabundance of Imaginary identifications that are not critiqued or questioned *because there is so much imperative to be social and socially “aware” that there is no time for pause or critical thinking*. And there is a rampant and—frankly—weird over-proliferation of gendered verbal and physical violence (Jane 2017a & b). I have written elsewhere that this seems to me to be an alarming and possibly pathological shift to a perverse ideology that affords no difference to others that are not of the same psychical (or indeed patriarchal gendered) structure (Thomas 2016). I do not want to dwell on this more as it is a complex issue, not unrelated to feminism today, but rather it is the terrain in which we as feminists find ourselves. And again, I reiterate that this particular cultural iteration does not stand out of context to its history. It is just that the contemporary terrain has its own imperatives and we are attempting to position ourselves as feminists within this terrain, which has its own—in my opinion—perverse ideology and structure.

With all of the complexities of feminism epistemology over time and history, where are we in the ideological perversity of the here and now?

This question causes its very own *jouissance*.

Personal/political

And not to become wiser means to become more ignorant. (Irigaray 1994 21)

The shrinking effect of social media, hyper-capitalism (with its devouring marketing-consumption imperative driven identifications) and post-truth ideology have reduced feminism to a singular entity “ism”. And, as that great absurdist philosopher of the 1980s Ferris Beuller once said, “isms are not good”.⁹ And feminism, in particular, was and always will be a complex thing. Feminism does stand apart from other “ideologies” because ultimately, feminism does not subscribe to a singular idea—apart from the radical idea that women are human beings and therefore subject to human rights. Hegemony has difficulty with the notion and practice of subjectivity; subjectivity is irreducible to a singular definition, it is flexible and malleable, and changes over time with experience. Feminism has been described as fluid, because feminism notices the subjectivity of each woman and each woman’s circumstances. Hegemony—and especially patriarchy—cannot fathom this, to the point of either foreclosure or disavowal, because it is itself subject to a specific form of phallic signification which can only be encapsulated by a slogan, or a unifying signifier, and at its worst, a

perverse and static ideology. Lacan's description of the positions of male and female, masculine and feminine, in his *Seminar XX:Encore (1972-1973)* speak very well to this, and I will be returning to Lacan later on.

This problem arises for women—and the feminist movement in particular—when there is no level playing field for masculine and feminine¹⁰ to stand on, and only one rule of the game; fight dirty, destroy with extreme prejudice. Boys will be boys, and will *fight* like boys, but do girls need to fight back like boys, or is there a way for girls to be girls (and remember, “studies” have consistently shown that girls are “verbal”)? Boys have taken to an extremely violent position towards girls—or at least, this violent position is finally being seen clearly, *and questioned for being the status quo*. Girls, however, are no longer happy to sit back, shut up, and take it for Queen and Country (or whatever), girls have stopped “being nice”. Girls are angry, and girls are pushing back, but it is a different action. It is *not* on the same dirty level as violent little boys.¹¹

Feminism has above all always identified and practiced as a unique integration between subject and principle; the personal *is* political, and this is problematic for a hegemony where a slogan, a “principle” and an ideology are identified with *more so* than human subjects, human relationships, and human subjectivity.¹²

Looking back on Carol Hanisch's 1969 article “The Personal is Political”, I can see many points she outlined that are still relevant and up for question today, forty-eight years later. Hanisch defines politics as power relationships, and describes the problematic of “the system” which uses its power to oppress women.¹³ She encapsulates a shift for women, a shift that involves not giving in to the signifiers for femaleness that the “system” hands us; “women are messed over, not messed up” (Hanisch 2006 [1969] 3). Describing the “consciousness raising” meetings that were part of the work early feminists were undertaking, she says that the findings and experiences of these groups show that “One of the first things we discover is that personal problems are political problems” (Hanisch 2006[1969] 4). The principle of feminism is that women's very lives are politicized in that the power relations of “the system” render women's lives as demeaned, secondary, and if women are unhappy about this they are unwell. And on top of that, all alternatives for living are “bad” under the contemporary conditions; all possible ways of political definition are negative. Hanisch describes that in such a climate, action and theory need to be positioned together:

This is part of one of the most important theories we are beginning to articulate. We call it “the pro-woman line.” What it says basically is that women are really neat people. The bad things that are said

about us as women are either myths (women are stupid), tactics women use to struggle individually (women are bitches), or are actually things that we want to carry into the new society and want men to share too (women are sensitive, emotional). Women as oppressed people act out of necessity (act dumb in the presence of men), not out of choice. Women have developed great shuffling techniques for their own survival (look pretty and giggle to get or keep a job or a man) which should be used when necessary until such time as the power of unity can take its place. Women are smart not to struggle alone (as are blacks and workers [and LGBTQI people]). It is no worse to be in the home than in the rat race of the job world. They are both bad. Women, like blacks, workers, [LGBTQI people], must stop blaming ourselves for our “failures.” (Hanisch 2006[1969] 4 [my additions])

Hanisch describes the difficulty in attempting action without some sort of underpinning theory to support the action, wherein which action fails into a messy, chaotic acting out, women “screaming for action without theory” (Hanisch 2006[1969] 5). This kind of knee-jerk reaction without thought behind it devolves the position of feminism and feminists, according to Hanisch, and we will bear this thought in mind, especially in context of the emerging difference between hegemonic (perverse) ideology, that is, static phallogocentrism, and a fluid discourse of subjectivity. I suspect that Hanisch’s article becomes a seed for further feminists to germinate, and I believe that these are ideas that *are still* in question for feminists to this day.

Here is a seed: “Maybe the answer is not to put down the method of analysing from personal experiences in favour of immediate action, but *to figure out what can be done to make it work*” (Hanish 2006[1969] 5 [my emphasis]).

Sticks and stones may break my bones...

How do we analyse? We have a body of information, a question about it, and we talk about it. We are taught to (first) engage in the Hegelian action of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. But what do we use in this action other than words? Speech?

Psychoanalysis itself has its efficacy in what is known as “the talking cure”.¹⁴ (Psychology and psychiatry follow, albeit in very different ways.) Words can and do have a very physical effect on the human being, and are not to be dismissed at the mercy of sticks and stones; which is why psychological abuse is *of as great a concern* as physical and sexual abuse, and should be paid more attention

to by the patriarchal hegemony.

Psychoanalysis has from the outset been concerned with “the woman question”, as it is psychoanalysis that first took the female hysteric seriously, as a *subject*. Charcot’s treatment of his female subjects put them on show as objects of scientific oddity and study, he made an experimental scientific-theatre from them. Freud—who, to be fair, only studied with Charcot for five months or so—found something else in the hysteric’s words. For Freud noticed that the hysteric patients he worked with—mostly women who wouldn’t shut up and were “difficult”—were speaking about *something* which the words they were afforded could not adequately encompass. Freud followed them and noted that the associations these women were making lead to a unique direction for each of them; into their unconscious repressions, which were on the whole sexual desires that were not allowed to be voiced, let alone acted on.¹⁵ It was the words of the female subjects of Freud that allowed the unconscious to be discovered, the words that Freud did *not* dismiss as irritating or trivial “woman’s talk”, but rather that he found a way to listen to, to make an effective “cure” for his patients.

Something about the way the hysterics spoke—and were listened to—freed them up from the attachment and return to the places of anxiety or depression or frustration or “overly-inclusive” babbling.

It is a testament to Freud’s work and practice that he never demeaned or trivialised his patients, even though as a researcher he might have stumbled along the way from time to time (frankly, who doesn’t?). Freud himself dwelt for a very long time on feminine sexuality, and for him it was something of a mysterious “dark continent”.¹⁶ His famous question, *what does a woman want?*¹⁷ speaks to his inability to “plug the hole” of this particular question, which we can perhaps perceive as *Freud’s* own subjective question. Whether or not Freud found an answer for himself to this question is not within the scope of our speculations. What we are concerned with is *how* this question comes into play in the terrain of the contemporary domain within which we are positioning feminism and feminist activity. Our question is a direct descendent of Freud’s, but we are coming at it *as women*.

A great many feminists have been anti-Freud, stating that Freud’s conceptualization of women comes from the hegemonic patriarchal phallic position. That psychoanalysis positions women as “the other”—to what? To men, who have the phallus. That having the phallus is the one trait that defines the “norm” of the hegemony. Since Freud did, indeed, investigate the line that the little boy has something the little girl does not, and that the little girl wants it, it is easy to see how some feminist developments can fall into the trap of automatically placing Freud into the place of an essentialist whose allegiance firmly grasps the phallic signifier and waves it in the face of those of us who go

without. It appears as a taunt by the bully who has been told that he is the little prince, because “he’s the man”.

This is one version that arouses feminist anger. And perhaps, on a certain level, we can say, *rightly so*. It is never pleasant to be continuously reminded of our failings, that which we don’t have and can never attain, making us somewhat lesser to those that appear to have it. It is never pleasant to be constantly told there’s something wrong with us because we can never have what the other one does, no matter how hard we try.

But we get stuck here. It is a ditch out of which we can never crawl. And that is not the point, I think, of feminism today.

Perhaps when Freud asks—and to me it is with that tinge of sadness—*what does a woman want?* we need to let go a little of the notions of what it means *to have* and *not to have*. There is a very large and glaring assumption being made here about this binary opposition, “whole” and “hole”, which is not unrelated to the imaginary position of essentialism. Freud had not yet come to the position that Lacan will later develop, in his own return to what Freud said. There is more to come. Feminist enquiry cannot and may not stop at the limit that Freud apparently comes to (after all, one can only live so long and research so far. Freud caused a revolution in his discovery of the unconscious.) It is, I repeat, a sticking place that is tempting to rest at, but we must not stay there, for reasons not only of progress, but our own personal/political sanity and stability.

I will return now to Hanisch and the notion that the personal is political, and to insert the notion of talking as a radical act of change (as did Freud). Hanisch finds a complexity in the consciousness raising groups which I think is pertinent to the idea of talk as change. She writes that the groups have been criticised as “therapy” sessions, and personal ones at that. Therapy, of course, indicates that there is something wrong, a dis-ease, a divergence from the norm that needs to be rectified. It indicates a certain standard of hegemonic mental hygiene that does not take the subject into account. In the context of feminism, she writes, this criticism comes because “woman’s personal talk” is “not political enough”.

And here we have the direct example of the patriarchal hegemony as the “norm” from which all divergences are abnormal, as in some feminist criticism of Freud.

But Hanisch asks a different question which I believe is as alive and as radical today as it was in 1969:

This is not to deny that these sessions have at least two aspects that are therapeutic. I prefer to call this aspect “political therapy” as opposed to personal therapy. The most important is getting

rid of self-blame. Can you imagine what would happen if women, blacks, [LGBTQI people] and workers (my definition of worker is anyone who has to work for a living as opposed to those that don't. All women are workers) would stop blaming ourselves for our sad situation? It seems to me that the whole country needs that kind of political therapy. (Hanish 2006[1969] 4, my addition)

The “sad situation” comes when those who have-not (women who do not have the phallus) compare themselves to those who have (men who “do have” the phallus). The “sad situation” also comes when *having the phallus* is what is culturally hegemonic for both “females” and “males”. And whilst I re-iterate that the “therapeutic” is in place when there is a perception that there is something “wrong” with the subject when placed up to the “norm” of hegemony. Hanisch shifts the perspective, shifts the ground, repositions the terrain. She holds up the hegemony and says, “this needs political therapy”: or, an absolute difference to the power differential.

For Hanisch, the “political” hegemony is not working. For us, we can do something with Freud’s question, *what does a woman want?*.

We can look at it from another perspective, one that stands in a different position to that of the phallic signifier of having. (After all, haven’t we come to the populist conclusion in the *hic et nunc*, that women can’t have it all?)

Girls talk/And they want to know how girls talk/And they say it’s not allowed, girls talk/And they think they know how girls talk¹⁸

“What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?
“The world would split open.” (Rukeyser 1968)

So what *has* been done in the meantime, between the then of the foremothers and the now? What does it mean to be a feminist today?

I am a feminist scholar, I am also a Lacanian psychoanalyst. This is not by chance, because Lacan tells us that “the unconscious is structured like a language.”¹⁹ My original interest and investment in feminism stems from the tense problematic that showed itself to me quite early on in life of *feminine speech*. My interest in Lacanian psychoanalysis only serves to extend the question of speech, and what Lacan identifies as *an ethics of speaking well*.²⁰ As a psychoanalyst, my work is not anchored in social theory or any universalising empirical confirmation of sociology. This does not intersect with the Discourse of the Master²¹, but I *do* believe it has connections with the terrain of feminisms, and the issue of female speaking. I am more interested in the subjective unconscious,

and how the subject may or may not come to terms with the contemporary world of signifiers and significations that we are all living in. The early feminist agenda and practice of “consciousness raising” in groups is not psychoanalysis, but it *is* a way of working that stands, perhaps, a little aside from the Discourse of the Master, and the hegemony. This practice is designed, it seems to me, to allow room for feminine speech and to attempt to “figure out what can be done to make it work”; not unlike the space of the analytical couch, where what is worked on is the creation of *an absolute difference*.²²

But the female speech I am interested in still has not yet left its safe space. It still stands apart from the places of hegemonic discourse, it is still “othered”. Women who speak (even within the norms of polite and academic discourse) in the hegemonic discourse of the internet are met with the most violent forms of threat imaginable (Ford 2016b; Jane 2017a), and to reiterate; whilst the immature response to the outrage of this language is that “it’s just words”, “it’s just a joke”, words have a very real effect.

I do not want to dwell in great length on female speech and female writing, but I have to point out that female speech, *écriture féminine* was an attempt to create some version of “an ethics of speaking-well” that stands outside the hegemonic patriarchy. Felski wrote of this form:

The notion of a purely “feminine” writing is defended as a utopian moment within feminism by several commentators: *l’écriture féminine* is to be understood as a liberating form of writing which cannot as yet be even fully imagined. It may well be the case that a utopian perspective constitutes a necessary inspiratory vision for feminism as an oppositional ideology (Felski 1989 42).

Feminine speech—and by extension feminine writing—is meant to be a “wild zone”.²³ A space opens up, or is consciously created, for a voice to emerge. There are two problematics, however, that arise: first, is this “wild” voice of the singular subjective unconscious, or is it of a political order, the voice of a group? Is it an intersection of the two, the personal *which is* the political? A question of *how* the politics effects the subject in the Real, or otherwise?

Second, what is this voice representative of? The Hegemonic Other, who could very well be situated in a static perverse ideology, or the *discourse* of *speaking-well, subjectively*? This tension is a very real one for feminists; it cuts to the very kernel of the feminist agenda, how to be radically different from the hegemony that is oppressive and alienating. It is the difference between fighting like a boy—and getting stuck in the mire of that battle to the death—and Ford’s notion of “fighting like a girl” (Ford 2016b).

To an extent, feminists who have engaged with what female speech and female writing means have been examining this idea of what it means to have a form and place that is “woman”. And that is *not* othered or alienated, a form and a place that is *safe* to be a woman in. Spender writes: “While the male-as-norm syndrome persists, women have a structured problem [...] If and when sufficient women agree that they no longer subscribe to the rules and patterns of patriarchy, then the rules and patterns are likely to be transformed” (Spender 1998[1980] 2-3). This is a critical mass approach, but the question remains: how do we achieve a critical mass?

Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman. (Cixous 1976 881)

Female *jouissance* is situated in a place that has nothing to do with patriarchal hegemony, and has—up until French post-modern feminism—always had the smear of mental illness associated with it. This smear sticks still, given the way women are still spoken about from popular media to personal encounters, and the odd, new (but not new) discussion surfacing on the way women’s speech is interrupted by men.²⁴ Women’s very speech is seen as *jouissance*, mad, disturbing and better off left unsaid. A woman who speaks is out of (the hegemonic) place.²⁵ Irigaray and Cixous are two writers of and for female speech who are informed by Lacan’s work, especially with regard to the question of female *jouissance*.

Cixous’s and Irigaray’s work focus on repositioning feminine *jouissance*, and working to liberate it from the negative connotation that it has when placed in the context of patriarchal hegemony and its institutions. Cixous states:

When I say “woman,” I’m speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses [...] But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept them in the “dark”—that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute—there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman [...] you can’t talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women’s imaginary is inexhaustible [...] (Cixous 1976 875-76)

Irigaray posits a description of female *jouissance* in a very vivid manner:

Man is separated from that primary space which, it appears, is everything to him. He lives out a kind of exile between the *never more* and the *not yet*. Woman can occupy the place of the spatial. She is assisted in this role by her relation to the cyclical. But not in the traditional act of love (in which, notably, she has no access to language as temporal scansion). Even if she extends indefinitely into space, and thereby risks losing time [...] this is because her sexuality does not have to obey the imperatives and risks of erection and detumescence. In some sense her *jouissance* is a result of indefinite *touching*. The *thresholds* do not necessarily mark a limit, the end of an act. She can take part in the man's act, or even produce it, without ever achieving her own act. In the act of love, she finds herself more or less expanded, more or less deeply touched, more or less unfolded in her desire of the moment. Time is not measured in the same way for her as for man. A sentence without a period? A musical phrase that would never end? An expanse extending on and on forever. A horizon forever open, closed up only with difficulty, as a result of that other punctuation or rhythm. (Irigaray 1994 64-65)

Both Cixous and Irigaray read Lacan's treatment of feminine *jouissance* as negative, lacking, and firmly in the place of the bearer of the phallus taunting the one who lacks, thus oppressing her. The bearer of the phallus shows her up for her lack, and denigrates her for always wanting more, more, more. This is a *jouissance* of greed, and this is what tends towards the pathological—to never be content, and to never desire to break away from the *jouissance* of the hungry demand, more! to “be sensible”. Irigaray states: “She always wants *more, encore*, we are told by certain psychoanalysts (Jacques Lacan in particular) who equate this *more* with pathology. In fact, the *more* is the condition of sexual female desire. Impossible, no doubt, to satisfy in everyday life. But not pathological for all that” (Irigaray 1994 64).

Cixous, too, comments on Lacan's grip on the phallus:

[...] Lacan preserves it in the sanctuary of the phallos (ϕ) “sheltered” from *castration's lack!*²⁶ Their “symbolic” exists, it holds power—we, the sowers of disorder, know it only too well. But we are in no way obliged to deposit our lives in their banks of lack, to consider the constitution of the subject in terms of a drama manglingly restaged, to reinstate again the religion of the father. (Cixous 1976 884)

For Cixous and Irigaray, feminine *jouissance* becomes the very thing that

plugs the hole of lack. It is this *jouissance* that places women out of the phallic hegemony, and into the space of feminine speech; the *jouissance* makes the speech. This speech, this writing, will recoup the feminine to the woman, bring her back herself, and reclaim that “irrational” and “mad” configuration, and restore her to herself. In this way feminine *jouissance* can be put to work, according to both Cixous and Irigaray, create something entirely new and radical, even if it does transgress the signifiers and tropes of patriarchal institutions.

But that is the agenda of this type of work, and for our purposes, is not even a difficult or negative one.

Feminine *jouissance* becomes the thing that fills the woman, gives her a sense of herself, and shows that the lack given to us by the phallogocentric symbolic order is being actively refuted and refused. Cixous calls for “[...] the woman who would hold out against oppression and constitute herself as a superb, equal, hence ‘impossible’ subject, untenable in a real social framework” (Cixous 1976 879).

It is without doubt that both Irigaray and Cixous treat feminine *jouissance* in a way that recovers it from a negative connotation, a pathologizing effect that has caused a great deal of trauma and anger through many ages. They suggest an agenda to work with: writing, speaking, the recognition of patriarchal universalizing signifiers of women and utilizing them as transgressive acts. “Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (Cixous 1976 875).

In a sense this is echoed by Spender as well:

Woman talk which has been disallowed and disavowed by the patriarchal order is one of the most powerful means of subverting and transforming that order. Because of this, the dominant group can be relied upon to hinder the growth and development of woman talk. I think women should resist these pressures to the utmost and that patriarchal myth should be made feminist reality. Women should become the talkative sex. (Spender 1998[1980] 137)

Irigaray gives us a beautiful example of female speech that is not burdened by patriarchal dismissal—perhaps inspired by Lacan’s *Seminar VIII: Transference (1960-1961)*—via Plato’s *Symposium*, and the story of Diotima’s teachings. In *The Symposium* (1999), Socrates, who is held up as the arbiter of knowledge of love and who is the hero of this story, speaks about his own education. He has been taught by a woman, Diotima. Diotima is a sort of wise woman—perhaps a priestess of some mysteries—and she has taught him the ways of love. Diotima does not speak for herself in *The Symposium*, though. Socrates speaks for her.

I will not repeat what Diotima teaches Socrates, rather I would prefer to dwell on *how* she speaks, which is where Irigaray's example proves very useful for us. *The Symposium* itself is in a form of literary expression that is dialogic. For us it could read as a script. It is set at a (boy's only) party where the express purpose of the evening is drinking and speaking. Tonight's topic is love, and each participant speaks of what he knows about love and how he knows it. Socrates is the man of the hour, a much beloved man who points out flaws in everyone's theory. But when he is asked what he knows of love and how he knows it, he defers to his teacher, Diotima, a woman. Here is what Irigaray says about Diotima's way of speaking:

Diotima's teaching will be very dialectical, but different from what we usually call dialectical. In effect, it doesn't use opposition to make the first term pass into the second in order to achieve a synthesis of the two, as Hegel does. From the outset, she established an *intermediary* that will never be abandoned as means or a path. Her method, then, is not a propaedeutic of the *destruction* or the *destruction* of two terms in order to establish a synthesis that is neither one nor the other. She presents, uncovers, unveils the insistence of a third term that is already there and that permits progression: from poverty to wealth, from ignorance to wisdom, from mortality to immortality. Which, for her, always comes to a greater perfection of and in love.

But, contrary to the usual methods of dialectic, one should not have to give up love in order to become wise or learned. It is love that leads to knowledge, whether in art or more metaphysical learning. It is love that both leads the way and is the path. A mediator par excellence. (Irigaray 1994 20-21)

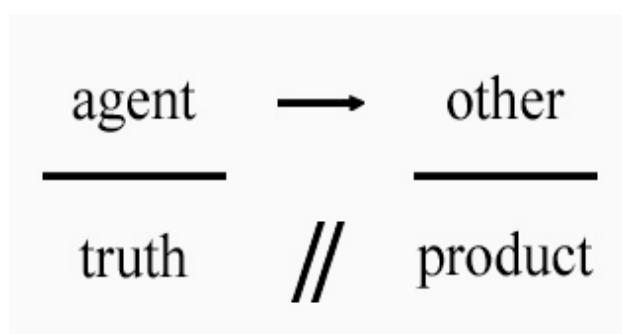
Irigaray posits that Diotima does something different to the destructive method of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; her dialectic *produces* something rather than diffusing it. This, then, allows growth, something new to emerge and keep circulating. This reminds me very much of the "old-fashioned" notion of consciousness raising groups, whose imperative is to "figure out what to do", much as in the same way the "absolute difference" of "speaking-well" in Lacanian psychoanalysis aims for the same production.

And I think it now useful to recast the "problematic" of feminine speech in this aspect: to call up the function of *production* via dialectic rather than *destruction-diffusion* via synthesis. Irigaray writes further:

Diotima's dialectic is in an at least *four terms*: the here, the two poles of the encounter, and the beyond—but a beyond that never abolishes the here. And so on, indefinitely. The mediator is never abolished in an infallible knowledge. Everything is always in movement, in a state of becoming. And the mediator of all this is, among other things, or exemplarily, *love*. Never fulfilled, always becoming [...] Thus [Diotima] ceaselessly examines Socrates on his positions without positing authoritative, already constituted truths. Instead, she teaches the *renunciation* of already established truths. And each time Socrates thinks he can take something as certain, *she undoes his certainty*. (Irigaray 1994 21-22 [my emphasis])

The undoing of certainty evokes the rigid difference of a static perverse ideology that must be questioned by a dialectical discourse, via movement and production rather than enunciated demand and destruction.

Lacan even gives this schema and ascribes the movement within discourse certain functions:



(Lacan 1972b 17)

The function of a discourse is to produce something. The discourse itself has an internal movement, starting from the lower left hand corner and progressing clock-wise to the lower right hand corner. (There are certain terms in Lacan's discourses which are placed in the schema and then moved to form different discourses, but the best readings of these can be found in Lacan's *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* and *Seminar XX: Encore*.)

Cixous and Irigaray find a different way of speaking for women. Utilizing what was previously perceived as the dregs of speech by an ideologically driven hegemony—women's crazy babble—they take what has been deemed pathological and give it a space apart from, away from its persecutors. Women's *jouissance* filled words are creative, they can *do something* in the world, produce a discourse that is at once mediated by love (rather than destruction) and

grapples with (hegemonic) certainties to de-stabilize the painful and oppressive status quo.

Irigaray states that “[a] non-traditional, fecund encounter between the sexes barely exists” (Irigaray 1994 9). Is it possible that this formulation—if it is possible that this formulation can ever be liberated from its radical and transgressive position—could produce a change?

Creation *ex nihilo*: the big bang, the black hole, the dark continent

There are limitations to the beautiful, tempting, utopian ideas of feminine *jouissance*.

It does not admit to lack, and when there is no lack, there is anxiety. Lacan describes this phenomenon very well in *Seminar X: Anxiety*. Felski, who we have seen laud feminine writing as an inspiring and visionary act, also warns that it is an impossible agenda.²⁷ For, really, how can we speak or write when our very words are the signifiers given to us by the Symbolic Order—which we are born into whether we like it or not—and therefore subject to the hegemonic patriarchal order? How can we speak *without* using those words, or is this an impossibility? If so, then what?

Cixous and Irigaray, who do fault Lacan as the one who uses the phallus and the phallic order to oppress the female *jouissance* and stuff it into the box of pathology, also do not follow the observation that anxiety comes when there is too much *jouissance*, as in their schema of never-ending utopian feminine *jouissance* where there is *no* encounter with the phallus as positioned as oppressive. Cixous goes so far as to accuse Lacan of saying that the phallus is sheltered from castration’s lack (Cixous 1976 884).

And it is here that I must part with my two favourite foremothers in their utopian dream of creating a pure zone of feminine *jouissance*. For this cannot hold in the world we are necessarily born into, and have to navigate through, whether we like it or not. After a great deal of scholarship dwelling in the wild zone, I was left with the sense that this wild zone was a nice place to visit, but impossible to inhabit. I also was craving to learn exactly “what Lacan said.” For there is something too frantic in Cixous’s and Irigaray’s fantasy of eradicating lack, something that runs too close to anxiety (which always indicates the opposite of lack, the opposite of desire).

So let us try to make a précis of what Lacan said, because the study of Lacan is no short thing. Lacan defies a definition of easy epistemological uptake. You can read and then reread Lacan and the text will change with each reading. You find more, you find something else. Because Lacan’s work is a praxis, and *not* an ideology. Lacan’s work does not remain static, because his

pedagogical value is not on the level of aphorisms, definitions, or rote learnings of “standards”. And you *certainly* can’t grasp it after one read only.

I think there is a great deal of value in exploring the process of the study of Lacan’s work, it is as complex as one’s own psychoanalysis. It is a work-in-progress and it speaks to the subjectivity of each unconscious that approaches this type of work. So—to cut things short—Lacan’s work ought *never* be taken as a canon for the masses. Here there is no empirical evidence but that of one’s own observations.

Something, I believe, that feminism would do well to re-examine given that we are face-to-face with a patriarchal hegemony that is getting more and more perverse by the minute.²⁸ In fact, it is my belief that feminism should cease thinking of itself as an ideology and begin to explore itself as a discourse. Therein lies at least one difference that feminism can utilize as a radical difference to the ideology of patriarchal hegemony.

Encore: anger is an energy²⁹

If there is some angle from which this business of the sexual relationship could be clarified, it’s precisely from the ladies’ side (*côté*), insofar as it is on the basis of the elaboration of the not-whole that one must break new ground. (Lacan 1973 57)

The biggest secret that no-one mentions about the phallus is *that it is a mirage utilized to cover up lack*.

NO-ONE “has” it.³⁰

We only pretend to have it—in one form or another, males make use of it in different ways to females, and with different psychic structures all sorts of things go on in the covering over of lack. We *all* lack, and the ones who shout the loudest about how they don’t, actually do lack the most. We *all* lack, and this is the hardest thing about human existence that is to be faced.

This is what, sadly, feminism has forgotten, or ignored; that by the virtue of our very existence, we *lack*. Yes, we are all subject to the perverse ideology of patriarchal hegemony, this—unfortunately—is the world we are currently born in to.

BUT: must we by virtue of being born at all *ingest* this ideology? Must we take it on board? Must we be stuffed silent by the phallus, forced down our throats? Must our lack, our desire, be plugged with the phallus-fetish that is too full of *jouissance*, and thus anxiety?

I am in no way, shape or form suggesting that we re-subscribe to a feminist utopia. We must rid ourselves of the idea that any utopia can exist.

Let us leave utopia firmly in the realm of fantasy, lovely to think about, but impossible to create, let alone sustain.

I *am* suggesting that we move our position in relation to the phallus. It actually isn't real.

Lacan describes two forms of *jouissance*: that of the phallus, which is simple, and feminine *jouissance*.

Feminine *jouissance* stands outside the phallic order. This is what Lacan has described:

There is a *jouissance*, since I am confining myself here to *jouissance*, a *jouissance* of the body that is, if I may express myself thus [...] "beyond the phallus." That would be cute, huh? And it would give another consistency to the women's liberation movement. A *jouissance* beyond the phallus [...] now and then, there is something that, for a brief moment, shakes (*secoue*) women up or rescues them (*secourt*). (Lacan 1973c 74)

This is a *jouissance* beyond the phallus (Lacan 1973c 74), and it is entirely on the side of the female subject because it is a *jouissance* that has absolutely nothing to do with the phallus or its *jouissance*.

The paradox of feminine *jouissance*, though, lies in its lack, or, as Lacan puts it, the not-whole of the woman. (And this is why he goes on to say that there is *no such thing as a universal Woman* as there is a universal Man, subject as he is to phallic order. Lacan adopts the neologism **woman** when speaking of the divided subject of not-wholeness.) To explain via a metaphor, Lacan says this:

When Achilles has taken his step, gotten it on with Briseis, the latter, [...] has advanced a bit, because she is "not whole," not wholly his. Some remains [...] Here then is the statement (*le dit*) of the status of *jouissance* insofar as it is sexual. For one pole, *jouissance* is marked by the hole that leaves it no other path than that of phallic *jouissance*. For the other pole, can something be attained that would tell us how that which up until now has only been a fault (*faille*) or gap in *jouissance* could be realized? (Lacan 1972a 8)

And *that* is why the patriarchal hegemony has such a hard time with it; it simply is unequipped to understand this. But that is *no* excuse for feminists and women to submit to what the phallic order tells them in the attempt to disavow feminine *jouissance*.³¹

Feminine *jouissance*—that little of nothing, not-wholeness that marks us as different to the phallic order, the mirage of *having it*—has been much maligned. It is what has sent untold millions of women either to the stake or to the madhouse, or numbed by consumable goods and psychotropic medications. It is undefinable and hard to pin down, but there is one signifier that I should like to give it, because it is a signifier that has been inadequately treated so far: *women's anger*.

Feminisms have made incredible social progress in the way women (and others) are able to recognize and speak out against violence and oppression—and this is where the personal becomes political, because personal violence visited upon singular subjects *en masse* becomes a political issue. Women are speaking out in ways that have traditionally been silenced. But there is currently an enormous backlash against the momentum of women's voices, and women are no longer content to return to silence. We have given up “being nice”. And this is all bound up with women's anger.

Anger as a form of feminine *jouissance* is an important affect to pay attention to; we often equate anger with violence. And anger is, indeed, violent when there is no adequate signifier to capture the sheer explosive affect without words that is the first moment of anger.

My hope is that feminism as a praxis, feminism as a discourse, feminism as a *jouissance* that is outside the phallic order, can do something constructive with our anger. Let us return to something Lacan says here, which I believe could be a tactic that feminism could adopt: creation *ex nihilo*.

Feminine *jouissance*, we know, is predicated on the not-whole of the woman. But, as Lacan reminds us, “[n]othing is made from nothing” (Lacan 1960a 121). He again uses a metaphor that we might find useful, that of the vase that surrounds a nothing but still *is something*:

Now if you consider the vase from the point of view I first proposed, as an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the centre of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a *nihil*, as nothing. And that is why the potter, just like you to whom I am speaking, creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole. (Lacan 1960a 121)

The vase takes shape around emptiness; can it take shape around the inarticulable beyond-the-phallus space of feminine *jouissance*? Can we do something profound with our anger?

We must.

And we must utilize what we have best, our words. *We must not stop talking*. In doing so, we can create a discourse that stands apart from the ideological constraints and violence of the hegemonic patriarchy. We can produce an absolute difference, and we must.

THIS is feminist praxis.

We must not stop talking.

We must not be afraid of our anger, we must give it shape with our words.

And we must *never* be afraid of not being nice.

Nice has had its day.

Nasty women, after all, say it very clearly: “you can’t speak for me, thank you very much.”

- 1 Whatever that might mean. This oxymoronic trope very well might be too stupid to keep dwelling on.
- 2 I had an enlightening conversation with my 17 year old (step)son. We were talking about the taboo on incest, and it was his belief and “education” that the taboo *against* incest is behaviourally and essentially instinctual. I had to explain to him that the very existence of the taboo against incest is because of exactly the opposite “drive”/instinct. We have the taboo *against* incest specifically *because* it is our “instinct” to love our primary love objects and that to flourish and function, human society/culture developed the taboo against incest and insisted on “marrying out”. (Freud, S. (1913) *Totem and Taboo: SE XIII* 1-162; (1930) *Civilization and its Discontents: SE XXI* 64-145; (1939) *Moses and Monotheism: SE XXIII* 7-137.) If we have no cultural censorship/taboo about the way we speak—as it seems now—then *why* are trolls and political leaders speaking about women the way they do? I need not repeat the Australian experience of our first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, and the way she was spoken about. If the cultural taboo of “respect for women (and others)” is removed, then look at the way women are publically sanctioned to be spoken about. It is not a human “instinct” to “be nice and respect others.”
- 3 Not to mention the practice of surgical cliteridectomy carried out in the 19th century on women in the USA and Europe, to “cure” them of their clitoral orgasms, and by extension, their “masculine tendencies” for sexual enjoyment.
- 4 After all, we are told by many that we do not need feminism anymore, that we have got “it all”, at least enough to keep us happy and silent, and that we are now “equal”. We are told this *especially* by the women who “have it all”, at least in

the material sense. We do not know the quality of their personal and/or psychic sense, because the media does not admit to anything it cannot adequately twitter on about in sound bites of 25 words or less. And media-generated images reside in just that, the Lacanian imaginary. Dwelling exclusively in the imaginary sounds somewhat culturally pathological. Kim Kardashian's media machine has touched on the actual Real in recent times, and the Imaginary avatar has faded somewhat under the Real of a trauma.

- 5 Wikipedia informs me that “post-truth” is the word of the year for 2016, but this term was brought to our attention in 2010 by David Roberts (Roberts, D. (2010) “Post-truth Politics”, in *Grist*. <http://grist.org/article/2010-03-30-post-truth-politics/>. Accessed 08/01/2017. He writes: “We live in post-truth politics: a political culture in which politics (public opinion and media narratives) have become almost entirely disconnected from policy (the substance of legislation). This obviously dims any hope of reasoned legislative compromise. But in another way, it can be seen as liberating. If the political damage of maximal Republican opposition is a fixed quantity — if policy is orthogonal to politics — then there is little point to policy compromises. They do not appreciably change the politics.”
- 6 Soho. “Hippy Chick”. 1991.
- 7 See for instance Jane, E. *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History* 2017a; Haraway, D. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991; Rushkoff, D. *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyper Space*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994; Wikipedia kindly informs me that this text was held back for publication in 1992 “due to publisher concerns that electronic mail and the Internet were still obscure topics unlikely to gain traction.” LOLZ. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberia_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberia_(book))) accessed 08/01/2017).
- 8 Bey, H. “The Temporary Autonomous Zone”. <http://nomadism.org/pdf/taz.pdf>. Accessed 08/01/2017, 1990; “The Temporary Autonomous Zone”. <https://hermetic.com/bey/taz1>. Accessed 08/01/2017, 1991.
- 9 Is it terribly sad that I still think this is a great concept and that I required my children to watch this movie *and think about it?* (<http://quotegeek.com/quotes-from-movies/ferris-buellers-day-off/227/>)
- 10 The terms “masculine” and “feminine” are NOT—I repeat NOT—essentialist or biological terms, according to Lacan and for our own purposes. They are *positions* that any and each subject must come to terms with. I suspect that a very many subjects these days have difficulty with the masculine position because it has become to be so very very violent, and many subjects do not desire to enter into this violence, or have been subject to it themselves.
- 11 I do apologize for the kindergarten metaphors, but it appears that this is the

terrain we are stuck with. When my first (female) child was being kicked in a play centre by a little boy, I turned to his mother to protest, but she silenced me by saying “boys will be boys”, and said nothing to her child. I *should* have said “boys will be wife-bashers” to her, but I was stunned into silence by this Neanderthal attitude on behalf of the mother.

- 12 Freud, S. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego: SE XVIII*. 67-143. 1921.
- 13 Hanisch’s 1969 language is a little retro, I must admit, and we have taken to using different words in the 21st century. But I am going to quote Hanisch’s words because the gist is the same; we just need to translate the “old-fashioned” language into contemporary words.
- 14 Breur, J. & Freud, S. *Studies on Hysteria: SE II*, 1893-1895; Freud, S. *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis: SE XI*, 1910[1909]; Doidge, N. *The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*. 234. New York; Viking. 2007; Doidge’s theory—whilst focussing solely in the physiological and not taking up the position of the unconscious—posits that due to the brain’s plastic nature, non-functioning neuronal pathways can be re-directed, or re-trained, via a “talking therapy” such as psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Words, in this view, have a very Real effect of absolute difference.
- 15 A personal favourite case of mine is that of Fraülein Elisabeth von R., who was very much in love with her sister’s husband: “At that moment of dreadful certainty that her beloved sister was dead without bidding them farewell and without her having eased her last days with her care—at that very moment another thought had shot through Elisabeth’s mind, and now forced itself irresistibly upon her once more, like a flash of lightning in the dark: “Now he is free again and I can be his wife.”” (Freud, S. “Fraülein Elisabeth von R.” in Breuer, J. & Freud, S. *Studies on Hysteria: SE II*. 156. 1893-1895.
- 16 “[...] after all, the sexual life of adult women is a “dark continent” for psychology.” Freud, S. *The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person: SE XX*. 212. 1926.
- 17 This famous and lauded question of his occurs in an editorial footnote in *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes*: “Ernest Jones writes (1955, 468): ‘There is little doubt that Freud found the psychology of women more enigmatic than that of men. He said once to Marie Bonaparte: “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is “What does a woman want?”’” Freud, S. *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes: SE XIX*. 244. 1926.
- 18 Edmunds, D. “Girls Talk”. 1979.

- 19 “If I say that everything that belongs to analytic communication has the structure of language, this precisely does not mean that the unconscious is expressed in discourse [...] Every analytic phenomenon, every phenomenon that comes from the analytic field, from the analytic discovery, from what we are dealing with in symptoms and neurosis, is structured like a language.” Lacan, J. “Seminar of 14/03/1956: The hysteric’s question”. In Lacan, J. 1993. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956*. Edited by J-A Miller. Translated by R Grigg, R. 166-167. New York; WW Norton & Company. 1956.
- 20 Lacan, J. *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*. Edited by J Copjec. Translated by J Mehlman. 41. New York: WW Norton & Company. 1990[1974].
- 21 Campbell makes a précis of the Discourse of the Master which is neat, but doesn’t quite capture the broader context of Lacan’s discussion; but it serves the purpose of this essay: “In *L’envers*, Lacan characterises the Discourse of the Master as that of the modern subject. This subject is a universal, self-generating, autonomous Master. It predicates itself as universal because it perceives all others as identical to itself. It repudiates the difference of others, including their sexual difference [...] Above all, it is a subject that disavows its lack.” (Campbell 2004 157). I would say that this is a neat definition of the patriarchal hegemony as we experience it. What the hysteric *does* with the Discourse of the Master is of interest to us as feminists.
- 22 “The analyst’s desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. There only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live.” Lacan, J. “Seminar of 25/06/1964: In you more than you” in Lacan, J. 1998. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by J-A Miller. Translated by A Sheridan. 276. New York; WW Norton & Company. 1964.
- 23 The “wild zone” is a term created by Elaine Showalter, a space that is entirely outside the sphere of the patriarchal, demonstrating this by a diagram of two interlocking circles. One circle represents the “female” and the other the “male”, whereby the patriarchy includes the “male” elements of the Symbolic Order as well as part of the “female” elements of the Symbolic Order. The part of the second circle (“female”) that does not intersect at all with the first circle (“male”) is described as the “wild zone” where “female” has no “male” influences whatsoever. Showalter, E. “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” in Showalter, E. 1985. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1985.

- 24 Spender notes in 1980: “In their study, Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975) found that 98 percent of interruptions in mixed sex conversations were made by males. In no case did they find that females thought this was “out of order” or sufficient reason for protest; on the contrary, females tended to be silent after being interrupted by a male.” (Spender 1998 [1980] 43). Contrast this with the recent incident involving journalists Van Badham and Steve Price on the ABC’s Q&A panel, in which Price interrupted Badham approximately thirteen times in the space of a few minutes, and then called her “hysterical.” Badham reported afterwards that her public protest at such treatment garnered her considerable internet abuse. (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/12/im-still-reeling-from-qa-but-not-because-i-was-called-hysterical> & <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/12/im-still-reeling-from-qa-but-not-because-i-was-called-hysterical>. Accessed 10/01/2017). In 1975 women did not speak out to protest being interrupted, but since then women have publically called for this behaviour to cease, only to be violently abused. Come on people, what’s wrong with this picture????
- 25 First and second century Christianity had women very much centre and front of its fledgling and persecuted practice, as did Ancient Judaism. Women were subordinated and then erased from public positions in the Christian Church in the 3rd century. See for instance Torjesen, K. *When Women Were Priests*. New York; Harper Collins Publishers, 1993; and Brooten, B. *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptural Evidence and Background Issues*. Atlanta; Brown University, Brown Judaic Studies. Scholars Press, 1982.
- 26 Not strictly true: Lacan’s formulation leads us to the notion that the phallus is put in place to hide the castration; the man brandishes his phallus specifically to show that he *has* one precisely because he (knows) he doesn’t. The phallus *always* signifies the lack, for both the feminine subject *and* the masculine subject. But more on that later.
- 27 “[n]evertheless, this vision of an autonomous women’s language and aesthetic also appear to generate intense anxiety; by claiming that women’s writing must be radically *other* than anything which has gone before, feminism sets itself the hopeless task of generating a new aesthetic by means of a negation of the entirety of existing cultural and literary traditions. As a result, an accusation often levelled at women’s writing by feminist critics is that it is not *different* enough, that it fails to excise all traces of male influence from its language, structures or themes. This ‘anxiety of influence’ is, I believe, an unavoidable consequence of positing the ideal of an autonomous women’s language and aesthetic outside existing literary and linguistic systems.” (Felski 1989 43)
- 28 And by “perverse”, I mean in the technical sense of the structure of perversion: the perverse structure take the phallus as both Real and Imaginary at the same time. This is called “disavowal”. The pervert—whose castration anxiety is so

severe and so pathological—insists that the phallus exists even though he *knows* that it doesn't. It is there, but it isn't, because this phallus is the one he invented in the intolerable face of his mother's lack of actual penis. It is there as a concrete fetish object to assuage his anxiety. We could feel sorry for the pervert *except* the pervert is so invested in his fetish object that he truly believes it is the answer to the universal problems of everyone. So the pervert *insists* that his fetish will solve everyone's pains, and *demand*s that you take his object. He has the key to "cure" you. His is a *will to jouissance*, your *jouissance*, and the pervert's enjoyment comes from creating that *jouissance* within you. That is how he gets off. To me, this sounds more and more like post-capitalist economic forces. For further reading, please see Lacan, J. "Kant with Sade". In Lacan, J. 2002. *Écrits: The FIRST Complete Edition in English*. Translated by B Fink. 645-668. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1962.

- 29 PIL. "Rise". 1986.
- 30 Lacan, J. "The Signification of the Phallus". In Lacan, J. 2002. *Écrits: The FIRST Complete Edition in English*. Translated by B Fink. 575-584. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1958.
- 31 "I mean that she disposes of **her** own *jouissance* in a way that totally escapes this ideological grasp. Even though she is an *homme-elle*, she is never lacking in resources and it is because of this that even feminist demands do not involve anything particularly original. It is still the same masquerade that continues, simply with a contemporary flavour. Where she remains impregnable as a woman, is outside the system described as the sexual act." (Lacan 1967 174)

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