

Tina Chanter. The following introduction and paper is forthcoming in an issue of *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of Continental Feminism*, part of which is devoted to papers presented at the 2016 London Graduate School Summer Academy.

## Introduction

The following papers were presented at Kingston University's London Graduate School Summer Academy, which focused in 2016 on Derrida and Gender. Prefatory to my own contribution, which asks how to live affirmatively as feminists, taking its inspiration from Derrida's meditations on *khōra*, I will briefly introduce the other contributions. Both my own and Ewa Ziarek's essay orbit, albeit differently, the symbolic authority of the law, problematizing the terms in which Derrida characterizes those who come to represent the institution of Women's studies within the university. Questioning Derrida's suggestion that in one of its modes Women's studies simply reproduces the law of the university, Ziarek asks if a feminist iteration of the law is ever simple, juxtaposing Kimberlé Crenshaw's parables of the law with Derrida's meditation on Kafka's parable "Before the Law." If professors of Women's studies are in danger of becoming guardians of the law according to Derrida, Ziarek suggests that there are those whose invisibility prevents them from even becoming supplicants before the law, let alone its representatives. Although in plain sight, the racialization of the law remains invisible to those guardians of the law who are too blinded by their own privilege to see it. Ziarek suggests feminists and race theorists who interrogate this invisibility inhabit a new relation to the law.

The binary law of gender is coming under increasing scrutiny by transgender scholars. Marie Draz attends to transgender theorists who resist diluting the fight against women's subordination in the proliferation and remixing of genders. Showing why we need a transgender feminism that is not gender-neutral, Draz demonstrates that Derrida's emphasis upon neutralizing gender opposition resonates with transgender theorists who diagnose hierarchies even as they push against the binary gender system. She thereby makes good on

Derrida's critique of philosophy as phallogocentric. If our very conceptual system is relentlessly and thoroughly masculinist, there can be no truth of woman that does not capitulate to the phallogocentrism of binary, hierarchical gender categories that privilege the phallus as standard bearer of truth. Only if we render neutral the hierarchical opposition between the sexes in ways that contest the cisgender origin of the phallus as founding meaning, is it possible to proliferate gender differences in a way that does not reinscribe traditional sexism. An intersectional transfeminism must not only work against heteronormative cisgender binaries, but also continue to dismantle the asymmetry between male and female, and the systemic hierarchies that structure racism, classism, and ableism.

Focusing upon Derrida's interpretation of femininity in Nietzsche, Verkek points out that while Nietzsche's and Derrida's embodiment of a feminine style might loosen up the fixity of gender in one way, in another way these male philosophers cast themselves as defenders of the cisgender system, by disciplining women to remain feminine while granting themselves the freedom to play with feminine roles, thereby becoming feminine. In doing so, they perpetuate a double standard, advocating polyvalence for themselves, while seeking to hold women to a standard of femininity that they themselves define. If woman functions as a trope for dismantling the coherence of a metaphysical system of truth, it is not enough for Nietzsche and Derrida to disrupt the binary gender system in becoming woman, while continuing to exploit their prerogative as male philosophers to dictate the options available to women. An approach to transgender is needed that both divorces gender from the material referentiality of the sex to which genders have traditionally been assigned, thereby disrupting the ostensible truths of the cisgender system for both genders, and at the same time refuses to endorse the phallus as the origin and guarantor of meaning, whereby any symbolic position is circumscribed in advance by masculine privilege.

Emily Apter's appreciation of the undoubted importance Catherine Malabou's work has acquired for a generation of scholars also addresses trans issues. She raises the question of whether the larger body of Malabou's work implicitly pursues the question of sexual difference explicitly interrogated in her book *Changing Difference*. Apter succeeds in avoiding the dual trap of either reducing Malabou to a disciple of Derrida, or critiquing her for not being completely loyal to Derrida, acknowledging Malabou's philosophical achievements, while also raising some crucial questions about the validity of her pronouncements on the question of gender and sexual difference, particularly around the issue of essence and ontology.

Derrida, along with others, Paulo Freire included, has problematized the economy of the gift, making the point that even gratitude, even gratefulness, is liable to turn a gift into its opposite, drawing the gift into the very logic of exchange from which it sought to escape. Spinning a web of images that begins with the university as a beehive, Perry Zurn reflects upon how a university incarcerates us, how it grates on us. Pressing bodies that have been told they do not belong in the cross-hatched space of its disciplinary pigeon-holes into which we slot ourselves, like the zest of lemons passing through a giant cheese grater, we come out shredded. An abrasive grid of microaggressions leaves its mark on us as we persist in trying to fit our bodies into the beehive of the university. Weaving Derrida and feminism together in their refusal to simply file away knowledge in order to preserve, classify and systematize it, in meditating on the marginal, and in allowing marginalized voices to reverberate in spaces from which they have been banished, Zurn reflects on the impurities of being grateful.

Kas Saghafi dedicates his memorial reflections to Pleshette DeArmitt, whose work on Derrida, among others, will be known to many readers of this journal. It is fitting to allow the memory of Pleshette DeArmitt, whose work has been inspirational for feminists, and for

which we remain grateful in the impossible sense that Zurn elaborates, to close this collection of essays devoted to Derrida and feminism. I leave Saghafi's piece to speak for itself.

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### Derrida and Beyond: Living Feminism Affirmatively

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That which goes beyond the oppositions “sensible” versus “intelligible” (K89), “material” versus “formal” (K99), “mythos” versus “logos” (K92), the “metaphorical” versus the “proper,” the “visible” versus “invisible,” “form” versus the “formless,” “icon” versus “paradigm” (K91), that which is neither “meaning” nor “essence” (K102), neither “object” nor “form” (K102), neither “body” nor “soul” (K103), neither “active” nor “passive” (K92). That which “gives place” (K99) to such oppositions but is not itself determined by them, that which is “[b]eyond categories, and above all beyond categorial oppositions” (K90).

I refer to *khôra*, that which troubles polarity, that which is unnameable, untranslatable, uninterpretable, yet bearer of every interpretation. That which cannot be said to properly exist as determinate, since as Derrida puts it, “There is *khôra* but the *khôra* does not exist” (K97). *Khôra* is “excess” but as an excess that is nothing— “nothing that may be” and nothing that “may be said ontologically” (K99). Strictly speaking indeterminable. Lacking in properties that would function like “those of a determinate existent” (K97), *khôra* is “[a]morphous” (K95), enigmatic.

Even the way I began is not strictly speaking accurate, indeed it is full of inaccuracy, misleading, aberrant. Errant. For it is not quite that *khôra* can be neither sensible nor intelligible, material nor formal, and so on, but rather that, “at times the *khôra* appears to be neither this nor that, at times both this and that” (K89). The only way one can begin to speak of *khôra* is in errancy, in full errant flow. Having already misspoken then is merely to have

committed an unavoidable fault, for one is always and inevitably too late to capture that which is *khôra*, which resists naming and determination but which enables, facilitates, holds in place all that is to follow, all that is to become and to be, all the oppositions Derrida names in an effort to specify how *khôra* is beyond them and yet precedes them all. It gives meaning to them all, it contains them, maintains them in their being and becoming, even in their mutual contradiction.

“To have nothing that is one’s own”—isn’t this, asks Derrida, “the condition of *khôra*?” (K105). A place, or rather a non-place, of giving. We are within the strange, impossible, non-existent economy of the gift, since the true gift lacks any economy of exchange, recognition, calculation, or symbolic payment (see WB198). The gift must not be reciprocated or acknowledged in any way, since to do so would be to draw it back into the realm of economics. To recognize, even to thank with gratitude would be to fail to allow the gift to stand as gift. It would be to draw the excess of the gift back into the circuit of meaning from which it extracted itself in being a gift. So with *khôra*, to name is always to misname, to engage in catachresis. *Khôra* is a gift that gives nothing, but “gives itself” (Derrida 1987, 175). With *khôra* we are perhaps, says Derrida, in a place “where the law of the proper no longer has any meaning” (K105). A place of “impropriety” (K97). A “neutral space” (K109), a place of a “third genus . . . a place without place, a place where everything is marked but which would be “in itself” unmarked’ (K109). A place of “effacement” (K116; see also K92 and 110). A place of “welcome” (K111), marked only by the “gift of hospitality” (K111), a place of “chaos, chasm, *khôra*” (K112), a place of “enigma” (K113), a place of the “receptacle” (K117), a place occupied by a “strange mother,” one who “gives place without engendering,” one who is “Preoriginary, *before* and outside of all generation” (K124), one who is “older than the beginning” (K126). *Khôra* requires our discontent with the orthodoxies of binary oppositions that continue to orchestrate thinking.

Derrida says, “Philosophy cannot speak philosophically of that which looks like its ‘mother,’ its ‘nurse,’ its receptacle’, or its ‘imprint-bearer.’ As such, it speaks only of the father and the son, as if the father engendered it all on his own’ (K126). His claim is a strong one. Philosophy as such—but it is of course the status of the “as such,” the question of inherence, necessity, what and what is not a priori, what and what is not transcendental, that is precisely in question. Philosophy, then, in its current configuration is in question, as phallogocentrism, as “the complicity of western metaphysics with a notion of male firstness” (C171). In “Choreographies,” his 1982 interview with Christie McDonald, Derrida refers to the matrix/womb, the container, imprint, locus of begetting (C164). Derrida does not name *khôra* here, he merely evokes *khôra*. Since *khôra* is essentially unnameable, this implicit reference is all the more palpable, as Derrida’s gestures signal *khôra* to those who will read them in a context to which *khôra* belongs in a way that is perhaps singular, given the subject matter of “Choreographies,” namely the birthing and rebirthing of feminism.

The context in which he fails to name this strange non-figure of the mother, of becoming, nurse of all beings, and yet in this very failure of language thereby succeeds in evoking *khôra* all the more effectively in her strangeness, is one in which Derrida comments affirmatively on the interrogation of the feminist movement by a dancer and a maverick. The condition that is put in question is the positive agenda that feminism assigned to itself in uncovering a silent history, a ‘silent past’ (C165), a history that had remained untold until Women’s and Gender Studies made it into the object of its study, a hidden history of women’s accomplishments that needed to be unveiled, exposed to the light of day, a history of women’s texts, art, poetry and literature, women’s scientific and philosophical accomplishments; a history of women’s names and legacies that establishes the crucially important contributions of women to all domains of knowledge, but that had lain dormant in the forgotten crevices of that which had passed for the official version of history until

feminists forged new symbolic narratives, contesting that which previously passed for the history of knowledge and discovery, imbuing these newly constructed narratives with the authority of institutions such as universities, and conferring upon them the capacity to circulate as legitimate knowledge, a knowledge that begun the proper naming of women.

Despite the incalculable and ongoing symbolic importance of such gestures, which write women's accomplishments into history for the first time, Derrida is interested in going beyond such initial gestures. It is in this project that he enlists the maverick dancer to whom Christie McDonald refers. The dancer is Emma Goldman, whose words McDonald quotes by way of opening the interview, "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution." McDonald goes on to quote Derrida's *Spurs*: "There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is <<truth>>. Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth" (S51). Woman becomes then, for Derrida, a way of naming the concealing or withdrawing of truth, and thus also of the giving of truth anew. A way of naming (and thus also necessarily misnaming) *khôra*.

Derrida is drawing upon Heidegger's well known interpretation of *aletheia* as unconcealment (*Unverborgtheit*), truth as unveiling, as that which hides itself, a meditation at the heart of his discussion of Nietzsche and Heidegger in *Spurs*. Against this background Derrida warns that the association of the feminine with truth should not be mistaken for "a woman's femininity," or "female sexuality" or "any other essentializing fetish" to which a "dogmatic philosopher" might resort (S55). Let's put this warning side by side with a text in which Derrida reflects upon the nature of women's studies as a discipline, and its relationship to the university. The transcript of a seminar held at Brown University in the Spring of 1984, "*Women in a Beehive*" refers to, among other texts, Derrida's "Before the Law," which scrupulously interrogates the nature of the authority of the law and the institution we call literature by meditating on Kafka's parable of the same title. It is a text to

which Judith Butler refers in what has become canonical for gender studies, *Gender Trouble*. Kafka's "Before the Law" concerns a man from the country who attempts to access the law, but who encounters difficulties he had "not expected" (BL183). Refused entry to the law by a doorman who, after the man from the country has stood for many years outside an open gate, through which the doorman says he must not enter, tells him it was meant only for him.

At issue here is the invisibility of the law, the way the law obscures its own origins and authority, displacing itself, suspending itself as prohibition (see BL197), perpetuating itself as it effaces its very law-like character. "The law, intolerant of its own history, intervenes as an absolutely emergent order, absolute and detached from any origin. It appears as something that does not appear as such in the course of history," says Derrida (194). The law "as such" is thoroughly intertwined with the law "as if" it were "spun from fiction," as if it were a fantasy, 'a myth, or a fable' (BL191-99). Nothing bars access to the law but the symbolic authority that accrues to the discursive prohibition issued by one who takes it upon themselves to represent the law; in recognizing the authority of the law a subject produces themselves as a subject of the law. As Butler says, "juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not 'show' once the juridical structure of politics has been established" (1990, 2). The legitimation of law naturalizes its exclusionary operations in producing subjects. In doing so it renders such exclusionary operations invisible to the very law that thereby consolidates itself, to those who make themselves into representatives of the law, who manage to legitimize themselves as subjects in the eyes of the law.

With this context in mind, we might ask ourselves what kind of event would occur with the establishing of a women's and gender studies (WGS) programme. What kind of relationship is enacted with regard to symbolic authority, what kind of displacement, if any, is thereby taking place? If "the law figures itself as a kind of place, a topos" (BL200), what



topology is enacted in the founding of a WGS programme? In *Women in a Beehive* Derrida calls for a kind of feminism that does not restrict itself, as he puts it in a phrase that evokes his discussion in “Before the Law,” to producing representatives of Women’s studies who become “guardians of the law” (WB190. See also BL188, 201). To be restrictive in this sense, would be to slot women’s studies into the university structure as it already exists, without bringing into question that structure. Women’s studies would establish itself on the model of a department, just like the traditional disciplines, such as “literature, philosophy, anthropology, etc.” (WB192), by acquiescing to the authority of the university without attempting to establish for itself “a new relation to the Law” (WB192). Derrida refers explicitly to Kafka’s “Before the Law,” making the point that even if “one were to radically deconstruct the old model of the university in the name of women’s studies, it would not be to open a territory without Law—the theme of liberation if you like” (WB192). For deconstruction itself is just “another way of writing the Law” albeit an “affirmative” way, in the same sense that Kafka’s text “Before the Law” “becomes the Law itself” even as it rewrites and “deconstructs all the systems of the Law” (WB197).

While Derrida acknowledges the symbolic importance of women’s studies having established itself as a discipline that commands a certain measure of respect, and acknowledges the difficulties still faced by women’s studies programs struggling to gain institutional sanction, he also calls for something else, something more, something that goes beyond the excavation and exposure of a silent and repressed history. The uncovering of texts, the retrieval of marginalized voices, the archival work of bringing to light those whose texts, works, and speeches have been neglected, denigrated, maligned, unappreciated, misrecognized, and misrepresented has been, and continues to be—since we are not talking in purely historically progressive terms—an indispensable first stage. This first, conservative gesture is necessary step on the way, but it is not enough because it still adheres to a

progressive view of history that assumes a telos governed by the idea that there is a truth that woman is, only one truth, a truth that will be revealed by the guardians of women's studies, the professors who have assumed its mantle of authority, who preserve, guard and police its truth. In the light of this truth professors of women's studies conduct their research and inculcate their students, so that they too can profess the truth of woman, and can in turn pass on this truth to new generations of feminists.

Derrida acknowledges some of the profound difficulties at stake, conceding that to create a truth for women's studies has been a necessary first step, creating a platform from which to launch the discipline of Women's Studies. Yet he is wary of all that this entails, not the least of which is a capitulation to all those dogmatic ideologies whose tenacious hold deconstructive philosophy has worked so hard to relentlessly interrogate, the ideology of the subject, for example. Derrida acknowledges that to insist that "*women* are subjects" is to "keep the philosophical axioms" of the "framework on which the traditional university is built," yet also concedes that to "deconstruct the notion of subjectivity" could have "dangerously reactive" as well as "radically revolutionary or deconstructive" consequences (WB193). To affirm the subjectivity of woman and to call for "equal rights" is to remain "caught in the logic of phallogocentrism," it is to rebuild "the empire of the Law." It is to acquiesce to the "notion of subject, of ego, of consciousness, soul and body, and so on" (WB193). So Derrida advocates that Women's Studies should try to "undermine the very structure [we're] trying to transform" (WB193), a gesture that carries with it a risk, precisely because it is in danger of co-optation by all the most conservative and reactive forces at work—and these are legion.

A feminism that unproblematically situates itself within the philosophical domain commanded by the law of subjectivity would, in Derrida's view remain "reactive"(C168). It would amount to "a specular reversal of masculine subjectivity even in its most self-critical

form—that is where it is nervously jealous both of itself and of its ‘proper’ objects” (C166). It is worth noting here that the narrative that academic feminism has produced for itself, a narrative about the first, second, third and fourth waves of feminism, while it no doubt commands a certain pedagogical appeal, does in fact reiterate the progressivist narrative Derrida is putting into question. What then would it mean not to remain content with only this founding gesture of women’s studies, which organizes and dissects the women’s movement into neat phases, one of which superimposes itself historically on another, as if one succeeded another, as if this were a history of straightforward supersession, not unlike the tale of Spirit that Hegel tells in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? What would it mean to go beyond establishing a canon and a linear history that would bring women’s studies into line with all the other disciplines one teaches at a university?

To go beyond this necessary condition of women’s studies would be precisely to bring it into question. In Derrida’s words, it would be to embrace “a completely other history of paradoxical laws and non-dialectical continuities, absolutely heterogeneous pockets irreducible particularities, of unheard of and incalculable sexual differences” (C167). It would mean to dream a dream of the “innumerable” (C184). It would be to move beyond the suffocating binaries of sexual difference, beyond the suggestion that there are more than two genders, for it is not a matter of inventing a third, fourth or fifth, it is not a matter of counting, for gender and sexuality are as multifarious as are individuals. The need to respect singularity is what is at stake when Derrida evokes polysexual signatures (C183). We would need to embrace the ideas that some feminists, queer and trans theorists have already put forward, which complicate progressivist narratives, straightforward linear histories, and assumptions that sexuality could be catalogued and classified according to pre-given models of temporality and spatiality.<sup>1</sup>

Derrida is calling on representatives of Women's Studies to embrace a risk, in calling for the kind of "undecideability . . . which is totally foreign to the realm of calculus, to the realm of opposition, to the realm of programming and so on" (WB195). He goes on to suggest that "you can use the force of [the term] woman" to suggest that "we could not even speak of 'woman' anymore" (WB195). On the one hand I am struck here by Derrida's extreme prescience. For he sees the need not to homogenize women, by pressing them into the mould of woman. By emphasizing the importance of singularity against the background of his critique of phallogocentrism he understands the need to give not merely gender or sexual difference, but also race, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, ableism their due. He understands the need not to get mired in these labels, the need to think beyond them, for just like any other label or category, they too can become immobilizing straightjackets for thinking if you allow them to take over. As Caribbean-American poet, essayist, activist and pedagogue June Jordan said,

I am reaching for the words to describe the difference between a common identity that has been imposed and the individual identity any one of us will choose, once she gains that chance. That difference is the one that keeps us stupid in the face of new, specific information about somebody else with whom we are supposed to have a connection because a third party, hostile to both of us, has worked it so that the two of us, like it or not, share a common enemy. *What happens beyond the idea of that enemy and beyond the consequences of that enemy?* (2003, 219)

Labels remain imperative for political struggles, making spaces where identification can happen, facilitating bonds of recognition that create solidarity, community and friendship that are vital for psychic survival. Yet there are times when labels themselves get in the way, hampering thinking, just as there are times when the terms in which recognition unfolds need to be brought into question. We need both gestures that begin to happen under the sign of

labels and the discourse of recognition, even as they exceed those labels and that exchange, and gestures that bring into question the fixity and stability of labels, and the terms on which recognition takes place, since labels themselves are often imposed on groups, and recognition can consolidate and shore up the symbolic law. Labels often derive from and are implicated in disparaging and disabling discourses, so we must mobilize and re-signify them in creative, affirmative rather than reactive, negative ways.

What complicates still more profoundly the difficulties Derrida acknowledges structurally is the affective dimension. As a feminist—and I want to explicitly acknowledge this is a different position from that of Derrida's—I want to add something that I think is indispensable. It is this: if you have suffered harassment, bullying, intimidation, marginalisation or discrimination as a woman, if you have been stalked, raped, assaulted, or psychologically abused as a woman, you will know, and you will know viscerally, precisely what is at stake in the erosion of your subjectivity. You will know that as and when your subjectivity—onto which you desperately try to cling—is eroded by forces over which you have no control, all those voices that have authorized themselves as legitimate speech, voices issued in the name of the venerable institution that western philosophy has established for itself, will sound clamorous, and your capacity to distance yourself from their noise will be severely diminished. For those voices have aired themselves over the centuries, one after another, acquiring the authority and dogma of institutional recognition, bolstering up one another. From Aristotle on, these voices have told women that we lack the capacity for rational deliberation, that our intellectual capacity is weaker than that of men (Hegel), that our moral capacity is inferior to that of men (Kant and Freud), and so on through the ages.

All of which is to say that when your subjectivity is eroded as a woman, it is no small matter, and you will discover, if you do not already know, that you can put your name to all the PhD theses or books in the world, but none of them will render you immune to those

moments that you will feel deep down inside that what is happening to you when you are assaulted as a woman whether psychically or physically is somehow your fault. And even as some distant voice will whisper that you are feeling this because of the phallogocentric legacy etched into the very fabric, history and conceptuality of society, this will not alleviate the feeling at certain times that it is still somehow *you* who have failed, and not your abusers who have failed you, failed to accord you the dignity, respect, equality and humanity you deserve as a human being to be accorded. Given everything that has been said about the functioning of the law, it should not come as a surprise that we give ourselves the law (see BL203), that the symbolic law unconsciously inculcates itself in us. It is not that Derrida does not see or know this at some level. It is that its affective operation exceeds whatever could be said or known of it.

If you identify as a woman, and you are thinking to yourself, not me, I will never be discriminated against, marginalised or abused, I will rise above it; if you are thinking that you do not recognize the debilitating, dehumanizing and desubjectifying pain of which I speak, let me take a moment to congratulate you on your good fortune, but also to remind you of a few salient facts and statistics. There is no country in the world where women's salaries are equal to men's. Statistically then, the chances of you suffering professional discrimination are extremely high. So you would be misinformed if you think you are unlikely to suffer discrimination. And you would be forgetful if you did not remember that the reason you are able to sit or speak in university lecture halls with impunity, the reason you are able to be a student or professor is because women fought for you to be able to gain admission to university, just as women gave their lives for you to be able to vote. So if you do not think of yourself as a feminist, it might be time to think again.

My point is simple, but I believe it is also vital. The affectivity of feminism means that whenever anybody says that women need to distance themselves from the

phallogocentric discourse of subjectivity, with all its metaphysical trappings, a double gesture is required, just as much as Derrida rightly points out that a double gesture is required of feminism itself. On the one hand, yes, feminism needs to be wary of recapitulating the sanctimonious discourse that places the subject, the ego, and consciousness, with all its Cartesian certainties, at the centre of the world. Yet on the other hand, feminism needs to be wary of any gesture that tries too rapidly to, if not do away with, then certainly to problematize, the subject for the simple but profoundly important reason that subjectivity is sometimes still so tenuous for women—and not only for women, but for trans subjects, minority subjects, subjects who identify as having a disability—that it is in danger if not of eradication then certainly evisceration, simply through the daily grind of institutionalised and legitimised sexism, racism, transphobia, and ableism, through the harassment and discrimination that is built into the very fabric of society and institutions, which is often invisible to those who do not experience it.

And in those moments when you are trying, and you feel like you are failing, to hold onto yourself in the face of these daily trials, when you are trying to hold yourself together as a subject, in such moments an appeal, whether deconstructive or not, to put into question your subjectivity will be less than helpful, because you will already be so fragmented, so scattered, so undermined and so disabled. You will already be trying to find the strength and will and peace of mind to hold together the subject that used to be you, and if you can just hold on long enough, with enough tenacity, and optimism, and determination to make it through, if you can just hold on that little bit longer, to see things through, you know you will become you again, although you will not quite be the you you used to be, you will have been fundamentally altered. It is precisely in those moments above all that the double gesture for which Derrida calls, the need to switch between strategies, comes into its own. For positivity and affirmation is needed above all to combat the worst of negations. Otherwise we are in

danger of colonizing negativity and reactive attitudes ourselves, and there is not much worse than that.

If you do manage to have your words taken seriously, you are liable to be dubbed aggressive, threatening, castrating, so that you will sometimes be called upon to perform a dance, a dance not unlike that of McDonald's maverick, appeasing, soothing and assuaging, even as you remain determined, forthright and hold yourself to high principles. You play the maternal, acquiescent, feminine role, even as you try with all your remaining might to pursue your own goals, to carve out your own path, your own career, to keep on writing and publishing, to keep on teaching well, to keep performing your job as a manager calmly, with humanity and empathy, with fairness and integrity.

You will see the politics of sexism, transphobia, racism, and ableism play out every day in the classroom and in the corridors of academe. By and large, female, lgbtq, and minority professors who have been able to rise up the ranks will perform the vast majority of pastoral care. You will be the ones that students approach, and you will be happy to do it, you will be called to do it, but even as you are doing it, your male, white, heteronormative, cisgender colleagues will be at their desks or in their houses, researching and writing their books and their papers, relaxing and enjoying life, having a drink, and you will not be. You will spend much of your time mopping up the messes they have left in their wake, for they have not, for the most part, been taught to deal with all those messy affects very well, so while the boys are off doing what boys do you will be depleted and exhausted, sometimes on their behalf, and you will lack the time and energy to think, write and work.

This symbolic and affective economy is real and tangible. It is the subtext, the lifeblood of our neo-liberal institutions, but remains for the most part invisible and unspoken, even as it sustains them, feeding and nourishing universities as they become increasingly centralised, dehumanising, depersonalising, and bureaucratic. Sapping our energies and



exhausting our very souls, measuring our outputs, and quantifying the words we publish, universities penalize women and minorities, who remain the lowest paid, and the harshest judged.

We cannot afford to stop doing the work of exposing and publicizing the real inequalities that remain invisible and ignored for the most part. This is why Derrida is right to call for the constant and incessant interchange of gestures. We still need to attend to and perform gestures of equality, even as we show that they do not go far enough, that we need to go beyond them. How, then, do we go beyond them even as we keep making these gestures?

You will find your own way, but here are some of the strategies I, along with a few friends, have found to be life affirming strategies that have made it possible to go on, even in the darkest times. You will conquer with the brightest splashes of colour, you will not stop running, you will bounce up and down on trampolines, higher and higher until you rise above the black, ornate, iron railings, and your head is in the trees, nearly in the clouds, you will walk coastlines and rivers, the contours of which you will allow to define the tempo and mood of your journey. You will swim and you will cycle, and no one can stop you, nothing will get in your way, you will twirl around and around, you will dance and nothing will still your feet, nothing can stem the energy of your pen, as you write your way through the world. You will love and you will live with friends who understand the importance of dancing through the world, who know that the steps of the dance matter, when they are taken and for whom, for what purpose and with what end, in what rhythm and at the behest of which choreographer.

You will spend your days and your life not with people whose energy is negative, repressive, and reactive, you will find a way to surround yourself with people who understand the joy of life, and it will be infectious, and soon everyone who wants to will be dancing along with you. You will address discrimination and marginalization wherever you

find it, not just in gendered spaces but in racialized, classed and transphobic spaces in any way you can. You will teach yourself to recognize it, you will do the work it takes not just to recognize it, but to act on it, and to change the terms of recognition, and when you fail, and you will fail, you will not give up, you will try again and again, until your failures do not predominate. This matrix of reworking, this space of the choreographies that will take shape is a non-place, and one of the names that has been given to it is *khōra*.

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<sup>i</sup> See, for example, Marie Draz, “Born this Way? Time and the Coloniality of Gender,” unpublished paper.

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