RETHINKING FEMININE SEXUALITY WITH JULIA KRISTEVA

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Introduction

Julia Kristeva[17] begins her reworking of feminine sexuality by revisiting Western constructions of sexual difference, tracing their roots to the symbolic foundations of monotheistic religion. She argues that Judaic-Christian monotheism institutionalises a patriarchal order that systematically excludes women from *subjectivity, law, and history.* Within this tradition, the masculine becomes aligned with *language, law, and history* while the feminine is relegated to *silence, corporeality, and reproduction*. As Lowe observes, women in the Western Symbolic order appear as ―the Other, who is mute, powerless, outlawed, ahistorical, and absent" (Lowe, 1994, p. 142). This exclusion is not merely social or historical but deeply embedded in the symbolic structures that organise Western culture.

In *About Chinese Women* (1977),[17] Kristeva traces the emergence of this patriarchal Symbolic order to the rise of Judaic monotheism, which formed community not through territory or ethnicity but through the unifying authority of the divine Word. She writes that monotheism established ―a abstract, nominal, symbolic community beyond individuals and their beliefs" (Kristeva, 1977, p. 22). However, this symbolic unity simultaneously represses earlier agrarian and maternal traditions, as monotheism, in consolidating paternal authority, excludes ―the greater half of agrarian civilizations and their ideologies, that is, women and mothers" (Kristeva, 1977, p. 18). This exclusion is mythically articulated in the figure of Eve, who embodies both desire and transgression, marking femininity as that which must be controlled for monotheistic unity to endure. Consequently, sexual difference becomes structured through women's exclusion from the Law and their confinement to reproductive and relational roles. Monotheistic civilization establishes a fundamental division in which, as Kristeva states, ―between the two sexes there is a cleavage, an abyss, which is marked by their different relationships to the Law" (Kristeva, 1977, p. 19).

To comprehend Kristeva's involvement with the development of feminine sexuality, it is first important to look at how psychoanalysis, specifically, the ideas of

Freud and Lacan, has defined and constructed it. For both Freud and Lacan, sexuality occupies a central role in the formation of subjectivity. They define sexuality in terms of, as Lowe says, ―the presence or lack of a penis (in the case of Freud) or the phallus (in the case of Lacan)" (Lowe, 1994, p. 143). Theories structured around castration and the phallus thus reinforce an understanding of feminine sexuality as secondary, incorporating it only within symbolic systems governed by male-centred structure. Despite the maternal body‘s role in early psychic development, it is systematically *repressed* and *displaced* within psychoanalytic accounts of subject formation. Kristeva argues that the misrecognition and denial of the maternal are necessary for the preservation of the authority of the symbolic father. Within this framework, castration acquires particular significance, as psychoanalysis explains the formation of masculine identity through the ‗repression of the mother‘s sexuality‘. Feminine sexuality consequently emerges as that which must be excluded, silenced, or subordinated to secure the stability of paternal law and symbolic order. Kristeva revisits the question of sexual difference by returning to the repressed site of the maternal, refusing the phallocentric logic of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Against the castration-centred models, Kristeva situates the maternal as a dynamic semiotic domain that precedes the Symbolic.Based on this theoretical framework, the paper is structured into three sections: the first examines Freud‘s Construction of Feminine Sexuality; the second analyses Feminine Sexuality in Lacan, and the third explores Kristeva‘s Reconfiguration of Feminine Sexuality.

Freud’s construction of feminine sexuality

Freud‘s theorisation of feminine sexuality emerges from his broader understanding of sexuality as a psychic, symbolic, and developmental process rather than a fixed biological instinct. Freud describes infantile sexuality as *polymorphously perverse*[17]. At this early stage, Freud does not posit a clear distinction between masculine and feminine sexuality. Sexual difference becomes psychically decisive only with the advent of the Oedipus complex[17] during the phallic stage. For Freud, subjectivity itself is inseparable from sexual differentiation. According to Mitchell, becoming a subject necessarily involves occupying one of the two socially recognised sexual positions, that of man or woman. This division is not merely anatomical but

symbolic, structured through unconscious identifications and prohibitions that regulate desire. The Oedipus complex thus functions as the decisive moment when polymorphous sexuality is reorganised into a culturally intelligible gender identity. In the case of the boy, this transition is governed by what Freud called the castration complex[17]. Minsky elaborates:

> The small boy, passionately in love with his mother, is suddenly overtaken by the ‗castration complex', that is, a consuming anxiety that he will lose his penis. This phantasy of castration is triggered by two factors: his recognition of sexual difference, his mother now appears to be castrated, and his guilt and murderous feelings towards his father, whom he now sees as a rival. (1996, p. 41)

To resolve this conflict, the boy represses his desire for the mother and identifies with the father. As Minsky writes,

> The father, internalised as the superego (an authoritarian version of the idealised ego characteristic of the narcissistic phase) will be the agency which represents the world beyond the mother's body, the culture in which he must take his place. (1996, p. 42)

By internalizing the father's role, the boy accepts the loss of the mother and steps into a socially defined masculine position within the Symbolic order. To achieve this, the boy must repress his desire for the mother. This repression is not only about shaping gender identity, but also marks the birth of the unconscious.[17] Freud's account of feminine sexuality, however, is more complex. Freud defines feminine sexuality as a psychological process rooted in the Oedipal crisis and castration complex, where a girl's perception of herself as already castrated develops penis-envy, which redirects her love from her mother to her father, aligning her with patriarchal norms of femininity as a passive object of male desire. Minsky notes,

> In Freud's theory of femininity, penis-envy provides the motive force for the little girl's switch from her mother to her father as a love-object. For Freud, penis-envy becomes the necessary pre-condition of the achievement of the form of ‗femininity' required by patriarchy, women as the passive object of men's desire rather than the active subjects of their own. (1996, p.50)

Female subjectivity, in this framework, is shaped through *negation, dependency,* and *a deferred desire* that orbits around the symbolic authority of the father. Freud himself admitted the limitations of his understanding of women, most notably in his description of female sexuality as a ‗dark continent'. This formulation

points not only to the difficulty of theorizing the feminine within psychoanalysis but also to unresolved contradictions within Freud‘s own theoretical framework. In Freud‘s account, femininity is ultimately positioned as a *lack*, defined by the absence of the penis.

Feminine Sexuality in Lacan

Lacan rereads the Freudian notion of sexual difference and detaches the idea of phallus[17] from the anatomical male organ and relocates it within the Symbolic order[17]. Rather than interpreting masculinity and femininity as biological, Lacan understands them as positions about the phallus as signifier, not the penis as organ. In his 1958 paper, *The Meaning of the Phallus*, Lacan writes, ―the relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of the anatomical difference between the sexes" (Lacan, cited in Minsky, 1996, p. 270). This insight challenges the Freudian assumption that sexual identity revolves around the possession or absence of the penis. For Lacan, ―the phallus is a signifier" (Lacan, cited in Minsky, 1996, p. 274). The phallus, in its symbolic role, represents a sense of lack, and the subject enters the Symbolic order by confronting this lack through what Lacan calls the castration complex. This castration is not the literal loss of the penis, but rather the symbolic loss of the imaginary wholeness that characterizes the pre-Oedipal relation with the mother.

For Lacan, sexual difference is not rooted in biology but is a symbolic process shaped by lack and *jouissance*[17]. Masculinity and femininity are not defined by anatomy but by different relations to the phallus as a signifier. The key distinction is between *having* the phallus and *being* the phallus. In the masculine position, the subject identifies with *having* the phallus, while the feminine position is defined by *being* the phallus, becoming the signifier of the Other‘s desire. This complex identification requires a woman to give up parts of herself and perform femininity as a *masquerad*e[17].

Lacan notes this explicitly when he says, ―the meaning of castration only acquires its full (clinically manifest) weight as regards symptom formation when it is discovered as castration of the mother" (Lacan, cited in Minsky, 1996, p. 271). In

other words, this structure begins in infancy, when the child depends on the (m)Other and fantasises that she can fulfil all needs. Over time, the child realises that the (m)Other also desires something else, revealing both the mother‘s and the child‘s lack. This recognition that the mother is castrated[17] establishes the law of the father, redirects the child's desire into the Symbolic order. This shift marks the move from need to desire[17]. As Lacan puts it, ―Demand always bears on something other than the satisfaction which it calls for" (Lacan, cited in Minsky, 1996, p. 275), which means that the mother‘s failure to satisfy desire introduces the child into the gap between demand[17] and desire. This *unfilled gap* is what structures subjectivity and sexuality for Lacan. According to Lacan, femininity is thus not a natural essence but a kind of symbolic performance in which the woman embodies the phallus to become the object of desire for the Other.

Kristeva’s Reconfiguration of Feminine Sexuality

In her psychoanalytic writings, Kristeva revisits and reframes the question of sexual difference by returning to the repressed site of the maternal. While drawing on both Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, Kristeva refuses to be bound by their phallocentric logic. Instead, she excavates the pre-Oedipal phase, particularly the child‘s relationship to the mother, seeking in this neglected terrain an alternative foundation for subjectivity. While Freud and Lacan place the castration complex as foundational to the formation of masculine identity, Kristeva‘s psychoanalysis shifts the focus onto the maternal body,[17] not as a passive object of repression but as a dynamic force of expression that exists outside the phallic-dominated Symbolic order.

While traditional psychoanalysis privileges the paternal function as initiator of the infant into the Symbolic order, Kristeva emphasizes the maternal function as foundational to subjectivity[17]. As Oliver observes,

> What Kristeva calls the ‗maternal function‘ contains both a negation and an identification that precede Lacan's mirror stage. This is to say that both the negation and the identification that are essential to human subjectivity are already operating within the maternal function prior to the subject's entrance into language. (Oliver,1993, p. 3)

This insight leads Kristeva to reconceptualize subjectivity not as a stable structure rooted in the paternal order but as a *subject-in-process*[17], emerging from the semiotic[17] rhythms of the maternal body. As Oliver further notes, "The maternal body itself is a primary model of the subject-in-process; its unity is called into question by the other within, an other-in-process" (1993, p. 13). The maternal body, then, is not merely a container for reproduction, but a dynamic psychic and symbolic site through which meaning and desire emerge. This early mother-child bond, structured by drives and bodily rhythms, is not mediated by language or the Law of the Father. It is a fluid, affective field that Kristeva names as the *semiotic*. While Lacan regards the Imaginary[17] as less important than the symbolic and dismisses the pre-Oedipal as a developmental precursor to be overcome, Kristeva insists on the continuing presence of the maternal and the semiotic within the subjectivity. This maternal presence, however repressed, is not fully extinguished.

Kristeva's concept of abjection[17] developed in *Powers of Horror* (1982), is crucial to understanding how sexual difference is structured. The child must abject the maternal body as separation from the maternal body is necessary for the emergence of the subject. The maternal body occupies a privileged place in Kristeva's theory of abjection because it is both the site of origin and the object that must be repudiated for subjectivity to emerge. By re-centering the maternal body in the formation of subjectivity, Kristeva opens up a new space for feminine desire, one that does not demand the rejection of the mother, nor the surrender to a phallic system.

Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* reflects a psychoanalytic and cultural inquiry into the formation of feminine subjectivity through the figure of the Chinese woman. While her reflections are grounded in a Freudian–Lacanian framework, Kristeva departs decisively from it by foregrounding the *pre-Oedipal mother* and the *semiotic* dimension. Rather than treating sexual difference as structured exclusively by the Law of the Father, she turns to ancient Chinese culture to find a different understanding of women and motherhood.

Based on her short visit to China in 1974 and the research of Marcel Granet[17], she constructs an image of pre-Confucian China as a symbolic space where

the maternal order was socially meaningful. As Lowe observes, Kristeva ―coded China as feminine or maternal" (Lowe, 2018, p. 138). She is not trying to recover a lost matriarchal[17] society, but projects a figure that challenges the fixed sexual identity of the Western (Lacanian and Freudian) Symbolic order.

Kristeva imagines that ancient Chinese society might have been based on matrilineal[17] and matrilocal[17] systems, where family lines were traced through mothers, and men moved into their wives' families after marriage[17]. The maternal order Kristeva envisions is not meant as a factual account of ancient Chinese society, but rather as a conceptual tool, a way to imagine alternatives beyond the phallocentric system. Her language remains deliberately speculative, using China as a site through which the *semiotic* can be articulated against the paternal law.

By imagining such a society, Kristeva invokes the semiotic dimension (a pre-symbolic, maternal logic) that resists the Law of the Father. This imagined matrilineal past[17] thus becomes a space where the maternal and the feminine can be rethought. In this framework, the mother is not a repressed or silenced figure but a central organiser of social and communal life. Kristeva further observes that sexual difference in ancient Chinese society was structured less through rigid gender binaries than through cultural, economic, and territorial structures. She describes men and women as functioning as a 'sexo-economic-territorial group'. Kristeva observes,

> The division of the sexes would coincide, in peasant custom, with the division of labour; so that the group of men would be opposed to the group of women as two 'corporations' of workers — field labourers and weavers. (Kristeva, 1977, p. 47)

This division was not grounded in essentialist notions of gender difference, but rather in the modes and places of labour, determining one's social function and identity within the community. The separation extended to territorial and kinship structures, such that a person's name marked their position in a complex web of *economic, territorial, and sexual relationships.* For Kristeva, this arrangement signals a Symbolic order in which identity is not derived solely from biology or the nuclear family, but from a broader matrix of cultural and communal relations. Marriage, accordingly, appears not as a romantic or symbolic fusion but as ―[a] domestic contract, a peace treaty between two adversaries" (Kristeva, 1977, p.49). Despite this

division, maternal figures retain symbolic authority; the mother is not simply a biological parent but ―the most respected woman in the community" (Kristeva, 1977, p.48).

The maternal is also symbolically linked with the earth itself. Kristeva writes that in this agrarian culture, ―mother and earth are identical," bound together as ―vital, living, life-giving" forces (Kristeva, 1977, p.50). Rather than constructing sacred spaces around paternal authority, *the place becomes „holy" because it is identified with the mother.* In this cultural logic, the maternal is not a figure of lack or passivity but a vital principle of meaning and the Symbolic order. As Kristeva writes: ―No Father, no unifying Word. A Mother: the Ancestress and a place of sexual jousting represent the logic and the cohesion of the society" (1977, p. 50). Thus, Kristeva offers an alternative vision of symbolic order, one rooted in maternal vitality, not paternal law.

According to Kristeva, in China, *language, subjectivity, sexuality,* and *gender relations* function differently yet remain structurally interconnected (Rabine, 1977, p. 45). In the Chinese language, meaning is conveyed through sound and tone, and it is these tonal distinctions[17] that infants first recognise as they begin to acquire language. Kristeva emphasises that ―the first thing one is aware of is the role that tonalities play in differentiating meanings" in everyday spoken Chinese (Kristeva, 1977, p. 55). Since infants can perceive tonal distinctions very early, Chinese children ―begin taking part in the code of social communication that is language at a much younger age (5 or 6 months) than children in other cultures," (Kristeva, 1977, p.55). This early linguistic entry occurs while the child remains closely attached to the maternal body, and it is this dependency that Kristeva calls the ‚psycho-corporeal imprint of the mother'. This maternal imprint remains as ―the underlying but active stratum of communication" (Kristeva, 1977, p. 55). This close relationship between tonal language and maternal presence is also reflected in Chinese writing. For Kristeva, this continuity between the semiotic and the symbolic dimensions in Chinese culture means that the strict binary divisions common in psychoanalysis may not apply. As Rabine suggests, this continuity implies that Chinese symbolic systems may not require ―the radical cleavages between unconscious and conscious, semiotic and

symbolic, or between the material maternal and the symbolic paternal" (Rabine, 1977, p.46).

Even within Confucian patriarchy[17], where the Order of the Father replaced the Order of the Mother, Kristeva identifies residual traces of maternal power. Although women are "submitted throughout her life to a whole series of authorities: her mother and father, her husband's mother and father, her husband, and, finally, her son" (Kristeva, 1977, p.71), she is not entirely without agency. Over time, especially through the birth of sons, a woman can ascend in the domestic hierarchy and attain the powerful role of the mother-in-law. As Gao notes, "A mother-in-law held even greater power than a mother" (2003, p.123), reflecting how feminine authority is reproduced across generations within the family.

Kristeva's reading of footbinding[17] offers a psychoanalytic reflection on the residual power of women within a Confucian patriarchal order. Against Freud's reading of footbinding as a symbol of castration, she interprets it as a violent attempt to suppress an enduring symbolic power attributed to women. She asks, "Does feudal patriarchal society suspect that woman possesses, if not a penile power, a social and symbolic power that remains with her from the early matrilineal tradition?" (Kristeva, 1977, p. 83) She argues that foot binding is not merely a symbol of lack, but a violent attempt to repress a power that patriarchal society suspects still resides within the female body. Kristeva suggests that the obsessive cultural emphasis on bound feet, as both erotic object and symbol of obedience, was a strategy to suppress not merely female sexuality, but the traces of matrilineal and maternal authority that once shaped Chinese kinship systems. Kristeva writes, "the only reward of this unimaginable suffering is that it transforms a woman into a fetish, and, thus, a pure object of love" (1977, p.81-82). This hidden power, she suggests, never disappears entirely. It resurfaces in cultural fantasies, in the eroticization of the bound foot, and in the feminine body itself.

Yet Kristeva's portrayal is not purely mournful. She describes modern Chinese women as embodying a form of *jouissance* that resists repression, a corporeal vitality expressed through voices that "vibrate, rhythmic and melodious, with the whole body" (Kristeva, 1977, p.65). This feminine energy occupies what she

calls ‗an empty centre, around which the society of men revolves" (1977, p.65), functioning as the unacknowledged core of patriarchal order. Through this speculative engagement with China, Kristeva articulates a vision of feminine subjectivity that unsettles phallocentric psychoanalysis and reclaims the maternal as a vital symbolic force.

This speculative vision is reinforced through Kristeva's reading of footbinding, which she interprets not simply as a sign of female subjugation but as evidence of anxiety surrounding residual maternal power. Even under Confucianism, Kristeva detects traces of a maternal logic that continues to structure social and symbolic life, suggesting that the maternal survives as a repressed yet active dimension within Chinese culture.

Conclusion

This paper has traced a movement from the castration-centred models of feminine sexuality in Freud and Lacan toward Kristeva's reconfiguration of the feminine as ambivalent, dynamic, and irreducible to lack. Classical psychoanalysis, structured by a phallocentric symbolic order, conceptualised feminine sexuality primarily through absence (whether as penis envy, castration, or exclusion from the phallic signifier). While Freud's work was groundbreaking in locating sexuality within psychic and cultural processes, it nevertheless remained constrained by the patriarchal biases of its time.

Against this framework, Cixous calls for a radical reappropriation of language and desire. Davies observes that Cixous urges women to write to claim language as their own, to take risks, and to free themselves from fear and restraint. Writing, for her, makes possible a way of loving and desiring that is not structured by lack, but by a full engagement with the other and with oneself. The self she imagines is not a fixed or unified whole, but a dynamic multiplication of differences. This critical moment involves recognising oneself as a woman while simultaneously breaking away from the ‗words, images, and metaphors' that have confined femininity within rigid male/female oppositions and defined woman only through phallogocentric frameworks (Davies, 1990, p.516). Cixous (1981) says,

> To write. An act which will not only "realize" the decensored rela tion of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being "too hot"; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing ...)-tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvelous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak. (p.880)

Kristeva's intervention complements and complicates this vision by insisting on the instability of feminine identity itself. She reminds us that woman as such does not exist and that we must think in terms of many different experiences, not one shared identity. The experiences of Chinese women show how culture, politics, and family shape femininity in unique ways. Kristeva encourages us to keep these questions open, rather than trying to find one final answer. Rather than proposing an alternative universal model, Kristeva keeps the question of woman deliberately open, warning against the universalising tendencies of feminist theory itself.

Kristeva's contribution extends beyond sexuality into the ethical domain through her formulation of *herethics*. Kristeva develops a new conception of ethics that departs radically from traditional Western moral philosophy, which regards the subject as a self-contained and autonomous individual. The West has been unanimous in conceiving of the moral agent as an autonomous and discrete individual. The self-contained subject presupposes the clear demarcation of self and other. Drawing on the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, as well as her own reflections on pregnancy and motherhood, Kristeva challenges this view. She identifies in the maternal experience, particularly during pregnancy, a unique relationship with an other who is neither completely distinct from the self nor entirely identical with it. The affection and attachment ―asoon-to-be mother feels for this not-quite-other being" (McAfee, 2000, p.77) provides Kristeva with the basis of a new ethical model, which she terms *herethics.*

Taken together, Cixous and Kristeva enable a reconfiguration of feminine sexuality that moves from castration to ambivalence, from identity to process, and from lack to relational excess. Feminine subjectivity emerges not as a stable essence

but as an ongoing negotiation between the *semiotic and the symbolic, desire and language*, *attachment and separation*. Rather than offering definitive answers to the question of woman, their work insists on keeping that question open. In doing so, it affirms a feminist philosophy committed not to closure or universality, but to plurality, ethical vulnerability, and the possibility of futures that exceed phallocentric limits.

End notes:

1. Julia Kristeva is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, psychoanalyst, literary theorist, and feminist thinker, best known for reshaping how we understand language, subjectivity, sexuality, and the maternal.
2. Translated into English as *About Chinese Women* in 1977. The book is divided into two parts: the first, titled From ‗This Side', and the second, ‗Chinese Women'.In the first part Kristeva analyses five chapters that explore how women have been defined and oppressed in Western traditions, particularly those rooted in patrilineal monotheism and psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan. She shows how these systems subjugate and represent the feminine as a *lack*. The second section offers her reflection on Chinese women.
3. Children experience pleasure from multiple erotogenic zones, oral, anal, and genital, without a fixed object or aim. In the early stages of development, no strict differentiation exists between masculine and feminine sexuality.
4. The Oedipus complex, introduced by Freud, is a stage in psychosexual development where a child experiences unconscious desires for the opposite-sex parent and rivalry with the same-sex parent. For boys, this leads to a desire for the mother and fear of castration from the father. For girls, the Electra complex involves desire for the father and competition with the mother. Resolving this complex is key to forming gender identity and integrating into societal norms.
5. The phantasy and fear that his penis, the source of both erotic pleasure and narcissistic identification, might be taken from him.
6. The unconscious, in Freudian psychoanalysis, refers to the part of the mind that holds thoughts, memories, desires, and feelings that are not accessible to conscious awareness but influence behaviour, emotions, and dreams
7. The phallus serves as a signifier of lack. It symbolises lack for both boys and girls, since both are subject to symbolic castration.
8. *The realm of language, law, and culture*.
9. A complex form of pleasure beyond satisfaction.
10. In Lacanian theory, femininity is often viewed as a masquerade not an innate essence, but a performance shaped by language, desire, and the symbolic order.
11. For Lacan, castration is not the literal or anatomical process described by Freud, but a symbolic loss experienced by both sexes. It involves relinquishing a part of one's *jouissance* in order to enter the Symbolic order and become a desired subject.
12. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the transition from need to desire marks a fundamental shift from biological necessity to symbolic longing. Need refers to basic, physical requirements such as hunger, thirst, or comfort, that can be satisfied by specific objects. However, once a need is expressed through language and addressed to another person (the Other**)** it becomes a demand. This demand is not just for the object that satisfies the need, but also for recognition, love, and acknowledgment from the Other. Yet no response can ever fully satisfy both the physical need and the

emotional longing embedded in the demand. Desire arises precisely from this gap, what remains unsatisfied and unspoken in the demand. It is not aimed at a specific object but is a continuous, unfulfilled pursuit shaped by language and the Symbolic order. In this way, the shift from need to desire reflects the movement from natural necessity to the endless, often unconscious longing that defines human subjectivity.

13. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, demand signifies the initial expression of a need or in other words a request made to the Other (a symbolic representation of the external world or authority). This demand is not a biological need. It is shaped by language and the Symbolic order. It is the foundation for desire.
14. Kristeva‘s concept of the maternal body refers not to the biological or gendered body, but to the *semiotic chora* (a pre-linguistic space of bodily drives) that underlies language and identity, where subjectivity begins to take shape before entering the symbolic order. In the earliest stages of life, the child exists within the *semiotic chora* in a state of undifferentiated bliss. At this stage, the child expresses desires through echolalia and expands its bodily drives through gestures and movements, unable to distinguish from its surroundings.
15. In order to bring the semiotic body, replete with drives, back into the structure of language, Kristeva employs two distinct strategies. First, she argues that bodily drives are not external to language but enter into it through the *semiotic* dimension of signification, which manifests in rhythms, tones, and disruptions within language itself. Second, rather than merely incorporating the body into language, she also reinscribes language into the body. That is, the logic of signification is not imposed from the outside but is already operative within the materiality of the body. For Kristeva, this body is specifically the maternal body, which both harbors and prefigures the Symbolic order.
16. Kristeva‘s notion of the *subject-in-process* offers a significant challenge to Lacanian psychoanalysis, which situates the emergence of subjectivity within the mirror stage and the paternal function, marked by the *Name of the Father*. For Kristeva, however, subjectivity begins prior to this linguistic and symbolic entry; it originates in the rhythms and affects of the maternal body. The process of becoming a subject is not anchored in symbolic identification but rooted in the *semiotic.* Thus, she displaces the father as the primary agent of psychic constitution and foregrounds the maternal function as the initial site of subject formation. (Oliver, 1993, p.13)
17. The semiotic is a pre-linguistic or pre-symbolic realm. It is characterised by sounds, rhythms and movements, such as babbling or echolalia of infants that lack formal structure or meaning.
18. The mirror stage, a central concept in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, describes a critical phase in early human development, typically occurring between six and eighteen months of age. At this stage, the infant first recognizes their reflection in a mirror and becomes fascinated by the unified image of their own body. This moment of recognition initiates the formation of the ego, as the child identifies with the external image as a representation of themselves. However, Lacan emphasizes that this identification is fundamentally misrecognition: the image offers a coherent, idealized version of the self that masks the child's internal experience of fragmentation and dependency. The ego, therefore, is not a true reflection of inner wholeness but a construct based on an external illusion. This early encounter sets the stage for the subject's entry into the Symbolic order—language, law, and social norms.
19. The child's symbiotic bond with the mother and her body must come to an end, as separation from the maternal body is essential for the formation of an individual subject. Central to understanding this process of separation is Kristeva's concept of abjection.
20. He was a French sociologist, ethnologist and sinologist.

21. [17] A matriarchal society refers to a social structure in which women, particularly mothers or elder daughter hold primary authority over kinship, property, inheritance, and lineage.
22. Matrilineal is tracing descent through the mother.
23. Matrilocal is where husbands move into the wife‘s home.
24. She deliberately frames this vision in tentative, conditional language, underscoring its speculative, even fantasmatic nature. She refers to this model as ―hypothétique (utopique? fantasmatique?)‖ (Kristeva, 1977, p. 45), making it clear that it is not a historical reconstruction per se but a symbolic and psychoanalytic possibility..
25. Her portrayal of China does not align with its actual historical reality. Her discussion of Chinese matrilocal society, she acknowledges that *it is hypothetical and fictitious.*
26. All Chinese languages are tonal, where the meaning of a word is determined not just by its sound but by the tone in which it is spoken, changing the tone changes the meaning entirely.
27. The Confucian family system, deeply rooted in patrilineal and patriarchal norms, became the foundational structure of Chinese social and political life from the early Zhou dynasty onward to the end of imperial rule.As the most influential school of thought in China, Confucianism served as the dominant social ideology across nearly every feudal dynasty from around 200 B.C.E. to the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, and remained influential under the nationalist government until 1949. The families were patrilineal, and lineage and inheritance were traced through the male line. The family‘s descent thus would be continued if it produces male offspring. Gardner says, ―It is for this reason that the birth of a son was from the earliest times in Chinese history regarded as a 'great happiness,' while the birth of a daughter was considered but a 'small happiness‘.‖ (2014, p.105) Daughters, on the other hand, were denied a fixed place in the lineage. Even among her own family, she felt homeless.
28. In the feudal symbolic system, women represent that aspect of the family and social order which must be controlled and regarded as a negative force. Foot binding is interpreted within this framework as a physical manifestation of this oppression crippling women to limit their mobility and reinforce their subjugation. The feet of young girls were bound after first being soaked in hot water, then massaged; the four toes were flexed and pressed over the sole of the foot and bandaged with a piece of cloth two inches wide and ten feet long. Suffering great pain the young girl was made to walk on her bound feet with shoes that were made progressively smaller until, after two or three years of having the bandages tightened, the foot was reduced to three- and a half to four inches. As the bound feet restricted the women's ability to even walk, no other practice is more symbolic of the subordinate role of women in traditional China. (Dorros, 1946, p.46)

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