Masculinity, Authority, and the Illusion of Objectivity in Academic Discourse

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Contents

Clarification of Key Terms and Approach[1]

In the following chapters I employ two terms that can be operationalised in several ways dependent on context: 'discourse' and 'ideology'. In Guy Cook's broad definition, 'discourse can be defined as a stretch of language in use, of any length and in any mode, which achieves meaning and coherence for those involved'.[2] For Michel Foucault, 'discourses (used in the plural) are conceived as distinct ways of using language which express institutionalised values and ideology, delimiting and defining what can be said and how' (ibid.). In relation to this paper, 'academic discourse' or 'the discourse of academia' can refer to either or both definitions. For this reason I refer to Cook's discourse as 'writing' or 'academic writing' (although academic discourse can also be delivered orally) and Foucault's as the 'discourse of mastery'. The discourse of mastery is the expression of the values and ideology of most dominant cultural institutions, but I use it here with specific reference to the education system and academia.

At its most basic, ideology is 'a specific set of beliefs and assumptions people have about things such is what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, and what is normal or abnormal'.[3] Louis Althusser expands this, stating that 'ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group' and 'there is no practice except by and in an ideology'.[4] At a T-junction we can turn left or right and this apparent choice obscures the fact that we unquestioningly drive on the left-hand side, stop at red lights, and remain on the road. Althusser clarifies that 'no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses' (ibid., italics removed).[5] These Apparatuses are 'a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialised

[1] For the sake of consistency I convert all US English spellings in quotations to UK English to match my own usage. All italics in quotations are original unless otherwise stated.
[2] Guy Cook, 'Discourse Analysis' in *The Routledge Book of Applied Linguistics*, ed. by James Simpson (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 431-442, p. 431.
[3] Rodney Jones, *Discourse Analysis: A Resource Book for Students* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 11.
[4] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)', trans. by Ben Brewster, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm> [accessed 14/09/2013].
[5] I use the term 'Ideological State Apparatuses'/'State Ideological Apparatuses' in direct quotations but don't include them in my own text. Althusser isn't a central contributor to my thesis and the phrase carries Marxist overtones that would confuse my argument, for although there is a Marxist undertone to this paper I don't have space to fully engage with the theory.

institutions' (Althusser) such as religion, law, and the education system. The 'realities' serve the most powerful cultural groups and their ideology is invisible because it is normalised, disguised as 'obviousness' or 'the way things are', and tacitly understood to be universally beneficial – it is hegemonic. Therefore the illusion of the status quo is rarely investigated precisely because it masquerades as reality. Academia is purportedly the arena in which such investigation takes place, but rarely does it turn the magnifying glass upon itself as it operates within 'an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology' (ibid.) Before I don my deerstalker to examine this relationship between education and ideology, however, a note on my approach to this paper.

Education and hegemony occur through all cultural institutions and discourses, but I focus on the education system, particularly Higher Education and academia, largely because as an apparatus it 'has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations' (ibid.; italics removed). I also have a personal interest in the ideological power of the discourse of mastery, especially as manifested through academic writing, sparked by feedback that my own writing is too personal and informal, hence 'unacademic'.

In his blog/online book *Academic Diary* Les Back recalls a quotation from the anthropologist Brian Morris that speaks to several of my main concerns: "I try to write in a way that is lucid and readable ... [sic] I am continually rebuked for this and told to write in an academic style, that is with pretension and in scholastic jargon, for in academia, obscurantism is equated with intellectual profundity".[6] Back adds that 'Professor Morris is absolutely right and the mistake that academic authors often make is to confuse "being clear" with "simplistic thinking"'(ibid.). I too champion a mode of writing that prioritises clarity of expression, mostly because obscurantism – the hindrance of knowledge transmission by using an obscure style of writing – and the employment of unnecessarily complex vocabulary promotes an intellectual elitism that, as I will discuss, is valued by the discourse of mastery. I distance myself from this discourse in several ways in order to reflect upon it, and also because I do not share its values.

As Roz Ivanič observes, 'students writing essays have to be a bit like teachers, explaining every term in order to show they know what it means, but experts writing academic articles can use discipline-specific terms without needing to explain them'.[7] Although I indeed am a student writing an essay it's my belief that experts should write like teachers also, illuminating rather than obfuscating their knowledge, aiding their reader in comprehension of complex issues rather than alienating those who don't have a pre-existing basis of knowledge. Hence my clarification of terminology and theory is as much a stance as a requirement of assessment. However, Hélène Cixous highlights the difficulty of achieving this, noting that once a concept 'is mastered and enters your discourse and gets lost, it becomes an ordinary word' and it's easy to overlook the fact that this 'isn't true at all for everybody else'.[8] 'That is mastery's trap', says Cixous – 'becoming so much a master that you forget you are one' (ibid.).

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[6] Les Back, *Academic Diary*, <http://academic-diary.co.uk>, <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=31> [accessed 13/08/2013].

[7] Roz Ivanič, *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1998), p. 301.

[8] Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, 'Exchange', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly-Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 135-160, p. 146.

Probably the most noticeable stylistic aspect of this paper is the relatively informal register and the prominence of myself as the writer of it. The discourse of mastery privileges an unnaturally stiff and formal style that, to quote one of Ivanič's research participants, can make writers and readers alike feel "like a working class person trying to talk 'posh' on the phone" (p. 8). Similarly, (the illusion of) objectivity is a central expectation and prime value of the ideology of academia, and the belief in the possibility and necessity of objectivity within science, philosophy, critical theory, etc., denies subjective involvement. I write in the first person, transparently acknowledge my subjective stance, and use occasional colloquialisms and contractions such as 'it's' as a feminist challenge to this masculine ideology. The basis for this is illuminated by the following chapters.

They want to keep the child so they can train the child to suck their cocks.
That's what's known as education.

Kathy Acker[9]

Introduction

In her novel *Blood and Guts in High School* Kathy Acker 'rewrites' Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as an unrestrained critique of patriarchy and its three most dominant institutions: religion, the law, and the education system. In Hawthorne's tale of Puritan-era sexual transgression, Hester Prynne and her illegitimate daughter Pearl are publicly shamed by the 'most important men in the world' (Acker, p. 94) – a reverend, a governor, and a scholar, standing synecdochically for the institutions they represent – who 'want to keep the child so they can train the child to suck their cocks'. In Acker's conception, education is the system through which we are indoctrinated into mainstream ideology, taught the discourse of mastery, and trained to perpetuate cultural norms – or, where we learn to kneel before authority. In Althusser's less colourful description, 'the school teaches "know-how", but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its "practice"'.

This paper investigates how, in academia, the privileged 'masculine' values of the discourse of mastery – agonism, objectivity, and rationality – are linked to authority and the perpetuation of ideological gender norms that disadvantage not only women but other individuals and groups assigned 'feminine' status. The term 'agonism' is borrowed from Deborah Tannen, and in academic discourse 'means conventionalised oppositional formats that result from underlying ideology by which intellectual interchange is conceptualised as a metaphorical battle'.[10] This is addressed in chapter two, with reference to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work on the metaphorical construction 'argument is war'. I consider how this relates to agonism in academic writing, then detail other idealised features of intellectual argument and their constitution through gendered, hierarchical, and mutually exclusive binaries. Chapter one takes a brief canter through Kathy Acker's metaphor

[9] Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School Plus Two* (London: Pan Books, 1984), p. 94.
[10] Deborah Tannen, 'Agonism in Academic Discourse', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34 (2002), 1651-1669 (p. 1652).

of 'the roads' before a review of the link between education and ideology, the 'game' of academia and its rules, and the masculine conventions of academic writing. In chapter three I discuss the implications of the 'game', asking who wins and who loses and what the consequences are for the players, especially women, concluding with some ways in which the rules can be, and are being, bent, along with the problems inherent in this endeavour.

Chapter One
Discourse and Ideology

1.1 Kathy Acker and 'the Roads'

Kathy Acker's multi-genre text *Blood and Guts in High School* reveals the powerful institutions of academia, religion, and the law as patriarchal behemoths that teach us all, especially women, to internalise the master discourses. At school, she suggests, in sympathy with Althusser, we don't learn to be creative individuals but how to conform to and adopt the 'correct' identity. Acker's metaphor for this indoctrination, introduced in her re-writing of *The Scarlet Letter*, is 'the roads', which are "the order men have impressed on chaos so that men's lives can be safer and more secure and, thus, so that we can all progress" (p. 94). The roads are the dominant ideologies and 'a scholar is a top cop 'cause he defines the roads by which people live so they won't get into trouble and so society will survive' (p. 68).

Acker isn't the only writer to observe the link between academia and ideology but her road metaphor is one I return to as a road represents progress, a journey, a trajectory; it is linear and teleological. In this sense a road, much like the ideology it symbolises for Acker, is a masculine structure by virtue of its association with activity, progression, linearity, and other traits typically correlated with maleness. It's important to note at this point that where I refer to 'feminine' or 'masculine' I speak archetypally and with reference to concepts that are not necessarily bound to sex or gender – or to actual women and men, who have both feminine and masculine attributes. Where I conflate women with femininity, or men with masculinity, it is not out of an essentialist imperative to anchor inherent qualities to either gender, but as a more constructivist recognition that the ideology of essentialism exerts a powerful influence over cultural conceptions of gender identity, regardless of any essential difference. For my current purposes the essentialist/constructivist debate is largely irrelevant; for the discourse of mastery to operate and maintain its authority it's enough that the gendered traits under discussion are, in practice, taken to be natural or innate.

1.2 The Race for Authority and the Ideological Function of Education

Acker's belief in the hegemonic power of the academy is by no means new. Pierre Bourdieu, amongst others, writes on the ideological function of the education system and although I haven't the space to perform an in-depth analysis of his work here, Toril Moi's summary adequately demonstrates the relevant theory. I choose to touch upon Bourdieu as his concepts of the 'game', 'field', and 'habitus' provide a link

between Acker's 'roads' and Lakoff and Johnson's 'argument is war' metaphor, explicated in the following chapter.

'"A field," Bourdieu writes, "is a space in which a game takes place, a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake"'.[11] To use Acker's terminology, the infrastructure of the road network would be what Bourdieu terms the 'doxa' – "what goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu, quoted in Moi, p. 1027; italics removed) – and his 'field' would be the 'roads'. The aim of the game is 'to *rule* the field, to become the instance which has the power to confer or withdraw legitimacy from other participants in the game' (Moi, p. 1021). The 'game', then, can be conceived of as a race, the winners of which become the judges of the other competitors. The necessary knowledge to enter the race – the route, the rules, the highway code, the shortcuts, etc. – is the 'habitus': the largely unperceived strategies that, to use Bourdieu's terminology, enable agents in the field to battle for legitimacy. '"For a field to work," he writes, "there must be stakes, and people ready to play the game, equipped with the habitus which enables them to know and recognize the immanent laws of the game, the stakes and so on"' (Moi, p. 1021). Within the intellectual field, the race is to gain increasing recognition and reputation, achieve publication and citations, and be granted tenure. This 'success' confers authority, or legitimacy, and earns the medal of power. To be equipped with the habitus is to be au fait with the conventions and expectations of the discipline within which the scholar is working, and of the academy as a whole – in short, to be at ease with the discourse of mastery. To perpetuate this, Bourdieu argues, is the function of the educational system: 'to produce the necessary social belief in the legitimacy of currently dominant power structures' (Moi, p. 1023).

Bourdieu elucidates that some members of society have a higher handicap by virtue of their social background and thus have an innate advantage in the race. That the underdog sometimes wins disguises this, reinscribing the education system's role, which is 'to make it appear as if positions of leadership and power are distributed according to merit' (Moi, p, 1026). 'The existence in every educational institution of a tiny percentage of what Bourdieu likes to call "miraculous exceptions"', says Moi, 'is precisely what allows us to believe that the system is egalitarian and meritocratic after all' (ibid.). However, this 'widespread democratic belief in education as a passport to freedom and success is no more than a myth: […] the new "opium of the people"' (ibid.). The phrase is Karl Marx's, with reference to the hegemonic and pacifying power of religion; in postmodernity, though, for Acker and Bourdieu, the institution of academia and its apparent meritocracy has gained status as the Class A drug.

Cixous acknowledges that 'teaching goes hand in hand with ideology' ('Exchange', p. 141) – partly, perhaps, because as noted by Althusser above, academia gives the impression of enabling us to step outside of culture. We examine societal values through the apparent objectivity of intellectual investigation, and so compelling is this illusion of enlightenment that we fail to recognise that the academy is itself produced by values; the objectivity is no less an ideological construct than the constructs it observes. As Lakoff and Johnson state, 'in western culture as a whole, objectivism is by far the greater potentate, claiming to rule […] science, law, government, journalism, morality, business, economics, and scholarship' (p. 189). Michael Cross and Marybeth Averill note that within scholarship it's the sciences that are 'the paradigm of modern academic disciplines', maintaining 'the self-serving if

[11] Toril Moi, 'Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture', *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 1017-1049 (p. 1021).

misleading pretence of "dispassionate objectivity"', not unlike philosophy.[12] Lakoff and Johnson assert that 'it is traditional in western philosophy to assume that absolute truth is possible and to undertake to give an account of it' (Lakoff and Johnson, p. 181); read in conjunction with Cixous's belief that 'philosophical discourse both orders and reproduces all thought' it's clear that between scientific and philosophical discourses, intellectual endeavour and the acquisition and transmission of knowledge are dominated by the privileged values of truth and objectivity.

1.3 The Discourse of Mastery, Academic Conventions, and Masculinity

The discourse of mastery, as the habitus of the academy, means that 'for the uninitiated newcomer, campus life appears governed by absurd invisible protocols and mysterious unwritten rules',[13] and, as Ivanič states, 'the only way an apprentice member of a community can learn to become a full member is by copying, adapting and synthesising from the work of other members' (p. 4). This, then, is how indoctrination into the discourse of mastery begins, for 'some discourses are more powerful, and/or more highly valued than others, and people are under pressure to participate in them through adopting them in their writing' (Ivanič, p. 32) in order to compete in the field and begin the race. Cixous acknowledges that 'one has a hard time escaping the discourse of mastery when using, for example, as a teacher, discourse I'll call "objective"; by that I mean a discourse that does not involve an easily located subject of enunciation, that speaks […] not just in the name of but as universal knowledge itself' ('Exchange', p. 137). As noted in the previous section, objectivity is the reigning principle of the discourse of mastery; the acquisition of knowledge must be through objective enquiry, and the transmission of knowledge must be through objective analysis and expression. This is problematic for precisely the reason Cixous illuminates – writing, in the objective mode, masquerades as 'universal knowledge'. Virginia Woolf signals this danger in *A Room of One's Own*, angered by an article insulting to women. 'When the arguer argues dispassionately he thinks only of the argument; and the reader cannot help thinking of the argument too', she says, whereas 'if he had written dispassionately about women, had used indisputable proofs to establish the argument and had shown no trace of wishing that the result should be one thing rather than another, one would not have been angry either. One would have accepted the fact'.[14] Dispassionate, objective argument translates into logical, unquestionable facts – 'indisputable proofs' – increasing the chances of the reader accepting the argument's validity. It's for the sake of upholding the myth of indisputable proofs and universal knowledge that 'there is a powerful ideology within the academic community that its members should not show their political commitments but should write in a so-called "neutral", "objective" way' (Ivanič, p. 316). Objectivity, however, is anything but neutral.

Evelyn Fox Keller asserts that 'the historically pervasive association between masculine and objective, more specifically between masculine and scientific, is a topic

[12] Michael Cross and Marybeth Averill, 'Evolution and Patriarchal Myths of Scarcity and Competition', in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. by Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Doredrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 71-96, p. 82.
[13] Back, <http://academic-diary.co.uk/introduction.php> [accessed 13/08/2013].
[14] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 35.

which academic critics resist taking seriously'.[15] Furthermore, Alison M. Jaggar adds that 'from Plato until the present, with a few notable exceptions, reason rather than emotion has been regarded as the indispensable faculty for acquiring knowledge'.[16] Already, two founding tenets of the discourse of mastery – objectivity and reason – are attributes readily correlated with masculinity, and their counterparts subjectivity and emotion are banished to the realms of femininity, which evidently has no place in the discourse of the master. It's not only the privilege assigned to one trait over its opposite that is gendered, but the very conception of such mutually exclusive binaries; as Cixous asserts, 'thought has always worked through opposition',[17] 'through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior' (p. 64).

Luce Irigaray is particularly wary of philosophical discourse, observing that 'this discourse sets forth the law for all others, inasmuch as it constitutes the discourse on discourse'.[18] By virtue of 'the power of its systematicity, the force of its cohesion, the resourcefulness of its strategies, the general applicability of its law and its value', she says, it holds a 'position of mastery' (ibid.; italics removed). Thus it is philosophical discourse that largely provides the model for 'the most traditional method of rhetorical demonstration' that is 'the method of teaching and transmitting ideas' (Clément, 'Exchange', p. 136). Ivanič notes that 'it is a generic characteristic of academic articles to use categorical modality for definitions, evaluations and statements of fact' (p. 301). Modality is the degree of certainty expressed by an utterance, and categorical assertions, which most usually include the definitive 'is', carry 'the strongest possible degree of speaker commitment' (Simpson, pp. 49-50). Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge highlight that because of this 'it may well seem that all these decisions are taken by reality, not by the speaker, so that the form can be utterly trusted' – what may be opinions or interpretations are stated as empirical truths that are less likely to be contested due to their apparent objectivity.[19] Linked to this is the fact that 'many people argue that it is unnecessary to state subjectivity explicitly, as any categorical assertion will be taken to be the result of the writer's cognitive act' (Ivanič, p 308). Indeed, my university's handbook offering guidance on essay-writing states that 'examiners will assume that everything in the essay that is not acknowledged as somebody else's idea will represent your considered opinion. It is therefore unnecessary and obtrusive to use the first person voice prominently'. I have largely ignored this injunction for, as Ivanič observes, 'those writers who choose to make their role in knowledge-making explicit are taking a different ideological stance from those who don't' (p. 308).

Whilst in one way it's logical to assume that what I write is my opinion whether or not I explicitly present it as such, this assumption is at odds with the importance academia places on maintaining objectivity, to achieve which I must erase myself from my writing. This very style of objective, rational argument occludes the author and their identity; it doesn't invite the reader to consider the writer, and by

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[15] Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Gender and Science', in *Discovering Reality*, pp. 187-206, p. 187.
[16] Alison M. Jaggar, 'Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, 2nd edition, ed. by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) [henceforth *WKR*], pp. 166-190, p. 166.
[17] Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays', in *The Newly-Born Woman*, pp. 63-132, p. 63.
[18] Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology, Revised Edition*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 570-573, p. 570.
[19] Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, *Language as Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979), p. 88.

masking their role in the production of the text it presents their writing as universal knowledge rather than the result of a 'cognitive act' that created a 'considered opinion'. The 'different ideological stance' I am taking is one that rejects the primacy of apparent objectivity and doesn't wish to perpetuate it by presenting opinions as if they were facts. Taking ownership of and responsibility for interpretation and opinion isn't born from self-importance but a desire to avoid appearing to claim authority I don't have a right to. This stance questions the possibility of authority, even more so its status as an ideal, doesn't believe that the presence of the author's identity in their writing is 'obtrusive', and finds that there's very much an 'I' in 'academic'. It's an ideology that challenges the discourse of mastery – however, it's easy to see how usage of the first person can be otherwise interpreted

Ivanič identifies four characteristics of academic writing that are associated with being an 'insider': 'use of the first person'; 'unattributed assertions'; 'presupposed shared knowledge'; and 'making claims' (pp. 301-302). Once student dues have been paid, the right to speak has been earned and along with it the authority to make free usage of these four characteristics. In addition to signifying a rejection of the discourse of mastery, inclusion of the first person in academic writing can mean that 'writers who present themselves as knowledge-makers are also positioning themselves as having property rights, as contributors to the field' (Ivanič, p. 308). In this sense, it's a claim to authority that complicates the ideology outlined above, which distances itself from such claims. Such positioning can be interpreted not as a disavowal of authority but, especially when invoked by student, fledgling, or unknown academics, as arrogant and potentially misguided self-importance that seeks to claim property rights it hasn't earned. The intention is down to the author, but given the significance of authority to the discourse of mastery it's not difficult to see why such claims might more often be viewed in this way. In an ideology that orders the world hierarchically it's inconceivable that anyone would not want to reach the master's authoritarian position, thus any self-professed contribution to the field, or ownership of knowledge, must be an attempt at casting an impression of mastery. Whether or not the authority is accepted or viewed as pretentious depends on whether it meets the criteria for legitimacy. However, a claim to authority may not be the result of a desire for mastery but of a desire to undermine the authority of the masters. My claim to property rights, my self-positioning as a contributor to the field, and the appearance this may give me of attempting to cast an impression of an authority 'above my station', is precisely the opposite because the ideology within which I'm operating doesn't conceive of 'above'. From this stance, to refuse or deny my own authority is to leave authority in the hands of those whom the discourse of mastery has sanctioned as legitimately entitled to it. It is to tacitly agree with the terms of the legitimacy and accept the status of illegitimacy. That use of the first person in academic writing is a contentious choice, especially amongst more traditional institutions and intellectuals, perhaps indicates its destabilising power. Unattributed assertions (discussed in the preceding paragraph) and the making of claims (explicitly owning an assertion) also project an appearance of authority and these three features can be similarly appropriated by those who haven't earned the 'privilege' of being granted the 'right to speak' (Ivanič, p. 303) to display rejection of the system of privilege and the criteria for receiving it. Presupposed shared knowledge, however is a characteristic of the discourse of mastery that serves only to exclude, and I return to this in chapter three's discussion of obscurantism.

Academia and the educational system, then, serve ideological functions that contribute to the maintenance of the 'roads'. The discourse of the institution of

education is that of mastery, and the rules of its game have their roots in philosophical and scientific enquiry that privileges the masculine traits of objectivity, rationality, reason, certainty, conclusiveness, and truth. In addition to the conventions outlined above, academic writing requires the use of Standard English, formal register, adherence to scholarly conventions of citation, and the inclusion of specialist vocabulary. These features are combined to build an argument, and, as Tannen notes, 'a common framework for academic papers prescribes that authors position their work in opposition to someone else's, which they then prove wrong' (p. 1655). The achievement of a successful argument confers authority on the writer, and this constitutes winning the race.

Having established the rules and aim of the game, I now move to consider the tactics used to win and explore more fully their masculine basis, beginning with an investigation into Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphor, which states that we conceive of argument in terms of the masculine arena of war.

Chapter Two
The Maintenance of Mastery in Academic Writing

2.1 Metaphor: (Rational) Argument is War

In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson assert that 'our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature' (p. 3). These concepts, they say, 'structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people' (ibid.). For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is integral to the way we understand the world, and on this basis they reject the myth of objective truth, for 'the idea that metaphor is just a matter of language and can at best only describe reality stems from the view that what is real is wholly external to, and independent of, how human beings conceptualise the world' (p. 146). They subscribe to the view that 'what is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his [sic] social reality and of the way in which that shapes his [sic] experience of the physical world', thus 'since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us' (ibid.). Because of this reality-shaping function, metaphors serve an ideological role, moulding and constraining the way certain aspects of existence can be thought about, thus 'new metaphors have the power to create a new reality' (ibid., p. 145), but this reality is mediated by the fact that 'in a culture where the myth of objectivism is very much alive and truth is always absolute truth, the people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true' (ibid., p. 160).

Lakoff and Johnson's first example of a metaphor we live by in the west is 'argument is war', which 'structures the actions we perform in arguing' (p. 4). The claim is supported with numerous examples – 'your claims are *indefensible*'; 'I *demolished* his argument'; 'I've never *won* an argument with him', etc. (ibid.) – and Lakoff and Johnson add that 'it is important to see that we don't just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing against as an opponent. We attack his [sic] positions and defend our own' (ibid.). At first this may seem a redundant observation because the 'argument is war' metaphor is so unconsciously embedded that it's difficult to see how argument could be conceived of in any other terms. To highlight this Lakoff and Johnson invite us to 'imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way' (p. 5). They point out that metaphorical concepts provide only a partial understanding, obscuring features of the concepts that don't fit the metaphor and

constructing a distortion that masquerades as reality' (p. 159). Dictionary definitions of 'argument' allude to disagreement, debate, dispute, discussion, and reasoning, but make no mention of adversariality or battle, so there's nothing *inherently* war-like about it.

That argument is conceived of in this way has implications for academic writing, for, as noted by Tannen, argumentation is the most common framework for articles and papers. Lakoff and Johnson identify that 'in the academic world […] the concept ARGUMENT is specialised to RATIONAL ARGUMENT, which is distinguished from everyday, "irrational" argument' (p. 87). Rational argument is conceived of as a 'higher' form (ibid., p. 63) and its tactics 'are *ideally* restricted to stating premises, citing supporting evidence, and drawing logical conclusions'; however, in practice most features of everyday argument also appear, but in a 'disguised or refined form' (ibid.). These features include subtle and carefully-worded methods of intimidation; threat; insult; assertion of authority; belittling; challenging of authority; evading the issue; bargaining; and flattery (ibid., p. 64). It's important to note that even where the ideal conditions of rational argument are upheld, it's still carried out and comprehended in terms of war (ibid.).

Feminists in particular have raised concerns with the necessarily adversarial nature of academic writing. Phyllis Rooney notes that there are two central issues, the first of which 'relates to possible gender differences in reasoning and arguing, and raises questions about whether traditional understandings of argument have favoured "masculine" modes'.[20] The second is that 'males are likely to be more antagonistic and adversarial in arguing, while females are more supportive and conciliatory' (ibid., p. 3), which disadvantages women because 'feminine norms of co-operation in discourse demand deference and subordination, both of which undermine authority'.[21] Genevieve Lloyd observes that 'the metaphor of maleness is deeply embedded in philosophical articulations of ideas and ideals of reason',[22] and Rooney adds that 'arguing has been understood as a paradigmatic example of reasoning – perhaps *the* paradigmatic example' (p. 5), thus masculinity dominates conceptions of reason, rationality, and argument. As Roxanne L. Knutson indicates, culturally-embedded 'social mores about the appropriate roles for men and women in relation to war and violence' affect the level of success women and men, or, more accurately, those with feminine or masculine styles of argumentation, can achieve in argument and debate, and I return to implications such as this in chapter three.[23]

Rooney states that 'there is nothing in the practice of argument *as such* that requires formalism and rigidity, and that excludes attention to the "feminine" factors or modes' (p. 2). She clarifies that when it comes to challenging the agonistic conception of argument the claim is '*not* that we should hold back the confrontational wording in order to be nicer or more polite, but that this wording is *misdescribing* the argument situation' (p. 4). There's no reason, she says, for argument to be war, pointing out that we can argue 'with' someone rather than 'against' them and asking, 'why are you my "opponent" if you are providing me with further or alternative

[20] Phyllis Rooney, 'Feminism and Argumentation: A Response to Govier' (2003), <http://web2.uwindsor.ca/faculty/arts/philosophy/ILat25/edited_rooney.doc> [accessed 13/08/2013], p. 2.
[21] Sylvia Burrow, 'Verbal Sparring and Apologetic Points: Politeness in Gendered Argumentation Contexts', *Informal Logic*, 30 (2010), 235-262 (p. 237).
[22] Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1993), p. viii.
[23] Roxanne L. Knutson, 'Metaphorical Construction: Argument is War', *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*, 17 (1996), 32-42 (p. 36).

considerations?' (ibid.). As Lakoff and Johnson highlight, 'when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the co-operative aspects' and fail to see the argument as 'an effort at mutual understanding' (p. 10), but this more 'Kumbaya' approach is at odds with the discourse of mastery and its values, which are predicated on hierarchy and authority as achieved through 'winning'. Janice Moulton observes that in certain contexts, notably philosophy, politics, law, and academia, aggression, 'when it is specifically connected to males *qua* males' takes on positive associations such as 'power, activity, ambition, authority, competence, and effectiveness', all of which are related to success.[24] Therefore 'males have an advantage over females' because 'as members of the masculine gender, their aggression is thought to be "natural"' (Moulton, pp.149-150) and they are not seen as transgressing gender norms. Tannen agrees that agonism 'is more pervasive in boys' and men's lives than in women's' (p. 1661), distinguishing the ritualised adversariality of agonism from 'disagreement that grows organically out of differing views' (p. 1655), and asserting that 'the agonistic ideology by which we attack others' work in snide and insulting ways is inseparable from the ideology of objectivity' (p. 1666).

Tannen notes that in academia we are trained to 'look for what's wrong with others' claims rather than what we can learn from them' (pp. 1555-1556): argument as war seeks not to add to previous ideas or to use them to further knowledge, but to attack, shoot down, or appropriate them. As Tannen elucidates, 'because agonism is *ritual* combat, attacks on colleagues' work are not supposed to be taken personally. We maintain this fiction even though everyone is personally pained by having their work attacked' (p. 1663), and in this sense the writer of an academic argument becomes the hired soldier both looking and not-looking at the consequences of their actions, justifying those actions as what has to be done; the name of the game. The illusion of objectivity is what allows the institutionalised annihilation of other contributors' ideas – the ideas are supposedly unconnected to the one who articulated them and by maintaining this facade those with a taste for agonism buy themselves licence to destroy their 'competitors' under the guise of measured and dispassionate argument. To use Tannen's words, 'the claim of objectivity is a cloak attackers hide behind while sticking their knives out through it' (p. 1664), and because the claim is situated so pervasively within the discourse of mastery it's necessary that participants in it turn a blind eye to both their own pain and the pain they may be causing others. To appear successful and authoritarian one must give the illusion of not only arguing objectively but receiving attacks objectively; Back notes that giving conference papers 'requires putting one's ideas forward and by extension putting oneself in peril', but players in the game must collude in the idea that ideas are not related to identity in order to perform the actions necessary to win.[25]

Cross and Averill investigate the notion of 'survival of the fittest' and note that evolution's 'episodes and events express the familiar sorts of processes and characteristics which men think promote progress and create history: competition, struggle, domination, hierarchy' (p. 72). However, they highlight that this is but an interpretation of the way that evolution operates, signalling both that the apparently empirical realm of science is just as open to blinkered analysis as the 'woolier' humanities, and that this formulation is based on masculine values. I bring in Cross and Averill's work because it illuminates a central concern of the discourse of mastery: competition. The theory of evolution is accepted, except by those for whom religion

[24] Janice Moulton, 'A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method', in *Discovering Reality*, pp. 149-164, p. 149.
[25] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=2&pageNo=5> [accessed 13/08/2013].

remains the reigning power over science, as the reality of life: life is a struggle for dominance, and success is constituted by achieving it. The logic behind this is based on the idea of scarcity; in nature, 'if one assumes scarcity of resources, especially food, a competition would ensue which affected the composition of successive generations', say Cross and Averill; 'in the course of such a competition, those best suited to the environment would be able to produce relatively more offspring; by inheritance their characteristics would predominate in the next generation' (p. 74). In an academic context, resources are critical acclaim, publication, tenure, etc. In this sense the game of academia, the race for authority, is a kind of intellectual survival of the fittest – the resources required to prevail are seen as in limited supply, and securing those resources furnishes the successful with enough of the equally scarce authority to dictate which characteristics predominate. To succeed in an evolutionary context, say Cross and Averill, requires going about one's business as efficiently as possible, but this, 'in the patriarchal mentality, does not mean doing well for its own sake but striving to excel specifically at the expense of one's colleagues (read: competitors)' (p. 79). The underlying motivation here is '(a) fear that others' success somehow diminishes one's own (underlain of course by the assumption of scarce resources – for instance, limited quantities of praise and recognition), and (b) anxious and transient satisfaction at the failure or relative losses of one's competitors' (ibid.). It seems inevitable that the world, subject to masculine interpretation, is conceived of as a battleground, and dominant western discourses, and conceptual and metaphorical systems, reflect this. Much as another culture may conceive of argument as a dance, evolution 'can be seen not as a constant struggle for occupation and control of territory but as a successive opening of opportunities' (Cross and Averill, p. 85). However, as Cixous observes, '"victory" always comes down to the same thing: things get hierarchical. Organisation by hierarchy makes all conceptual organisation subject to man' ('Sorties', p. 64). This organisation is predicated on a number of oppositions that dictate the manner in which rational argument is to be performed and articulated, as outlined by Cixous in her essay 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays'.

2.2 Binaries and Hierarchies; Illusions and Myths

Cixous points to the fact that 'the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection' ('Sorties', p. 63). This thread is 'always the same metaphor' (ibid.), the hierarchical opposition of man and woman that organises all binary pairs. Lloyd agrees that 'our ideas and ideals of maleness and femaleness have been formed within structures of dominance – of superiority and inferiority, "norms" and "difference," "positive" and "negative," the "essential" and the "complementary"', and because of this 'the male-female distinction itself has operated not as a straightforward descriptive principle […] but as an expression of values' (p. 103). When it comes to the quest for knowledge, says Rooney, the masculine mode is 'typically described as linear, abstract, separating emotion from reason, and antagonistic, whereas "feminine" mode is narrative, context sensitive, relational, and supportive' (p. 2). Tannen notes that this type of polarisation is embedded in the form of academic writing as argument, that 'the agonistic model of academic discourse is posited not only on the dichotomising of information but also on the illusory assumption that the personal has no place in scholarship' (p. 1665). This illusory assumption is founded on the privilege of

masculine objectivity, which as already noted allows for antagonistic attacks in the name of rational argument. The personal has no place in scholarship because the feminine has no place in scholarship, but, as Tannen states, this is an illusion – because objectivity is itself an illusion and subjectivity is *already present* in academic writing, simply wearing disguise. However, the hierarchical split between the objective and subjective is the overarching principle for the related dichotomies of rational/emotional, scientific/theoretical, and reality/relativity.

Lakoff and Johnson highlight the mythical nature of ideas about objectivity and subjectivity. The myth of objectivity states that 'being objective is generally a good thing. Only objective knowledge is real knowledge' because 'to be objective is to be rational; to be subjective is to be irrational and to give in to the emotions' and 'subjectivity can be unfair, since it takes a personal point of view and can, therefore, be biased. Subjectivity is self-indulgent, since it exaggerates the importance of the individual' (Lakoff and Johnson, p. 188). It's a myth, in my view, that there can ever be a point of view that isn't biased; as Sandra Harding notes, 'the subject of knowledge claims to be an idealised agent who performed the "God trick" of speaking authoritatively about everything in the world from no particular location or human perspective at all', and the operative word here is 'claims'.[26] We all have a location and a perspective and '"the self," should not be conceived of as something to be studied in isolation, but as something which manifests itself in discourse' (Ivanič, p. 18). Identity is present wherever there is articulation and the idea of objectivity masks this by demanding that myriad identities are expressed in the same way, a way in which they are rendered invisible by clouding their subjective nature. As Lorraine Code emphasises, 'ideal objectivity is a tacit generalisation from the *subjectivity* of quite a small social group, albeit a group that has the power, security, and prestige to believe that its experiences and normative ideals hold generally across the social order'.[27] Jaggar furthers this point, drawing attention to the fact that although emotion is denigrated as belonging to the feminine, subjective, 'irrational' realm, 'if we had no emotional responses to the world, it is inconceivable that we should ever come to value one state of affairs more highly than another' (p. 173), thus the value of objectivity is itself determined by an emotional reaction.

On the subject of the personal in scholarship, Nancy K. Miller quotes Jane Tompkins, who says "my response to [an] essay is not a response to something [the author] has written; it is a response to something within myself".[28] Whilst this may seem to be heading into therapist's-couch territory and is a way of thinking more readily associated with inward-looking eastern philosophies than externalising western ones, it's a valid point. Objectivists and rational scientists would undoubtedly counter that certain responses are logical and reasonable – these would be considered seeing in the 'clear light of truth' – and that any other response is simply a distorted view based on irrational subjective bias. To deny the effect of affect, though, is in itself illogical – people study what interests them and read the essays that further the kind of knowledge they wish to have. Critical responses, whether or not they are written from a 'critical distance', whether or not they pose as objective assessments, cannot but be motivated by the individual's personal engagement with the text. The discourse of

[26] Sandra Harding, 'Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate', in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. by Sandra Harding (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-16, p. 4.
[27] Lorraine Code, 'Taking Subjectivity into Account', in *WKR*, pp. 191-221, p. 197.
[28] Jane Tompkins, quoted in Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 17.

mastery demands that we take a step back and 'master' our subjective responses, converting them into something less partisan, but overlooks the fact that in shrouding emotion in reason we are not becoming less biased, only presenting our biases as universal and self-evident truths. The response doesn't change, only finds a way of articulating itself that justifies its legitimacy. As Ruth Hubbard astutely observes, 'every theory is a self-fulfilling prophecy that orders experience into the framework it provides'.[29] That this ordering of experience is thought to be undertaken from a neutral position, states Jaggar, doesn't mean that the framework into which it's ordered is an objectively- and rationally-considered inevitable conclusion of the theory, for 'it is not unusual for people to be unaware of their emotional state or to deny it to themselves and others' (p. 175). 'This lack of awareness, especially combined with a neopositivist understanding of emotion that construes it just as a feeling of which one is aware, lends plausibility to the myth of dispassionate investigation', Jaggar continues (ibid.). However, 'lack of awareness of emotions certainly does not mean that emotions are not present subconsciously or unconsciously, or that subterranean emotions do not exert a continuing influence on people's articulated values and observations, thoughts and actions' (ibid.).

The paradigm of rational, objective, and reasoned argument is the field of science, which is widely considered the arena of fact and not interpretation. Fox Keller notes that, in terms of gender, 'what is called scientific receives extra validation from the cultural preference for what is called masculine' and that as a result 'what is called feminine – be it a branch of knowledge, a way of thinking, or woman herself – becomes further devalued by its exclusion from the special social and intellectual value placed on science and the model science provides for all intellectual endeavours' (p. 202). The masculine/feminine binary operates in two ways; it's not simply that certain attributes, approaches, epistemologies, etc., are considered feminine and therefore banished from fields that value traditionally masculine modes, but that what is excluded by masculinity becomes feminine by default. A binary allows for only two options, thus what masculinity finds 'other' can only be designated feminine. As Lloyd notes, 'rational knowledge has been construed as transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind' (p. 2). That femininity is archetypally conflated with nature, with all its uncontrollable mysteries, speaks to the masculine thrust of rational knowledge and scientific exploration. Science, at least in how it conceives of itself, dominates nature, explains it, makes it intelligible. I would argue, of course, that under its guise of objectivity science does not simply reveal the 'facts', the 'truth', the 'way things are', but inscribes its masculine framework onto the unknown. This is evident in the shoe-horning of the theory of evolution into the discourse of mastery's conception of victory through competition and domination, which brings us back to Hubbard's complaint that all theories can justify themselves by manipulating information to fit their purpose. Lakoff and Johnson posit that 'any correspondence between what we say and some state of affairs in the world is always mediated by our understanding of the statement and of the state of affairs', and 'since an understanding is always partial, we have no access to "the whole truth" or to any definitive account of reality' (p. 180). Scientists, however, believe themselves to have performed Harding's 'God trick' and to have the omniscience to achieve a definitive account of reality – although, as the Sokal Hoax reveals, when the validity of this is challenged it produces heated debate.

[29] Ruth Hubbard, 'Have Only Men Evolved?', in *Discovering Reality*, pp. 45-70, p. 46.

In 1996 the scientist Alan Sokal infamously opened fire on the humanities by submitting 'an article liberally salted with nonsense' to the cultural studies journal *Lingua Franca*.[30] It was a parody of 'the charlatanism and nonsense purveyed by dozens of prominent French and American intellectuals', intended to prove that factually inaccurate and theoretically-incomprehensible papers would be accepted for publication as long as they sounded good and fell in with the journal's editors' ideological predilection for postmodernist and social-constructionist approaches.[31] Sokal's central complaint is that the 'fashionable' intellectuals of certain 'trendy' sections of the humanities no longer hold to the values of 'rational thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality' ('Experiments', p. 4) in favour of an approach that considers reality to be largely socially constructed. This, he says, is evidence of 'the intellectual arrogance of Theory – meaning postmodernist *literary* theory' (ibid.), but I cannot help feeling that it's rather the intellectual arrogance of science that insists on the greater importance of its empiricist bias. Sokal asserts that 'there *is* a real world; its properties are *not* merely social constructions; facts and evidence *do* matter. What sane person would contend otherwise? And yet, much contemporary academic theorising consists precisely of attempts to blur these obvious truths – the utter absurdity of it all being obscured through obscure and pretentious language' (ibid.). It's difficult not to feel piqued at Sokal's patronising tone, accusations of insanity, and insinuations that the humanities avoid 'reality' in favour of fearful self-delusion, for, as *Lingua Franca*'s editors Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross state in their reply, he 'appears to have absorbed these critiques only at the level of caricatures and has been reissuing these caricatures in the form of otherworldly fanatics who deny the existence of facts, objective realities, and gravitational forces'.[32] There's something willfully obtuse about Sokal's caricatures and his invitation for anyone who doubts the existence of gravity to test it by jumping out of his window. He asserts that his 'goal isn't to defend science from the barbarian hordes of lit crit (we'll survive just fine, thank you)' ('Sokal Replies'), but the vocabulary here – not to mention the defensive, sarcastic, and pejorative tone – indicates a sense of being under attack. Whether his goal or not, his reply *does* attempt to fend off the 'barbarian hordes', and employs all the features of 'everyday' argument outlined by Lakoff and Johnson in order to undermine cultural theorists. This reveals, I think, anxiety about the permeability of the borders of science, and Sokal's 'voice of reason' attempts to put the humanities in their place.

Sokal does have a point, though, when it comes to highlighting the obfuscating power of obscurantist expression, and were he simply criticising brainiac intellectuals for articulating their knowledge in impenetrably incomprehensible ways I'd probably join him. However, as an example of 'an academic turf war between scientists and humanist/social scientists' (Robbins and Ross) I feel that Sokal has some blind spots. His disappointment with theory's lack of attention to objective reality is, he says, because this constitutes an abandonment of the necessary 'tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful' ('Experiments', p. 4), but he readily overlooks the possibility that the idea of objective reality is *in itself* a mystification promoted by the powerful. Whilst Sokal may shake his head at the arrogance of

[30] Alan D. Sokal, 'A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies' (1996; originally published in *Lingua Franca*), <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/lingua_franca_v4.pdf> [accessed 13/08/2013], p. 2; henceforth 'Experiments'.
[31] Alan Sokal, 'Alan Sokal Replies…', (1996; originally published in *Lingua Franca*), <http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9607/mst.html> [accessed 13/08/2013].
[32] Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross, 'Mystery Science Theatre' (1996; originally published in *Lingua Franca*), <http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9607/mst.html> [accessed 13/08/2013].

theory, he fails to observe his own arrogance in proposing that the truth and falsity apparently provided by science continues to be the polygraph test against which the humanities and social sciences pit their ideas. The attachment to true and false, to right and wrong, and the need for science to be true and right in comparison to other disciplines is consonant with the binaries discussed above, and Sokal's move here is exemplary of masculine competitiveness. One discipline must win out, one epistemology, one methodology, one approach must be better, dominant, and more highly privileged – they cannot simply co-exist, going about their business in different ways. With disciplines, as with academics themselves, there's a constant jostling for authority and legitimacy, and whichever adheres best to the discourse of mastery wins. Sokal clearly feels that science's position as top dog is under threat and warns of the dangers of this, positing that 'theorising about "the social construction of reality" won't help us find an effective treatment for AIDS or devise strategies for preventing global warming' ('Experiments', pp. 4-5), but I feel it's here that he's furthest from the mark. This perspective takes a view that science is of practical use to the world because it deals with 'real' reality, whereas theorising about how reality is socially-constructed is a self-indulgent waste of time. However, understanding how people construct reality seems to me a fundamental consideration when implementing any solutions science may provide. AIDS is a 'real' disease, but it's also a socially-constructed event with a number of complex discourses framing it; a treatment is worthless without investigations into the *social* reality of AIDS, what the implications are for how the treatment is taken up and administered, etc. Similarly, global warming is a phenomenon to which we are all contributing, and devising strategies to combat it iss not enough on its own; how the 'reality' of global warming is perceived in society – indeed, whether or not it's even accepted as being 'real'– affects how much responsibility individuals take, whether they are likely to implement strategies, and other factors that complicate the 'real' solutions that science offers. That Sokal thinks simply that a physical problem can be treated with a physical cure is an overly simplistic perspective that dismisses the political and sociological realities that contextualise 'reality'. It's Sokal that has pitted science against theory and instigated a 'turf war', framing the humanities as the subjective, irrational feminine to science's objective, rational masculinity and denigrating them accordingly to score points. As far as I can tell, even the 'charlatans' and purveyors of 'nonsense' don't claim that there are no such things as physical objects with physical properties, or that scientific investigation of the world is a useless endeavour, just that our conception of the physical world is always mediated by the social world. For this reason, Robbins and Ross say of the hoax article that 'its status as parody does not alter substantially [their] interest in the piece itself as a symptomatic document' because regardless of the 'truth' of Sokal's paper, it remains a comment on the 'science wars' and is a testament to the ongoing need for absolute objective truth, fact, and knowledge to remain the reigning ideology. Where there's war, there must be winners, and there must also be those who lose, as I demonstrate in the following chapter.

Chapter Three
Winners and Losers

The discourse of mastery is predicated on battle and competition, framing academia as an intellectual survival of the fittest. To win, the scholar must secure 'scarce' resources for themselves, often at the expense of colleagues, who become competitors. In academic writing, knowledge and thought must be furthered through argument against previous knowledge and thought; this argument must be presented as fact, its basis must be rational, its expression must be impersonal, and it must be founded on the philosophical and scientific ideals of reason and objectivity. These ideals, emblematic as they are of masculinity, are easier for some to employ than others, however, and furthermore not everyone displaying the same valued traits will be perceived as equally successful. The version of success instituted by the discourse of mastery is success modelled on the ideology of the dominant group – white, educated men from the middle classes or above – thus the kinds of behaviours that are viewed positively within this group are not necessarily translated the same way when it comes to others. Moulton points out that in certain contexts aggression in men is seen to be indicative of positive attributes such as 'competence, energy, ambition' (p. 150), because it's seen to be a 'natural' male characteristic, whereas female aggression is 'unnatural' and therefore attracts negative judgement. She also signals that this can work in reverse, so where a woman shows competence, energy, and ambition, she may be viewed as aggressive by association even if she hasn't behaved aggressively. It is only in men that aggression indicates success.

If the academic game is played by its rules and the race run by its route – or the shortcuts available to certain advantaged competitors – those who cross the finish line are furnished with the trophy of power. Cixous observes that 'there has always been a split between those who are in possession of knowledge and culture and who occupy a position of mastery and the others', adding; 'I am not saying that knowledge is always associated with power, or that it must be: but that is its danger' (p. 140). She also recalls her time of 'ignorance' when she 'suffered from being made inferior or was crushed by what comes through the surrounding knowledge' and felt herself 'constantly under attack, aggressed, because it is very hard for people with a knowledge at their disposal not to be aggressive' (p. 145). Partly this is because the competitive framework makes this aggression inevitable and running the race itself becomes a rite of passage. The game is a tradition, its rules are an unspoken code, and, as Ivanič states, 'members of the academic community are in danger of positioning themselves as an elite […] whether they intend to or not' (p. 312). Gaining elite status, having gone through the necessary trials to obtain it, is seductive – ultimately, it's this status that is the scarce resource. It's the position at the top of the food chain, the seat of power in the ivory tower. It's necessarily scarce because the elite are exclusive and their power comes precisely from the fact that it's wielded by so

few. The distinction granted by winning the race is diluted for every colleague who completes it, and it's difficult, once the power has been tasted, to pass the cup on after one sip; the tendency is to guzzle the whole lot, then try and quaff everyone else's. As Back highlights, 'the studied maintenance of a professional reputation is a time-consuming business and involves the vigilant rebuttal and undermining of any interlopers on your intellectual territory'.[33] The discourse of mastery perpetuates largely because those who are in a position to change it have no vested interest in doing so, and those who wish to change it struggle to gain a position from which to do so. Elite authority, power, and right to speech are conferred by three interconnected and interdependent tactics, each of which creates the conditions for the others: agonism, obscurantism, and objectivism.

As Tannen notes, agonism 'leads to the exclusion or marginalisation of those who lack a taste for agonistic exchange' (p. 1651), and 'many scholars are discouraged from presenting or publishing their work […] by the agonistic tone of academic discourse' (p. 1661). Thus those who don't wish to engage in intellectual war fall by the wayside, or don't enter the battle, and those for whom such tactics are considered to be inappropriate struggle to gain legitimacy even where they perfectly emulate the ideal. However, the agonistic mode doesn't just disadvantage subordinate groups or those who eschew antagonism, it disadvantages everyone – as Back notes, 'years of scholarly endeavour can be dismissed with a few cutting sentences aimed only to bolster their author's credentials and authenticity'.[34] Even established authorities suffer from this 'intellectual machismo', leading to a situation where 'substantive disagreement becomes almost a sideshow' (ibid.). Critics of the agonistic model don't suggest that we sit around a camp fire holding hands, simply that scholars don't 'search for weaknesses in each others' work at the expense of seeking strengths, understanding the roots of theoretical differences, or integrating disparate but related ideas' (Tannen, p. 1651). Agonism, Tannen says, leads to 'obfuscation of knowledge' and 'personal suffering' (p. 1651): ultimately, we all lose. Knowledge loses, egos win, and we don't find out 'how much might be learned if we think of theory not as static structures to be demolished or assertions to be falsified, but a set of understandings to be questioned and shaped' (Tannen, p. 1666).

Obscurantism can manifest either as a product of a writer who is so steeped in their discipline that they are accustomed to using specialised and highfalutin language, or as a feint, a way of dressing up underdeveloped ideas in their fathers' clothes to lend them more weight. The result is that either only an elite group of readers have the prerequisite knowledge to follow the theory, or that those who don't understand feel stupid and inadequate in the face of what appears to be a work of inscrutable genius, unintelligible to mere mortal brains. In the competitive world of academia, continually affronted with my own ignorance, it's easy to assume that my inability to comprehend is a result of my own inadequacy, not least because the alternative seems arrogant. It's not the done thing to question 'superiors' – and superior they must be, for they have secured those scarce resources, and I'm still an amoeba scrabbling around by the start line, threatened perpetually with extinction.

The Sokal hoax raises a few issues pertinent both to obscurantism in academic writing and the related matter of expertise. After the hoax, Sokal and his colleague Jean Bricmont wrote a book entitled *Intellectual Impostures*, criticising prominent postmodernist theorists for their use of scientific terminology. They are, Sokal and Bricmont argue, guilty of 'displaying a superficial erudition by shamelessly throwing

[33] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=27&pageNo=1> [accessed 13/08/2013].
[34] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=26&pageNo=3> [accessed 13/08/2013].

around technical terms in a context where they are completely irrelevant'.[35] The complaint is ostensibly one that is anxious about the discipline of science being invaded by non-scientists by virtue of having its vocabulary appropriated by theory, but Sokal and Bricmont nonetheless have a point. Many of the writers they analyse – Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, etc. – do write in a style that is abstruse to say the least and in danger of following a pattern where 'turning back again and again on itself philosophical theorisation becomes increasingly complex and arcane until it is closed to everyone but a few intellectually adroit practitioners'.[36] Whether the bandying around of specialist terminology is technically correct in context or not is unlikely to make much difference to a non-specialist reader; the content is equally incomprehensible regardless of how well the scientific logic flows, unless the reader is a scientist, in which case their problem is more indignation on behalf of science. Sokal and Bricmont assert that 'if the texts seem incomprehensible, it is for the excellent reason that they mean precisely nothing' (p. 5); this may or may not be true, but if they are incomprehensible then for all intents and purposes they *do* mean nothing. Incomprehensibility isn't limited to theory, though; as Mara Beller details, the physicist Niels Bohr was 'notorious for the obscurity of his writing' – so much so that when a volume of his was accidentally printed with the pages in the wrong order, no-one noticed.[37] 'When physicists failed to find meaning in Bohr's writings, no matter how hard they tried', says Beller, 'they blamed themselves, not Bohr' (ibid.). Those invested with the right to speak, which is both granted because it's earned and 'earned' because it's granted, are less likely to be doubted, and those with less authority are likely to defer to the perceived superior wisdom of those with more right to speak, thus authority is maintained.

It's not that I suggest those with the right to speak should not use it to express their ideas obscurely if that is their wish or inclination, rather that I feel it's important to consider the power imbalance inherent in employing a style of communication that can be alienating and discouraging to readers who are less at ease with the 'complex and arcane'. As Ivanič outlines, 'the discoursal self which writers construct will depend on how they weigh their readers up, and their power relations with them' (p. 33), and positioning oneself as an expert maintains a hierarchical relationship between writer and reader that reinforces the inequality. Rather than sharing knowledge in a manner that is lucid and readily-graspable, knowledge, or the illusion of it, is sequestered in the centre of a maze that may or may not be nothing more than a series of dead ends. Cixous highlights this difficulty, noting that 'a mastery's contradiction, if it isn't thought differently, is that, far from transmitting knowledge, it makes it still more inaccessible, makes it sacred', and 'only those people who already have dealings with culture […] have ever dared have access to the discourse that the master gives' ('Exchange', p. 139). The discourse of mastery retains its ascendancy because it demands that in order to contribute to and understand it one is already participant in its machinations. This causes an obvious obstacle for those who belong to marginalised groups that have traditionally been barred from the cultural milieu required to gain access to and fluency in the master discourse. It's also problematic for those who have earned the right to speak within a particular discipline, but are

[35] Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures* (London: Profile Books, 1998), p. 4.
[36] Andrea Nye, 'The Voice of the Serpent: French Feminism and Philosophy of Language', in *WKR*, pp. 323-338, p. 329.
[37] Mara Beller, 'The Sokal Hoax: At Whom Are We Laughing?', <http://www.mathematik.uni-muenchen.de/~bohmmech/BohmHome/sokalhoax.html> [accessed 13/08/2013].

excluded from commenting in other fields because they lack the necessary 'credentials'.

In chapter two I foregrounded the aspect of the Sokal Hoax that focused on Sokal's masculine project demonstrating science's war for legitimacy over the humanities. Robbins and Ross, in writing back to Sokal, point to another issue embedded within this, arguing that Sokal's opinions are based on 'the premise that only professional scientists have the credentialed right to speak their minds on scientific matters that affect all of us'. Nevertheless, Sokal has no qualms debasing literary theory and cultural studies despite not being an expert in the field. What's important to Robbins and Ross isn't the fruitless and time-worn science/humanities debate, not 'the gulf of comprehension between "the two cultures," but rather the gulf of power between experts and lay voices'. Again, individuals must obtain the credentials deemed requisite in order to be granted speech rights, but as Back observes, this is problematic because those who have the authority of a domain define its parameters and defend its borders by setting their own criteria. Such unyielding allegiance to a niche results not only in a vested interest in closing entries into it in order to maintain one's own status within the field, but in the reduced transmission of that field's knowledge and decreased scope for scholars themselves to broaden their intellectual horizons. 'Specialisation and professionalisation institutionalises narrowness and results pardoxically [sic] in anti-intellectualism', says Back; 'being a slave to specialism is self-confinement'.[38] 'Perhaps lessening the hold of the imperious specialist on the university might result in cutting academic vanity and self-importance down to size' (ibid.), he suggests, preventing a situation where 'the Defenders of the Discipline and its founding Great Men […] define their discipline in such tight and exclusive ways that membership of this club is limited to themselves'.[39] Back does note that 'sometimes difficult and abstract language serves a purpose' because 'it is really important to hold to the idea that understanding the world is difficult and can't be served up like a soap opera or the kitsch of reality TV', but it's not necessarily the case that simple and readable writing is equivalent to trashy television.[40] Academia can serve many purposes, but I hold to the belief that the scholar's job is to make the world easier to understand. Academics don't have the omniscience to understand the world as a whole or see past the ideological distortions that trouble such understanding, but, to quote Back once again, 'the value of academic writing is in the attention it pays to the arcane or otherwise glossed over aspects of life that would otherwise be lost in the cacophony of contemporary culture'.[41] However, I maintain that the writing itself need not be arcane, and that in making obscure, abstract, and extremely specialised language a requirement of the right to speak a distance is created between experts and non-experts that perpetuates the hierarchical ideals of the discourse of mastery. This distance is celebrated by its masquerading as 'objective', but the illusion of objectivity, too, presents certain groups and individuals with significant difficulties achieving legitimacy.

As Lloyd highlights, 'the celebrated objectivity and universality of our canons of rational belief might not in fact transcend even sexual difference' (p. xvii), and she adds that 'the obstacles to female cultivation of Reason have historically incorporated exclusion of the feminine, and […] femininity itself has been partly constituted through such processes of exclusion' (p. xix). Jaggar points to a similar issue,

[38] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=15&pageNo=7>[accessed 13/08/2013]
[39] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=2&pageNo=3> [accessed 13/08/2013].
[40] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=31> [accessed 13/08/2013].
[41] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=31&pageNo=3> [accessed 13/08/2013].

commenting that 'the western tradition has not seen everyone as equally emotional. Instead, reason has been associated with members of dominant political, social, and cultural groups and emotion with members of subordinate groups' (p. 177). This facilitates the perpetuation of the discourse of mastery, for 'where there is a differential assignment of reason and emotion, it is easy to see the ideological function of the myth of the dispassionate investigator. It functions, obviously, to bolster the epistemic authority of the culturally dominant groups, composed largely of white men, and to discredit the claims of the currently subordinate groups' (p. 178). Thus a self-fulfilling prophecy is created whereby 'the more forcefully and vehemently the latter groups express their observations and claims, the more emotional they appear and so the more easily they are discredited' (ibid.). The dismissal of marginalised voices is especially prevalent when it comes to gender as the cultural stereotype of the angry, irrational, emotional woman is a well-established box into which women who express frustration at the existence of the box can easily be squashed. The condescending 'calm down, dear' trope is a very effective method of domination and control that reinforces the power and 'rationality' of those who have the authority to make the judgement. This authority originates from the fact that men are already assumed to be rational and objective, where women are presupposed to be capricious and overemotional, so it's overlooked that the judgement and boxing-up of those who challenge the identity inscribed onto them is itself an emotional reaction to a display of independence and agency by those the box is supposed to contain. It also fails to recognise that an emotional response and an irrational response are not the same thing, but the discourse of mastery's correlation of rationality with objectivity precludes the presence of emotion – by definition a subjective experience – in what is rational and therefore makes emotion irrational by default. Depending on what the reaction is to, an emotional – or 'irrational' – response may be perfectly rational. Indeed, anger at being dismissed and patronised, at having one's thoughts, opinions, feelings, identity, etc., undermined – especially where it's by virtue of a culturally-embedded assumption and a product of misogyny rather than an observation of the situation at hand – seems to me a perfectly rational reaction.

The 'heads I win, tails you lose' double-bind is such an effective silencing method that it's difficult to break out of. After all, it's not that a woman loses because she doesn't participate in the discourse of mastery but that she loses even when she does. The injunction of the discourse of mastery isn't that if women want to have a stake in it they participate by its rules, but that if women *do* participate their very act of participation is subversive and subject to dismissal. A woman taking the master's position isn't a master, she is a woman acting like a master, a woman trying on the master's clothes. A female master is a transgression and a threat, and if she speaks too loudly – and she must perhaps speak louder than a man in order to be heard, for she is already partially gagged by the awareness that as a woman she has a diminished right to speech – there will always be grounds to discredit her utterances. A woman 'acting like a man' is at once unfeminine and ultrafeminine; if she speaks in the voice of the master, the aggressive, agonistic, rational, objective voice of the master, she sloughs off her proscribed femininity – but in a woman this behaviour doesn't render her masculine, doesn't furnish her with metaphorical balls, doesn't confer on her the authority it would a man – it constitutes a grotesquing of the feminine. In a woman, aggression is emotional, agonism is irrational, thus objectivity is impossible; in a woman, objectivity is shown to be an illusion, and as a consequence of her attempt to emulate the masculine she becomes once more feminine. In a man, aggression is valued as a natural display of power and competence; in a woman, it's a gross and

unnatural exhibition that must signal emotional instability. Additionally, 'that oppressed groups are indeed capable of precisely the forms of rationality so highly valued by logicians, scientists, and in law courts', says Harding, 'cannot become visible so long as those groups are denied access to the educations and practices it takes to make logicians, scientists, and lawyers' (p. 9). I would add to this that even once access is attained, and even once those voices are heard, there's still the problem of being *listened* to. The very fact of the speech occludes the words that are spoken.

Clearly the stranglehold on power that the discourse of mastery allows is problematic for those who wish to play the masters at their own game, but it's more difficult still for those who want to play a different game all together. hooks recalls that when she first entered academia she was 'made to feel as though a central requirement of […] being accepted would mean participation in this system of exchange to ensure […] success' (p. 53). The question of how to gain legitimacy and be heard in an environment where utterances fall on 'the deaf, masculine ear, which can only hear language that speaks in the masculine' (Cixous, 'Sorties', p. 92), is by no means simple to answer. Cixous suggests that the way to democratise power and knowledge is 'to execute the master, kill him, eliminate him, so that what he has to say can get through, so that he himself is not the obstacle, so it will be *given*' ('Exchange', p. 140). By this I take her to mean that the representation of the master, the discursively-constructed master, must be removed as the authoritarian vessel through which all knowledge is funnelled. One way of achieving this is to instate the personal into academia, break down the illusion of objectivity that allows for 'a joyless atmosphere of rivalry, pettiness, malevolence, anxiety and status obsession', and opt for an approach that focuses on dissemination of knowledge rather than retention of it.[42] The academy need not be bracketed off for the elite, just as those working within academia need not be bracketed off from each other, and academic writing need not be bracketed off from the self. As Ivanič notes, 'people's identities are affected (if not determined) by the discourses and social practices in which they participate' (p. 10), and in this sense the focus on objectivity, the disjunction between the writer as subject and their writing leads to a situation where 'academics themselves don't much like other academics, and often feel deep estrangement from their colleagues as people'.[43] The emphasis on competition over confederation means that 'forms of self-presentation are tied to the modern academic desire to be taken seriously' and 'this means many of our most appealing human qualities are kept hidden like closely guarded secrets' (ibid.). The denigration of subjectivity, the perceived emasculation subjectivity entails as it inevitably marks the subject as feminine, makes losers of all of us – but there are some ways to make gains.

[42] Back, <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=15&pageNo=3> [accessed 13/08/2013].
[43] Back, <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=27&pageNo=1> [accessed 13/08/2013].

Conclusions
Bending the Rules; Pitfalls and Hurdles

The discourse of mastery, I have established, is the discourse of academia, and is predicated on an ideology that privileges agonism, objectivity, and rationality – the successful implementation of which leads to a position of authority and power. These ideals, and the actions necessary to achieve them, are masculine in nature and their dominance excludes those who do not comply – or are perceived as being unable to comply – with them. As Back observes, 'one of the privileges of being an academic is that we have the power to frame what happens in the classroom and the intellectual values we communicate as we perform this role'.[44] However, because those who 'win' the academic game are overwhelmingly those best-suited to its habitus and who benefit most from its continuation, the discourse and its values are self-perpetuating and rarely (successfully) threatened. There are possibilities for working within the discourse of mastery without simply bowing to its requirements, but there are inevitably barriers that problematise any attempt at emancipation. In summarising some of these potentials I focus on feminist approaches, partly because issues of masculinity and femininity are my central concern, and partly because feminism has become a movement that seeks to include all minority groups. This in itself, however, can be problematic.

Cross and Averill posit that 'one of the "liberties" […] feminist scholarship may take is the freedom to risk intellectually, to sketch incomplete projects, and thereby to inspire a collective quest' (p. 71). Already existing on the margins, already partially excluded from the master discourse, women and feminists have greater room to manoeuvre within the system because there's already less expectation of conformity. However, the relative lack of authority of this position also makes it more difficult for risks to be registered, as that which is on the outside is preconditioned to be dismissed. hooks asks, in consideration of this dilemma: 'within the complex and ever-shifting realm of power-relations, do we position ourselves on the side of the colonising mentality' with all its safety, 'or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed'? (p. 48). There is the option to play the game by its rules and challenge those rules once accepted as an insider, but this approach has many pitfalls, not least that in the process of acquiescing to the discourse individuals not only compromise their own ideological position but contribute to and assist in the perpetuation of an ideology they have no stake in. To some extent we all have to do this; we live in a capitalist, patriarchal society and we make it work for us as best we can even as we are aware of the many ways it works against us. The rules of the road are restricting, but in condemning them and voicing her frustration with them, Acker, I think, isn't recommending that we all leap in our 4x4s and blaze an anarchic trail

[44] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=15&pageNo=7> [accessed 13/08/2013]

through the central reservation and beyond. That way *Thelma and Louise* lies. Avital Ronell notes that 'Acker scrambled the master codes without pretending that she could simply dispense with them' – radical and risky as Acker's work may be, she recognised that we have to work with what we've got.[45] The ultimate conclusion of the road metaphor in *Blood and Guts in High School* doesn't suggest that going off-road is either the best way to effect change or to achieve greater personal happiness. Hester Prynne's transgressive actions take her outside of society and although Acker clearly advocates disruption over submission to the status quo, living off the roads ends in ostracisation. It may shake the sensibilities of authority temporarily, but does little to improve the situation of the subject herself and, as signalled in the book report, risks pushing conservative authorities into a position of greater conservatism and regulation. As Ellen G. Friedman notes, 'Acker's protagonists must move beyond the border of culture to conceive of themselves as individuals, as other than compliant products of their culture', as must we all in order to interrogate the discourses we unconsciously comply with, but this raises a question of what we do once we have moved beyond the border, off the road.[46] Perhaps we step, as far as possible, off the road and out of discourse just enough to conceive of ourselves, then take ourselves back to do what we can to widen the road.

Resubmitting to the discourse of mastery on our own terms, though, doesn't mean becoming powerless to it. It means knowing that some compromise is necessary, that sometimes we will feel we are 'talking posh', but holding firm to the 'power to be able to separate useful knowledge […] from participation in ways of knowing that would lead to estrangement, alienation, and worse – assimilation and co-optation' (hooks, p. 52). hooks advocates maintaining a position at the margin, considering 'what it means to struggle to maintain that marginality even as one works, produces, lives, if you will, at the centre' (p. 52) and suggesting that this location constitutes a transformative, 'radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world' (p. 55). However, there's a tension here – the margin, by definition, is the 'other' to the centre, is, as Lloyd noted above, constituted by what the centre dominates, transcends, and leaves behind. If enough people write from the margins, though, the centre will lose its dominance, the discourse of mastery will no longer have the monopoly on authority, and the margin will no longer be the margin. Perhaps this would be better treated as a starting point; the problem with maintaining the marginal position indefinitely is that it bars acceptance by the centre and reinscribes difference. Reappropriating otherness is a helpful tool for recovering agency, but there's an irony in campaigning for the visibility and audibility of that other in a manner that continually defines itself by its otherness. It's still, in some sense, a war, a competition for legitimacy, and competitions must have winners, but the model of battle and its necessarily hierarchical nature is fundamental to the discourse of the centre. Clément notes that there's always a split between centre and margin, and that 'even if the split shifts, it does not disappear. Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes' ('The Guilty One', p. 6) and it seems to me that reinforcing marginality is only broadening the split. This model is substantially the same as that of the discourse of mastery, just inverted; it's a 'we're the normal ones, it's you lot who're weird' move

[45] Avital Ronell, 'Kathy Goes to Hell: On the Irresolvable Stupidity of Acker's Death', in *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, ed. by Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman, and Avital Ronell (London and New York: Verso, 2006), pp. 12-34, p. 23.
[46] Ellen G. Friedman, 'Where Are the Missing Contents? (Post)Modernism, Gender, and the Canon', *PMLA*, 2 (1993), 240-252 (p. 243).

that turns rejection back upon the centre, and I'm not sure that a strident attachment to otherness is the way forward. To some extent we're all in the margins, we all live with the split running through us, not neatly on one side or the other. The discourse of mastery is an ideal, the centre is a fiction, and by that token so is the margin; none of us fit the categorisations and boxes society places us into and indeed the very illusion of the centre creates the conditions whereby those who self-identify as marginal in relation to it corroborate and reinforce the myth of division and otherness that allows for domination and oppression.

Marilyn Frye notes that 'the feminist faith in and respect for the experience and voice of every woman seemed to lead us into the valley of the shadow of Humanism – wishy-washy, laissez-faire, I'm OK-You're OK, relativistic humanism'. However, she also registers the problem of the opposite approach: 'a good deal of feminist thinking has issued in statements and descriptions that pertain to "women" and are not modified to mark distinctions among women'.[47] This is a common criticism of feminism, which often speaks in sweeping generalisations in a manner that again foregrounds flattening categorisations. Personally I'm not so critical of 'wishy-washy' humanism, but of course it does present its problems for those who hold the view that feminism – or any social movement – needs to be based on coalition. Frye agrees, though, that 'metaphysical generalisation, declaring this or that to be the what-it-is of a thing, threatens the annihilation of that which does not fit its description' (p. 38) and 'respect for women's experience/voice/perception/knowledge, our own and others', is the ground and foundation of our emancipation – of both the necessity and the possibility of rewriting, recreating the world' (p. 37). Rather than fitting people into preordained categories, she suggests, we should observe patterns, which 'instead of bringing a phase of enquiry to closure by summing up what is known, as other ways of generalising do […] opens up fields of meaning and generates new interpretive possibilities. Instead of drawing conclusions from observations, it generates observations' (p. 39). Naming patterns, she says, 'is like charting the prevailing winds over a continent; there is no implication that every individual and item in the landscape is identically affected' (ibid.). It doesn't assume a blanket consequence, instead recognising that the forces acting on us may be the same, but the actions and effects are not. To some extent this combats the problem of the at once vague and definitive 'women', of which Harding asks, 'who are these "women" whose experiences, social locations, and discourses are to ground feminist knowledge? Are they only the women privileged to speak and write from the dominant universities, research institutes, and national and international institutions and agencies?' (p. 7).

There's a difficulty with speaking 'as a feminist' because it creates an inference of speaking 'as a woman' and by extension speaking *for* women. Harding points out that 'feminism has a long history of association with bourgeois Liberal rights movements, racially and ethnically discriminatory projects, heteronormative understandings, and other theoretical "luxuries" available to women from the dominant groups' (p. 9). This is because 'most of the feminist theorists who are best positioned politically and economically to have the widest audience have been members of groups which are generally privileged in western cultures' (Frye, p. 44). Within movements that operate from the margin there are always going to be those who are closer to the centre than others; the white, middle class woman with a family background of Higher Education achieves legitimacy more easily than a woman

[47] Marilyn Frye, 'The Possibility of Feminist Theory', in *WKR*, pp. 34-47, p. 37.

whose position complies less with what is valued by the discourse of mastery. From this location it's tempting to use the right to speak to speak for those one has no right to speak for, which is in some respects helpful – those with power can choose to use it to assist those who haven't yet reached it, although this entails some degree of power-imbalance – and in others unhelpful – slippage into the kind of discourse that squashes the disenfranchised whilst claiming to act in the interests of their liberation. Even in speaking only for herself, the woman who has earned the right suffers a quandary, and Frye invites us to 'consider the highly educated white feminist theorist standing in her relatively privileged position for speaking and being heard' (p. 44). 'In what voice will she speak', she asks, 'now that she has assumed the authority to speak? Given the pervasive *de facto* race and class segregation in which she has lived, and given the education she has had, there is only one voice she has ever heard that is a voice with authority: the voice of the male speaking *ex cathedra*' (ibid.), or, to use plain English, speaking with supreme and infallible authority. I had to Google Frye's Latin expressions, and whilst it's educational to have the occasional vocabulary-expanding word and a dictionary handy, a superfluosity of them, especially the more archaic ones in fancy italics, qualifies as obscurantism. Feminist scholarship is often guilty of intellectual one-up-(wo)manship – looking at you Gayatri Spivak, Mary Ann Doane, Judith Butler – which is disappointing in the context of the current argument as it both ringfences feminism for the elite and masculinises its discourse. Louise Marcil-Lacoste notes that this is a perennial catch-22, for 'when a good case for equality is found in feminist writings, the purport of the conclusion would seem to be an invitation to imitate men'.[48] Here is the difficulty hooks encountered upon entering academia – how to speak, who to speak for, how to take what is offered without swallowing the ideologies and values that come with it whole. As Moi points out, 'the would-be critic of the *doxa* [see 1.1] finds herself obliged to reflect on the conditions which produce her as a speaker. As an intellectual, her position becomes particularly ambiguous, insofar as her social or political critique necessarily also finds itself caught up in the mechanisms and strategies – the habitus – of the intellectual field she is in' (p. 1028).

To criticise the discourse also places individuals in a precarious position, however; as with Moulton's assertion that theories become self-fulfilling prophecies, the behaviour of those at the margin is always interpretable by the discourse of mastery and always subject to the kind of spin that discredits it. As Moi elucidates, 'women who laugh at male self-importance in university seminars may find themselves constructed not as lucid critics of male ridicule, but as frivolous females incapable of understanding truly serious thought' (p. 1031). It seems impossible to escape the binaries, to not get drawn into accepting or refusing prescribed masculinity and femininity and to avoid simply shuttling between the two. Marcil-Lacoste highlights that 'in feminist writings, attempts will be made to show that it is erratic [sic – erroneous?] to define women's reason by means of feelings of intuition; or else, it will be argued that feelings of intuition, ascribed to women, should be given a higher epistemological status' (p. 125). It always seems to be an either/or decision, in which both options fail to break down the gendered attributions inherent in the discourse of mastery.

When it comes to proposing a neatly-packaged solution to the problem of how to resist the discourse of mastery, like Woolf to her Cambridge students, I have 'shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion' (p. 6). The requirement for tidy,

[48] Louise Marcil-Lacoste, 'The Trivialisation of the Notion of Equality', in *Discovering Reality*, pp. 121-138, p. 123.

conclusive 'answers' is a 'duty' of academic discourse that seals off rather than opens up further thought, and perpetuates the illusion of the all-seeing, all-knowing writer's God-trick. A conclusion is an ending that demands authoritative certainty and freezes ideas into facts, condenses them into an apparent 'nugget of pure truth' (Woolf, p. 5), and parcels them up into a reassuring certitude. Without imposing a falsely definitive and largely arbitrary conviction, the only conclusion I can draw from the variety of both approaches to challenging the discourse of mastery, and restrictions to those approaches, is that there is no singular conclusion and an Ikea method won't work. Different women face different hurdles, and different contexts provide different pitfalls. The 'free size' or 'flatpack' mentality may in some ways be inclusive, but it overlooks nuances of experience and location and in that respect excludes almost everyone because it fails to account for individuality.

If the discourse of mastery disallows the individual and the subjective then, it seems to me, a central way of challenging it is to restore the personal to scholarship and academic writing. Jaggar agrees that there's a 'need for theory to be self-reflexive, to focus not only on the outer world but also on ourselves and our relation to that world, to examine critically our social location, our actions, our values, our perceptions and our emotions' (p. 184). Emotion is a guiding light for Jaggar, and a possibility for change, for 'the new emotions evoked by feminist insights are likely to stimulate further feminist observations and insights, and these may generate new directions in both theory and political practice. There is a continuous feedback loop between our emotional constitution and our theorising' (p. 183). Ivanič states that 'every written text is, among other things, a statement of the identity of the writer, and hence in itself a form of social change' (p. 332), thus the more identities that find access to Higher Education and negotiate a right to speak, the more social change will be effected. 'New populations', says Ivanič, 'present a challenge to the dominant values, practices and discourses of the institution of higher education' (p. 9), and, gradual though their entry may be, participation in Higher Education *is* widening. One more voice might appear to be insignificant but 'people are not isolated individuals' (Ivanič, p. 332) and 'clashes between writers' autobiographical identities and institutionally supported subject positions have the potential to contribute to changing the possibilities for self-hood available in the future' (Ivanič, p.28). As Back says, 'we need to take risks in order to expand not only what can be thought but also what counts as academic writing and communication'.[49]

To some extent, the discourse of mastery must be used, partly because there are limited options available, and partly because not doing so gives the discourse what it wants. Cixous says, 'I use rhetorical discourse, the discourse of mastery […] and obviously I do it on purpose; it is a refusal on my part to leave organised discourse entirely in men's power' ('Exchange', p. 136). Clément agrees that 'there is no reason at all not to steal that discourse from men', adding, 'besides […] we don't steal anything at all – we are within the same cultural system' ('Exchange', pp. 136-137). The question of how to 'steal' it without simply replicating it, becoming it, hasn't been – I think, cannot be – completely answered, but there is something to work with. The exchange between Cixous and Clément is based on their idea that 'by listening to each other, a process of reasoning will emerge that will lead in a direction which, separately, we would not perhaps have taken' ('Exchange', p. 135). This enables a situation in which 'there can be two women in the same space who are *differently* engaged, speaking of almost exactly the *same things*, investing in two or three kinds of

[49] <http://academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=15&pageNo=7> [accessed 13/08/2013].

discourse and going from one to the other' (Clément, 'Exchange', p. 136). This, for me, is the ideal – a democratic sharing of knowledge and opinion founded on listening and discussion rather than argumentation and competition. I agree with Rooney in that an argument need not, is not by definition, agonistic or adversarial. It's an opportunity to express a point of view and for parties with differing views to make those views intelligible to each other in the interests of sharing ideas rather than wrestling opposing parties to the ground and forcibly shoving our vehemently-held and indisputable 'truth' into their oesophagus.

However, as Tannen says, 'alternative approaches to intellectual interchange need not entirely replace agonistic ones but should be accommodated alongside them' (p. 1651). I would be working against my own ideology if I insisted that any one way of writing should be privileged over another, but I believe in Cixous's utopia. In this vision 'there will not be *one* feminine discourse, there will be thousands' ('Exchange', p. 137). 'Until now', Cixous says, 'women were not […] creating their tongues – plural, but they will create them, which doesn't mean that the others (either men or tongues) are going to die off' (ibid.). The more tongues, the broader the field, the wider the road, the less overall power any small group or person gets to wield. It's in everyone's interests to make knowledge more accessible and have more people endowed with the right to think and speak. If this is achieved the issue of who are 'women' and who can talk and write on their behalf will fall away, for we will write on our own behalves, which is the only behalf we have any right to write on. That feminism is trying to break its association with white middle class women by including other marginalised groups under its umbrella doesn't mean that individual feminists must speak for all feminists. I'm a middle-class, white woman in her late 20s and I bring to my feminist perspective my past experiences and the oppressions I personally suffer – which, due to my position of relative privilege, are few compared to many. I recognise that I can only ever know my own position and however much I may sympathise with others and be angry on their behalves I have no authority to speak on them. Therefore I don't subscribe to the view that it's arrogant to bring personal identity into writing, or to speak from a subjective location. The self is present regardless, albeit occluded by the patina of objectivity, and to deny it, to allow it to speak in universal terms is, I feel, certainly no less arrogant or self-involved than speaking in the first person. In any case, the accusation is one I can shoulder, for I'd rather gaze at my own navel than eyeball the master's down the barrel of a penis.

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