

Tremendous Pedagogies

Feminist Theory, Deconstruction and the University

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The Candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the theorization of the concept of the university and strives to imagine its future by bringing together particular threads within feminist and deconstructive thought. Through deconstructive textual analysis of three theoretical debates – on the disciplinarity of women’s studies, on resistance against the so called ‘neoliberalization’ of the university, and on narratives of feminist studies – this study seeks to establish the theoretical ground necessary for generating a university beyond its phallogentric and neoliberal predicament. This attempt is conveyed under a heading ‘tremendous pedagogies’. Part I discusses how the possibility of women’s studies can be further re-thought. This discussion triggers a critique of the discourses through which the current university is most commonly accounted for. Part II examines how deconstructive scholars theorize resistance to the so called ‘neoliberalization’ of the university. Here, the exploration proceeds through the word and the concept of ‘accountability’. Finally, drawing from these insights, Part III examines how narratives of feminist studies can help us articulate premises under which a university and its future beyond its current ‘neoliberal’ *and* ‘phallogentric’ predicament can be made possible.

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Preface

As with every journey, the one followed in this thesis began long before reaching its official starting point. It was underway and in motion before October 2012, when I enrolled on the PhD program in Cultural Studies at The School of Fine Arts, History of Art & Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds.

I began to ask questions which, retrospectively, I would call feminist, as a teenager, as I tried to divert from the paths which already seemed set for me. I pursued the answers to those questions through drawing and painting and by developing my own art practice. Throughout my secondary education, I attended additional weekend courses where I learnt the basics of the techniques and technologies in visual arts. As part of this education I was also introduced to the Western canon of art history and began to familiarize myself with the codes and grammar of art's contemporary forms and concepts. This field seemed to be one where I could develop my intellectual leanings, so I planned to go to a university and study fine arts. My future steps were not clear, but, perhaps, I could become an art teacher in one of the schools in a city near my home town in the southern part of the Czech Republic.

The first steps were soon taken. In 2003, after finishing secondary school, I began an undergraduate programme in art education in a city across the country from our town. Coming to the university felt incredibly exciting and liberating. It was an opportunity to explore and learn more about things I was beginning to be passionate about and an opportunity to be surrounded and supported by people who

would share similar interests and who could open new intellectual horizons for me. The possibilities for me felt infinite. An artist? An art teacher? A bohemian art shop owner in the romanticised south of Spain? Every door seemed open for me.

That was, at least, what I imagined. The reality was, as a matter of course, quite different. Although I signed up for ‘Spanish Language for beginners’, I only rarely made it to the 8am classes. I stopped attending after a few months. But it was not only the lack of commitment and dedication on my part which narrowed my view and my visions for the future. Very early on I became aware that my educational environment was structured by various hierarchies and power relations which were only rarely reflected or even recognized as such. Those in the educational institution I was part of - to my surprise and against my expectation - did not share my passion and did not challenge or even wish to challenge institutional inequalities across the axes of age, class, gender and race. The lack of commitment to engage with how different people experience and inhabit this world was also reflected the content of my education. Thus, for instance, although feminist scholarship had proliferated across various disciplines, and gender and feminism related courses had been taught in the Czech Republic by that time, feminist critiques were rarely reflected in this artistic and academic community.¹

Mentions of men’s and women’s different position in society, whether in relation to art, scholarship, pedagogy or policy, almost always strictly followed discourses carried by the mainstream media and the Czech intellectual and political elites which dismissed or mocked both feminism and the women’s movement. Most

¹ The Center for Gender Studies, as an independent academic site, has been established in Charles University in Prague in 1998, the undergraduate gender studies course in Masaryk University in Brno in 2004. The Master degree in Gender Studies in Charles University in Prague was established also in 2004. ‘Speciál O OBORECH: Gender studia’, *Vysokéškoly.cz* <<http://www.vysokeskoly.cz/clanek/special-o-oborech-gender-studia>> [accessed 20 January 2017].

commonly, feminism was portrayed as an artificial import from the ‘oversensitive’ West which was depicted as over-occupied with political correctness. Within this framework, feminism was represented as a powerful lobby which sought to impose new regulations and control and introduce agendas considered foreign to Czech tradition. Simultaneously, however, the emphasis feminism puts on solidarity and collective action, were not welcome for another reason. The insight that discrimination against women does not happen only on an individual level but structures legislation, media, education or intimate relations, and therefore also must be addressed on a collective and structural level, made feminism resemble another ‘movement’ ending with ‘-ism’, the condemned ‘communism’. Represented as communism’s kin, feminism seemed to oppose the key aspirations of the time, the development towards democratic and capitalist society and its exorbitant valuation and enforcement of individualism and free choice which dominated this post-Communist and newly capitalist country after the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989.² Feminism was thus depicted as being both too progressive and conversely too *regressive*.

My disturbing feeling of ‘being in discord’ with what not only the mainstream media and cultural and intellectual scene but also most of my mentors, peers, friends and family thought about how society should and could work led me to seek different visions elsewhere, to ‘follow’ feminism to what seemed to be, from the Czech vantage point, its ‘proper’ place – to the ‘West’. In particular, it was my frustration with the lack of any critical discussion in the classrooms and more

² For an analysis of how feminism and women’s movements were perceived in the Czech Republic after 1989 see Elzietta Korolczuka and Steven Saxonberg, ‘Strategies of Contentious Action: A comparative analysis of the women's movements in Poland and the Czech Republic’, *European Societies* 17 (2015), 404-422.

broadly with gender politics and the unquestioned racism directed at the Romani minority, which led me to pursue further education in the United Kingdom.

Feminists in the UK might see it as an unlikely destination for one seeking an alternative to institutional sexism and widespread racism. However, in comparison to higher education in the Czech Republic, in British academia, feminist scholarship, research on women, gender, race and sexuality, are institutionally recognized as legitimate fields of inquiry and have a much longer institutional history alongside the problems they challenge. Moving from the Czech Republic to the United Kingdom also opened for me an opportunity to be surrounded by a community of friends, scholars, artists and activists, whose political and intellectual perspectives were not so fundamentally contradictory to mine. That was something I hadn't had a chance to experience until then. Yet, as aptly described by scholars who reflect on feminism's past and present entanglement with the universities in the UK or elsewhere in the so called 'West', and as I will also explore at length throughout the thesis, the situation is not as unambiguous in the British university and society as it might have seemed from the vantage point of a student in an Eastern European country. As Clare Hemmings and other feminist scholars before her have pointed out, despite feminism's successes – or, as some believe *due* to feminism's successes – instead of proliferating, feminist political and intellectual projects seem to be rather tolerated in the British university and cunningly put aside.³

The perspectives I bring to this thesis were thus developed also along this intersection offered by the coupling of my origins in a 'post-communist country' with my new location in an established capitalist democracy. In Czech society

³ Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011).

‘feminism’ would be seen as new, unnecessary and unwelcome. In the UK where feminism has long been part of higher education, the mainstream culture, however, can present it as old, past-its-prime, and claim that we live in ‘post-patriarchal’ age. Feminism can be seen to have become redundant and is therefore also, unwelcome. This, however, is not the only axis through which I approach the problems discussed in this thesis. There are two more ‘distortions’ which I would like to call upon.

One of them is linguistic. Apparently, this thesis is not written in my mother tongue, that is, in Czech. Nor were most of the texts which I discuss throughout the following pages. Similarly, although I studied these texts mostly in English, some were originally written in French, German or Ancient Greek. This ‘linguistic distortion’, although on the one hand is undoubtedly limiting, on the other hand has also proven to be particularly useful during my wrestling with the problems pursued in this thesis. More specifically, ‘the problem of translation’, which I come into contact with regularly, seems to me to be a productive way to grasp the issues pursued in the thesis – the theoretical, political and institutional aspects of my at once feminist and deconstructive reading of the university and the crossings between these unique contexts, modalities and interventions. This ‘methodology’ gains a particularly significant role and charge when we take into account the context of ‘globalisation and virtualisation’, where terms and concepts seem to, as I argue in the thesis following work by Joan Scott and Anne Berger ‘travel without translation’ and thus tend towards homogenization and unification.⁴ Hence, I also understand ‘translating’ as a practice which seeks to resist this trend and, instead, promotes plurality and heterogeneity not only in ‘intellectual’ or ‘scholarly’ senses but also as

⁴ Anne E. Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris: A Twenty-First-Century Tale of Seasons’, *differences* 27 (2016), 1-26 (p. 10); Joan Scott, ‘Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?’, *Diogenes* 57.1. (2010), 7-14 (p. 13).

a political aim. For me, additionally, ‘translation’ also includes the question of ‘transmitting’ and ‘transferring’ and thus pedagogy and education. The ‘linguistic’ aspect, as already apparent, in my understanding, goes far beyond what we traditionally grasp as something related to language understood as a means of communication by written or spoken words.

Finally, another significant distortion which forms the way I approach my questions comes from my educational journey which, as already indicated, has been from the very start closely related to visual art. I began my studies in an art-teaching undergraduate programme in a university situated in one of the most economically deprived parts of the country. Later on, and after several unsuccessful attempts, I was finally accepted to a fine art school, an academic field highly competitive and still considered very prestigious in the Czech Republic.

I was made acutely aware of the effects of the binary ‘gender divide’ which privileges those considered men over those perceived as women, in every aspect of my studying. It struck me immediately that I had become a part of what Adrienne Rich would call the ‘man-centred university’ which was ‘a breeding ground not of humanism, but of masculine privilege’.⁵ Only a brief look around lecture theatres and art studios confirmed that becoming an artist would not be an easy path: in the art-teaching program, although attended almost exclusively by women, most of the lecturers were men. In the fine art schools, which focused on the training of professional artists rather than art teachers, the ratio between the number of men and women students was more or less equal. The professors were, however, apart from a few exceptions, again only artists who were men.⁶

⁵ Adrienne Rich, ‘Toward a Woman-Centred University’, in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose*, 2nd edn. (New York & London: W. W. Norton & company, 1995) pp. 125-156 (p. 127).

⁶ The disproportion between staff who were almost exclusively men and students who in majority were women, was, I believed, a problem specific to fine art education in the Czech Republic. This

Experiences of sexist behaviour were common in both art-teaching programmes and fine art schools. Women students were daily exposed to crude jokes, intimidation, patronising treatment, humiliation and abuse. It wasn't uncommon that teachers or administrators abused their position of power especially in relation to students' access to resources, assessment and evaluation. Of course, one might object that this could have happened in any field of study, in any university department in higher education. And, I suppose, women who studied in Czech universities would testify that it often did. Education which is in any way related to what we call 'creative arts' (such as visual arts, music or literature), however, proved to be a privileged site in this respect. These educational scenes seem to be further distorted by their 'objects' of study – by what we call 'creative arts'.

That there is something particular about the relation of literature, music or visual arts to education has been argued by many scholars. A scholar in French and comparative literature, Peggy Kamuf, who also works across the two 'schools' I situate myself within - deconstruction and feminist theory – makes a similar point. Kamuf argues that literature and the teaching of literature, much like my interpretation of visual art, has a particular relationship to the university. As Kamuf explains in her book *The division/of literature or the university in deconstruction* from 1997, the reason for this is because the question that literature poses to the university - 'what do we teach *as* literature?' – is 'touching upon some essential foundation of the university institution'. In other words, literature 'is a question

demographic feature, to my surprise, however turned out to characterize the fine art department of the University in the UK I am a part of now.

posed to the possible *limits* of this institution, that is, to the definition of what is and what is not to be comprehended within that institution's determination of itself'.⁷

Kamuf understands 'literature' as a division or divisionality. This potential is, as she argues, preserved or embodied in the institution of literature and its teaching. Teaching literature therefore represents 'an open set, and, thereby, the opening beyond itself, beyond the self'.⁸ Because of this peculiar character, literature and its teaching(s) are, on the one hand, experienced as threatening to the identity of educational institutions. Yet, on the other hand, it is literature and the teaching of literature which, according to Kamuf, represents a chance of the university's transformation. It makes the university, as she argues, 'open to the transformations of a future':

with the question of literature's institution, a space may be opened up for the remaking of institutionality in general, a space that is neither inside nor outside some pre-given (instituted) boundaries.⁹

As I see it, this interpretation can also apply to fine art education. One of the ways in which this 'divisional' potential manifested itself in the institutions where I studied was their relentless refusal to conform to the university and its orthodoxies. Fine Art departments did not follow university doctrines. There was no systemic induction and pedagogical encounters did not follow conventions characteristic of the academic environment. The departments did not have fixed guidance for assessing students' work, clearly defined programs of study, or criteria for students' admission

⁷ Peggy Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution', in *The Division / Of Literature: or the University in Deconstruction* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 1-40 (p. 3).

⁸ Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution', p. 7.

⁹ Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution', p. 4.

to study programs. My first impression of the overall mood in the schools would suggest that it was very relaxed. For instance, the encounters with teachers such as consultations, tutorials, seminars, or even examinations, took place in the pub. The art departments' non-conformist approach also impacted the accessibility of this education. It opened the university to students who would otherwise struggle to gain a university degree. It provided access to education for people who, owing to various reasons 'did not fit', and would otherwise have no chance of being accepted to any other university program.

Art schools thus did - in many respects - feel like an 'open set, as an opening beyond itself and the self' which was remaking the space of education and art beyond pre-given boundaries as Kamuf describes it. Practices and ideas could be developed which were impossible to pursue in any other department of higher education across the country. This was not only in art practice, but also regarding all methods and objects of teaching, and 'institutionality' across the curriculum. Art schools were places which in many ways acted as a counter-force against the university establishment, as a maverick which resisted orthodoxies, normativity, disciplining, as a free creative place where 'civil disobedience' or 'dissidence', creative and critical practice, could develop. It was a gap, an exception from the (educational) system, a deviation from the norm, which resisted being 'quantified' by university measures and which provided room for experimentation in art as well as life.

However, as I described earlier, the experience of being an art student distorted the optimism of this picture. Although the questions art and its teaching posed to the university did 'touch upon some essential foundation of the university institution' in significant ways as described by Kamuf, it left certain questions

untouched and thus kept some parts of its ‘foundations’ firmly in place. There was another boundary which the division of art – despite its ubiquitous presence – did not see. Although art departments did question the possible *limits* of the university, this questioning seemed to harden another *limit* which the institution failed even to recognise as one. The possibility that through the question of art’s institution ‘a space may be opened up for the *remaking* of institutionality in general, a space that is neither inside nor outside some pre-given (instituted) boundaries’, was divided by another divide or a ‘cut’ – the gender dichotomy.

To be clear, the art departments were not in accord with the ways in which gender binaries manifested themselves in the Czech mainstream culture and society of that time. It did not correlate with the gender roles and (hetero)normativity characterised by the majority of Czech society. Art students and art teachers were transgressing limits not only artistically but also in terms of traditional distribution of gender roles and sexuality. However, despite the exceptional gender-fluidity and the loosening of sexual norms – or, perhaps, because of it - sexism against women flourished extremely well in art schools. For women students, and particularly for those, myself included, who pointed at this ‘hidden limit’ of the seemingly otherwise ‘limitless’ and transgressive art department, art’s institutionalization in the university felt like a dead end and not an ‘openness towards transformation of a future’.¹⁰

Clearly, the creative arts, as Kamuf writes of literature, are not characterized only by their ‘openness’. It is not only the ““space” of the neither –nor, which is [...] not marked out by spatial or conceptual boundaries’. Although literature or the fine art school may act ‘as a reserve in excess over its past or present institutions’, they

¹⁰ On the problem of how places which are in discord with and seek to challenge the status quo, not only artistically but, as Kamuf suggests, politically and institutionally, may in fact reproduce and harden that which they sought to oppose see Jo Freeman’s ‘The Tyranny of Structurelessness’. Jo Freeman, ‘The Tyranny of Structurelessness’, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-3), 151-164.

are, still, institutions.¹¹ Just like the university, literature or fine art were founded in a particular cultural and historical context. They are, therefore, as Kamuf puts it, ‘the instituted name of a set of traditions, practices, conventions, and evaluations’.¹²

The extreme form in which institutional sexism manifested itself in the Czech art schools was undoubtedly related to the way in which this specific quality, the so called ‘openness’, was translated in its institution. In other words, the reason institutional sexism thrived so well in this environment was related to the traditions, practices, conventions, and evaluations which dominated Czech art and art education.¹³

As feminist scholars pointed out, although current Western art education proceeds in accordance with ‘post-’ or even ‘anti-’ modernism and thus has questioned some of the fundamental aspects of modernist and bourgeois concepts of art and artist, it is still dominated by this particular paradigm.¹⁴ As Griselda Pollock defines it, the modernist paradigm ‘celebrate[s] individualism by means of the idea of the self-motivating and self-creating artist who makes things which embody that peculiarly heightened and highly valued subjectivity’ and ‘whose works express both a personal sensibility and a universal condition’.¹⁵ The creative and independent individuality, furthermore, is not ‘gender neutral’ but a modernist

¹¹ Kamuf, ‘Introduction/Catachresis and Institution’, p. 5.

¹² Kamuf, ‘Introduction/Catachresis and Institution’, p. 7.

¹³ On an analysis of sexism in fine art school in Czech see Zuzana Štefková, ‘The East Side Story of (Gendered) Art: Framing Gender in Czech and Slovak Contemporary Art’, in *Czech Feminisms: Perspectives on Gender in East Central Europe*, eds. Iveta Jusová and Jiřina Šiklová (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 247-269.

¹⁴ See Pen Dalton. Pen Dalton, ‘Oedipal Dramas in Art Education’, *The International Journal of Art & Design Education* 18.3 (1999), 301-306.; *The Gendering of Art Education: Modernism, identity and critical feminism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001); Griselda Pollock, ‘“Art, Art School, Culture: Individualism after the death of the artist” (1985)’, in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), pp. 131-139; Griselda Pollock, ‘Then and now: what difference does difference make?’, *Arts & Education* 7 (2015).

¹⁵ Griselda Pollock, ‘“Art, Art School, Culture: Individualism after the death of the artist” (1985)’, in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), pp. 131-139 (p. 133).

paradigm which ‘celebrate(s) the great and creative as an exclusively masculine attribute. Man is an artist *tout court*’.¹⁶

Pollock’s analysis of the art schools in the United Kingdom which was first published in 1985 closely corresponds with the situation of art departments in the Czech Republic as I remember it. The imperatives of modernism were critically reflected by the more ‘progressive’ or ‘open-minded’ pedagogues and students (most commonly pedagogues and students who were women). Also, the names of critical thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida or even Judith Butler and Linda Nochlin were referenced in conversations and taught in seminars. However, the modernist paradigm of the artist as a supreme, independent, ‘gifted’ male individual, someone detached from its enabling conditions, a self-created ‘Master’, hadn’t been challenged in any significant way and still ruled supremely over the education of future professional artists and art teachers. The ‘new’ critical and ‘postmodern’ approaches were, in fact, accommodated by this modernist discourse. The challenges they raised were interpreted as the contradiction between artistic generations which is an idea central to the modernist conceptualization of art progression as overcoming ‘ancestors’ by the young radical and rebellious generation of (male) artists.

The modernist paradigm of art and artists seemed to be further strengthened in the context of the Czech Republic in two particular ways. Firstly, the definitions of the artist as an independent, individual radical force correlated with the values which dominated the political and cultural climate of that time. As I alluded to above, after the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989, the key aspiration was that Czechoslovakia was to move from totalitarian communism to democratic and

¹⁶ Pollock, “‘Art, Art School, Culture’, p. 131.

capitalist society. This shift was understood not only as a shift from totalitarianism to democracy, from socialism to capitalism, but also as a shift from ‘collectivism’ to ‘individualism’. The understanding of the artist as a self-motivating and self-creating individual independent from his surrounding, who expresses his subjectivity through art, correlated well with the supreme individualism of a businessman or a consumer free to express himself or herself on the new capitalist market. Nor was the revolt against ‘norms’ and ‘normativity’ performed by artists directed against the actual (capitalist) establishment. Rather, most of the art scene which felt driven to politically-engaged themes or topics joined the new ruling classes in their attacks against the values associated with the previous regime. By proxy, these artists also attacked feminism which, as described above, was portrayed by the media and the political and intellectual representation as communism’s ‘ally’ or a ‘descendant’.

The institutional sexism of art education was further strengthened by a second factor, the structural organization of art education. In the Czech Republic, fine art departments, or fine art academies, are divided into ‘ateliers’ (workshops or studios) where a small number of students study under the supervision of a principle master artist, a professional painter, sculptor or new media artist. Although ateliers are divided and officially named according to the various artistic media (e.g., ‘Atelier of Painting’ or ‘Atelier of Video Art’), and the students receive training in the skills and techniques in that particular medium, it is the persona of the master, the artist-pedagogue, which epitomized the atelier’s *raison d’être*.¹⁷

Surely, a formative encounter with a strong and mature creative individuality was something we all longed for during our studies. This encounter, however, was

¹⁷ To the question ‘In which atelier do you study?’ a student would not answer ‘the studio of painting’ but with the name of master of the studio.

set up in the context of a hierarchical paternalistic pyramidal structure, where everyone was subordinate to this single authority. An affiliation with an atelier therefore meant much more than just studying one artistic medium or another. After being selected by the pedagogue-artist in an interview, one became a disciple, a member of an enclosed and close-knit camp which embraced the views of its master. This resulted in antagonisms with other camps at the school, a rivalrous relationship with the other students in the atelier and competition with the master himself. This pedagogical scene thus animated - 'in flesh' - the model of artistic progression through contestation and overcoming of previous generations, the battle between 'the father' and the 'sons'.¹⁸

According to feminist theorist Joan Copjec, discipleship is based on the 'Oedipal battle' between masters and disciples where men occupy both sides of this transference. The model of discipleship does not react to sexual difference but rather is founded on its exclusion.¹⁹ This educational model thus, undoubtedly, might be a 'spur to creativity and intellectual development'. However, as Mignon Nixon adds in her study of art discipleship, it works only 'for boys'.²⁰ For women, 'who would occupy the role of disciple, the position of the surrogate daughter is very far from that of the surrogate son, whose rebellion is the proof and fulfilment of the patriarchal bond'.²¹

As already suggested, in the case of art education, the model of discipleship is further complicated by its 'object'; art. In the modernist paradigm, art is

¹⁸ It seems little may have changed since I studied Fine Art Higher Education in the Czech Republic. See a video produced by a women collective which calls themselves 'Čtvrtá vlna' [*The Fourth Wave*] published in January 2017: Čtvrtá vlna, 'Sexismus na českých uměleckých školách' ['Sexism in Czech Fine Art Schools'], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IalaPTetZig> [accessed 21 January 2017].

¹⁹ Joan Copjec, 'Transference: Letters and the Unknown Woman', *October* 28 (1984), 60-90 (p. 76).

²⁰ Mignon Nixon, 'Discipleship: Deference and Difference', in *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2005), pp. 13-53 (p. 26).

²¹ Nixon, 'Discipleship', p. 25.

understood as the expression of masculine creative subjectivity. Modernist artists, however, also appropriate and identify themselves with features attached to idealized femininity. This is what Nixon shows with her study of the surrealist movement. Surrealists celebrated ‘hysteria’ as a ‘sign of forbidden desire’, as a ‘source of inspiration and a model of creative expression’. As she further points out, it is, however,

one thing to identify, as an artist, with the hysteria of the other, as the male surrealists did: to turn hysterical might feel exciting or terrifying, liberating or rebellious. It is something else to lay claim, as a ‘woman artist’, to the hysteria that is culturally synonymous with being a woman.²²

In the art schools where I studied, discontent and protesting *actual* women were not perceived as artists with access to ‘sources of inspiration’ or ‘creativity’. Nor was the rebellion against paternal authority of art students who were women understood as a legitimate way of forming their artistic identity. These art students were, on the contrary, seen as immature, ungrateful, or, eventually, immoderately ambitious ‘daughters’.

In such an environment, becoming a woman artist was almost impossible as was creating relationships with other artists and art students. The idea that one would have something in common with someone else usually made the situation even worse for these students. It marked them as dependent and weak, and thus only confirmed the established assumption that they do not meet the requirements of a strong, self-determined creative individuality characteristic of ‘real’ – that is ‘man’ - artists.

²² Nixon, ‘Discipleship’, p. 32.

Similarly, attempts to create a space where the issues of what a ‘woman artist’ might be (or might become), and how her education might look, a space where these questions could be asked, thematised and discussed, was perceived as a threat to the foundations of the art school. Such art practices, were, however, not recognized as an opening beyond pre-given boundaries of art, art education and the society. They were simply not recognized as art practices. They were excluded from the realm of art and defined as art’s other, as ‘mere’ theory or politics or, even, they were sometimes declared to be an expression of militant and dangerous ideologies. My own art practice usually received such responses from my tutors and peers. My project ‘How to Become a Woman Artist?’ which aimed to problematize the institutions of art education and art, was particularly unwelcome. An attempt to problematize the question of how woman can become an artist raised very hostile reactions from administrators, some art-pedagogues and men studying in my art school.²³

To conclude, I want to highlight that my experience of studying to become a ‘woman artist’ made me aware that what might seem transformative may actually entrench patterns and modes of thinking. Surely, self-proclaimed radicality, such as that of ‘modernist artists’, doesn’t suffice to exempt one from the most entrenched biases and assumptions. More fundamentally however, trying to create *any* work which would be artistically, intellectually and also politically transformative, is an

²³ The art project ‘Feminist Action Research – How to Study to Become a Woman Artist?’ was my MA dissertation project at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Brno University of Technology in 2010. I wrote and interpreted the situation in two texts: ‘Feministický Akční Výzkum – Jak studovat na umělyni’ [‘Feminist Action Research – How to Study to Become a Woman Artist?’], in *Vizuální Gramotnost*, ed. by Katarína Přikrilová (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2010), pp. 61-75; and ‘Negativita ve studování na umělecké škole’ [‘Negativity in Studying in the Art School’], *Sociální studia* 3 (2012), 51–64.

endeavour which cannot be guaranteed despite one's good intentions, politics and ideals.

When, from this vantage point, I look back to my project 'How to become a woman artist?', I see that what I hoped for in fine art was not very dissimilar from the potential to intervene which Kamuf sees in literature. I wanted to question the limitations and dominant definitions which constrain what the university, art, and teaching art are and could be. As a way of becoming an artist, I wanted to question the 'possible *limits* of ... institution, that is, the definition of what is and what is not to be comprehended within that institution's determination of itself'. I wanted to make these institutions, as Kamuf would put it 'open to the transformations of a future', to open a space 'for the *remaking of institutionality* in general, a space that is neither inside nor outside some pre-given (instituted) boundaries'.²⁴

In that time, however, I did not know about Peggy Kamuf and her work. Those who were accompanying me in my educational journey at that time, likewise did not interpret my art project as an attempt to open art and education beyond pre-given boundaries.

It became clearer that my questions therefore applied beyond their initial limits, they could not be solved locally, but spread outwards institutionality itself, to the university as a whole and down to its very foundations.

Perspectives, however, do shift and change and there is a chance to intervene and distort the paths which have been prescribed to us. It is the belief in the possibility of influencing them which has led this project from its very beginning, slowly away from those initial paths and towards encounters which unfold, for me, the intricacies of the university and visions of its future.

²⁴ Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution', p. 4.

Introduction - Mapping Tremendous Pedagogies

This thesis contributes to the theorization of the concept of the university and strives to imagine its future by bringing together particular threads within feminist and deconstructive thought. Through deconstructive textual analysis of three theoretical debates – on the disciplinarity of women’s studies, resistance against the so called ‘neoliberalization’ of the university, and narratives of feminist studies – the study seeks to establish the theoretical ground necessary for generating a university beyond its phallogentric and neoliberal predicament. This attempt is conveyed under a heading ‘tremendous pedagogies’.¹

The combination of these two words, which themselves proliferate with multiple meanings, can be interpreted in various ways.² In this thesis, however, the

¹ The idea of ‘tremendous pedagogies’ was inspired by Joan Scott’s phrase ‘fantasy echo’. Scott employs this phrase in order to intervene in feminist historiography. As she explains, ‘fantasy echo’ is not a ‘technical term’ but ‘could become one of those clever formulations that also does useful interpretative work’. Joan W. Scott, ‘Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity’, *Critical Inquiry*, 27.2 (2001), 284-304 (p. 284-5).

² The adjective ‘tremendous’ comes from the Latin word *tremendus*, a gerundive of *tremere* which means to shake, quake or tremble. The word ‘tremendous’, which appeared in English in the seventeenth century, thus first designated something that excites trembling, or awe, something dreadful, horrible, or astonishingly terrible. In the early nineteenth century, however, it gained meanings which we are more likely to associate with this word today. It is used hyperbolically or as an intensive. Thus, if we describe something as ‘tremendous’ it implies something which ‘excites wonder on account of its magnitude or violence’. The word ‘tremendous’ is used to describe something ‘outstanding, extraordinarily great or immense’, something which is excellent or remarkable, something exciting, wonderful, fantastic and exceptional; something that is beyond what is ordinary or usual. ‘Tremendous’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/205497?redirectedFrom=tremendous#eid>> [accessed 21 January 2017]. The second word, ‘pedagogies’, is of multiple origins. It came to English through the old French word *pédagogie*, which means ‘instruction’ or ‘education’, and post-classical Latin, where the word *paedagogia* also designated ‘school’ or ‘college’. Unlike the word ‘trembling’, however, ‘pedagogy’ is not originally Latin but comes from Greek (*παιδαγωγία, paidagōgiā*). *Paidagōgiā* is composed of two words. The one which forms its prefix, *país*, is a genitive of *paidos* meaning ‘child’. The word that forms the suffix of ‘pedagogy’, ‘agogy’, comes from *agōgos*, a reduplication of *ago*, a verb meaning to ‘lead’, ‘drive’, ‘bring’ or ‘carry’. The word ‘pedagogy’ thus literally means to ‘lead a child’. The suffix ‘-agogue’ indicates a person that leads or incites one to action and is also used in

phrase ‘tremendous pedagogies’ refers to the future of the university and its practices which do not yet exist but towards which this thesis aspires to contribute. Specifically, it is a development of Jacques Derrida’s theorization of a university of the world more just than the one we have inhabited, a ‘university-to-come’, which he envisions as a ‘university without condition’ and which he describes as ‘an ultimate place for critical resistance – and more than critical – to all the powers of dogmatic and unjust appropriation’.³

Taking ‘tremendous pedagogies’ as that which the work seeks to help make possible, the various readings presented in this thesis do not therefore deal directly with pedagogical practices, feminist or otherwise.⁴ Neither does the thesis explore the university directly via, for instance, historical analysis, through an examination of documents produced by universities’ management and policy-makers or ethnographic research.⁵ This work intervenes on a theoretical level, which is similarly necessary for any substantive contribution to the generation of the so called ‘university-to-come’.

medicine where it indicates a substance that stimulates flow or secretion. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, and unlike today, the word ‘pedagogy’ was frequently used to name a place where instruction took place such as a school, college or university. Today, the word ‘pedagogy’ is used to designate instruction, discipline and training, or a system or a doctrine of introductory training and a means of guidance in both an educational and spiritual sense. Finally, the word ‘pedagogy’ is used to name ‘the art, occupation, or practice of teaching’, ‘the theory or principles of education’ or ‘a method of teaching based on such a theory’. ‘Pedagogy’, *Oxford English Dictionary* < <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/139520?redirectedFrom=pedagogy#eid> > [accessed 21 January 2017].

³ Derrida, ‘The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (Thanks to the “Humanities,” What Could Take Place Tomorrow)’, in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities*, ed. by Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-57 (p. 26).

⁴ See bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Pedagogy as a Practice of Freedom* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 1994); bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003); Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973).

⁵ See Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008). For a feminist ethnography of academia see Maria do Mar Pereira, *Power, Knowledge and Feminist Scholarship: an ethnography of academia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

Likewise, the theoretical discussions of the three themes – the disciplinarity of women’s studies, resistance to the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university, and narratives of feminist studies – in the subsequent chapters, do not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of the vast and diverse engagements, which have developed within feminist and critical theory towards these themes. Rather, the study seeks to contribute to the current debates by performing deconstructive textual close reading of groups of significant writing on each topic.

The corpus of texts examined in the subsequent chapters have been selected on two grounds. First, the works examined in this thesis focus on a particular issue in relation to the university and feminist scholarship and, second, the texts employ textual and deconstructive analysis in order to examine this issue.⁶ Specifically, the thesis examines texts which engage with a question of the possibility and its correlate, impossibility, of constituting and maintaining an institutional space where free thinking and scholarship can develop. One of the arguments made in this thesis is that the question of the possibility/impossibility of such a space does not only characterize texts produced in one particular academic field or in one historical moment. Yet, the decision to structure the study around the texts which thematise this issue has been made in response to a particular political, intellectual and institutional context. It was triggered by a proposition made by some feminist scholars who argue that feminists working within particular theoretical paradigms

⁶ The texts I examine all employ textual or deconstructive analysis, with the exception of the two texts which serve as a ‘springboard’ for it, namely the work by Wendy Brown and Bill Readings. Wendy Brown, ‘The impossibility of women’s studies’, in *Women’s Studies on the Edge*, Joan W. Scott, ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 17-38; Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

and in a particular historical moment have been reluctant to profess their faith or commitment to envision and strive for ‘better’ futures.⁷

Anne Berger, one of the feminist theorists who engages with this issue, argues that particularly within ‘America’ since 1990s,⁸ the focus of feminist scholarship either moved to different problems or ‘became intro-retrospective [...] as we can see from countless talks and publications that thematize “after-ness” in various ways: the datedness, the posthumous character, but also the enduring if problematic legacy of women’s studies, gender studies, and their queer posteriority’.⁹ As a consequence, ‘American’ feminist theory has detached itself from a ‘utopian impetus’ which other feminist intellectual and political traditions (particularly those related to the context of the 1970s, and continued and developed by scholars such as Drucilla Cornell or Elizabeth Grosz and many others), have considered to be ‘a necessary heuristic condition for theoretical and political progress’.¹⁰

An example of a feminist account to which Berger may be referring is the introduction to the collection of essays *Women’s Studies on the Edge* by American

⁷ For more on this argument within feminist theory see, for instance, Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 139. For similar argumentation within cultural theory and particularly Marxism see Nick Srnicek and Williams, Alex, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and the World without Work* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015); Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2010).

⁸ For Berger, what ‘America’ (and ‘Americanization’) signifies, is one of the questions at stake. As she explains in *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, “‘America’ ... which I am speaking is not always or not merely a territorial entity with precise boundaries. It is also a cultural zone whose contours do not simply coincide with the geopolitical entity ‘United States’, it is a phantasmatic territory [...] and it is a question of ‘vantage point’ (Anne E. Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 9). In ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, Berger poses the question whether “‘Americanization’” of the field [feminist scholarship, gender and women’s studies] amount[s] to a hegemonic and/or neocolonial pattern of extension’ (Anne E. Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris: A Twenty-First-Century Tale of Seasons’, *differences*, special issue *Transatlantic Gender Crossings*, 27.2 (2016), 1-26, p. 8.

⁹ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 129; Or, as Drucilla Cornell puts it, ‘without the aesthetic evocation of utopian possibility of feminine difference, we are left with the politics of revenge ... feminism becomes another power-seeking ideology, a reversal that inevitably reinstates the old economy’. Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 185.

feminist theorist and historian Joan Scott. In this text, Scott both enacts and critiques this detachment when she argues that the 1980s felt like ‘amazingly productive and exciting years’ while, in the following decade and particularly on the eve of the new century, ‘the sense of open-ended, utopian possibilities was fast disappearing’.¹¹

Although, as Scott continues, gender stereotypes had been to a large extent undermined and women were granted access to professional careers and experiences once closed to them, this progress, which is largely a result of the women’s movement and feminist struggles, had nonetheless become detached from feminism. Scott therefore argues that within U.S. academia and in society at large, for more than twenty years we have been witnessing ‘the turn away from feminism’.¹²

Among the factors that caused this shift Scott enumerates the worldwide success of neoliberalism, which, on the level of the university, is characterized by the restructuring of universities’ namely,

the turn to corporate models of administration and governance; [...] redefinitions of ideas as commodities and of students as fee-paying clients; the substitution of vocational ends for humanistic ones; and the emphasis on acquiring factual information rather than learning to think critically.¹³

Scott stresses that the effects of this development have not only performed some ‘cosmetic changes’ to the facades of the universities. The marketization of higher education did not only eradicate some particular views and approaches from the university curricula but is attempting to wipe out the key defining feature of the

¹¹Joan W. Scott, ‘Introduction: Feminism’s Critical Edge’, in *Women’s Studies on the Edge*, ed. by Joan W. Scott (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 1-13 (p. 3.).

¹² Scott, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

¹³ Scott, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

modern university – its association with critique. Specifically, in relation to feminist scholarship, these changes have had crucial consequences for disciplines such as women’s studies. As one of the critical forces exposing the seeming neutrality and objectivity of knowledge production, women’s studies, as Scott argues, are currently under attack.

This thesis shows that it is not only accounts by particular feminist theorists and historians in the U.S., like that of Scott, which became ‘intro-retrospective’. That Scott situates the alleged ‘turn away from feminism’ in the context of the university under neoliberalism, which is characterized by its corporatization and the commodification of knowledge, is demonstrative of this.¹⁴ As I will argue, discourses where ‘after-ness’ is being thematized as ‘the datedness’ and as a struggle with a problematic legacy of institutional forms also proliferate through and, in some cases, govern, discourses which account for the university *as a whole*.

The proposition that the possibility and the impossibility of an institutional space where we could develop free thinking and scholarship relates to the problem and the tension between ‘the part’ (or ‘the particular’) and ‘the whole’ (or ‘the general’) is significant for this thesis. First, it is a pattern which structures the study: The first section discusses the problem of im/possibility in relation to a particular

¹⁴ Scott is not the only scholar who has taken account of and critiqued these changes. That something has been happening to the ‘value’ of and in higher education, and as I will discuss particularly in the second part of my thesis, has been voiced by many scholars and not only in the U.S. Particularly what is called the ‘corporatization’ of knowledge and the ‘marketization’ of higher education, the so called ‘neoliberal university’, has been at the centre of the critiques conveyed by activists as well as critical theorists of the last three decades in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom but also the Netherlands and South Africa. In relation to protest and activism see ‘Support the New University’, <<https://www.change.org/p/university-of-amsterdam-executive-board-support-the-new-university>> [accessed 14 February 2017]; Gray, Jonathan, ‘Dutch student protest ignite movement against management of universities’, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/mar/17/dutch-student-protests-ignite-movement-against-management-of-universities>> [accessed 14 February 2017]; Reuters in Johannesburg, ‘South Africa: students attack police as protests over tuition fees escalate’, *The Guardian*, 4 October 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/04/south-africa-students-attack-police-protests-tuition-fees-escalate>> [22 March 2017].

discipline, women's studies; the second section examines it in relation to the whole, the university; whereas the third section, returning to the particular again, (narratives of feminist studies), examines how re-configurations of this question can be generated within feminist thinking. Second, in this thesis, the issue of 'the part' and 'the whole' is identified and examined as one of the key conceptual problems intrinsic to the way in which the question of the institutionalization of a space for free thinking and scholarship proceeds in the examined texts. Finally, the thesis proposes that oscillating between 'the particular' and 'the general', or 'the singular' and 'the plural', is to be used as a method which will help to re-constitute a belief that different and better worlds are possible. This is a belief from which, as Berger and others have argued, certain discourses within feminist and cultural theory have detached themselves. In other words, the thesis demonstrates that by keeping this tension open and unresolved, we can re-introduce 'utopian impetus' into the narratives about feminism's academic institutionalization and the university. By doing so, this thesis aims to be both critical and constructive. This programme is reflected in the choice of texts examined, and in the methodology of the thesis.

Methodology

In order to gesture towards 'tremendous pedagogies', the thesis deploys deconstructive textual analysis. This methodological approach is both developed through and demonstrated in the three topics discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Although deconstructive and textual analysis have been implemented by many scholars within feminist and cultural theory – and it is particularly these scholars whose work I focus on – this methodological approach is most commonly associated with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida addressed the

problem of ‘tremendousness’ and ‘trembling’¹⁵ in relation to the methodological proceedings of deconstruction on several occasions. For instance, a term *soliciter*, from the Latin *solicitare*, meaning to shake or make tremble, appears in one of his early texts, the first chapter of *Writing and Difference* entitled ‘Force and Signification’.¹⁶ Similarly, it is not uncommon among scholars to describe and speculate on Derrida’s work or deconstruction and its effects as causing ‘trembling’ or ‘tremors’,¹⁷ as something that incites ‘shaking’ or ‘solicits-into movement’,¹⁸ as something that makes one ‘shiver’ or even ‘stutter’ or ‘stammer’.¹⁹ Most recently, David Wills has taken this route as a way of speaking about Derrida and deconstruction in his talk entitled ‘the Solicitation of Deconstruction (*If I never see the English...*)’.²⁰ Kas Saghafi takes a comparable approach in his explorations of the theme of ‘remains’ in Derrida’s work.²¹

However, my approach to deconstructive textual analysis is distinct from that which, as it seems to me, is the prevailing one among scholars. It is not only that

¹⁵ There is also a particular root to the usage of the term ‘trembling’ in relation to feminist thinking. It refers to Hélène Cixous’ famous declaration ‘Let the priest tremble, we’re going to show them our sexts!’ Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, *Signs* 1.4 (1976), 875-893 (p. 885).

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘Force and Signification’, in *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1978), pp. 1-35 (p. 5); For more see Alan Bass, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 1978), pp. ix-xxiii; Sarah Wood: *Derrida’s Writing and Difference: A Reader’s Guide* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009); or David Wills, ‘The Solicitation of Deconstruction (*If I never see the English ...*)’, paper presented at the *5th Derrida Today Conference*, Goldsmiths, June 10 2016. One of the last lectures Derrida delivered was also devoted to the problem of trembling and was entitled ‘*Comment ne pas trembler*’ [‘How to Avoid Trembling?’], *Annali: Fondazione Europea del Disegno (Fondation Adami)* 2 (2006), 91-104. Furthermore, as I will discuss in the last part of the thesis, *mysterium tremendum*, which appears in one of the *Heretical Essays* by the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, triggers Derrida’s deliberations on the problem of responsibility. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Laurence Simmons, ‘Comment ne pas trembler?: Derrida’s Earthquake,’ *SubStance*, 42.3 (2013), 28-45.

¹⁸ Dawne McCance, ‘Mourning the Voice’, in *Medusa’s Ear: University Foundings from Kant to Chora L* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 1-26.

¹⁹ Peggy Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, *Textual Practice* 21.2 (2007), 251-266 (p. 253).

²⁰ David Wills, ‘The Solicitation of Deconstruction (*If I never see the English ...*)’, paper presented at the *5th Derrida Today Conference*, Goldsmiths, June 10 2016.

²¹ Kas Saghafi, ‘The Master Trembles: Sacrifice, Hierarchy, and Ontology in Derrida’s Remain(s)’, *Derrida Today* 9.2. (2016), 124-139.

such reading shakes the foundations of Western thinking by, for instance, showing that meaning is not one but always multiple. In my view, it embodies what John Mowitt calls ‘antidisciplinary potential’.²²

With regard to feminist scholarship, I understand deconstructive textual reading as being more than a useful ‘tool’ for tracing the diverse ways in which phallogentrism produces and sustains itself through unstable but still powerful dichotomies such as feminine/masculine, private/public, nature/culture or sex/gender.²³ Following the feminist thinkers Drucilla Cornell, Elizabeth Grosz and Berger, I read deconstruction and Derrida’s work as deeply interested and profoundly invested in a better future, as work which strives to reinvent the world as more just than the one we are living in.²⁴ In other words, deconstructive textual reading is one of the traditions which considers the ‘utopian impetus’ to be a necessary heuristic condition for political and intellectual progress.

Simultaneously, however, as the thesis seeks to demonstrate, deconstructive textual analysis does not embrace ‘the utopian’ as conceived in ‘general’ or ‘abstract’ terms or as something unrepresentable. Rather, it is a method which allows us to conceive of ‘the utopian’ in relation to particular ‘others’, and in relation to current political struggles. As such, deconstructive textual analysis allows, as Mowitt argues, to think through ‘how it may become possible to articulate in a fairly direct way the struggle over interpretation with the struggle to change the world of disciplinary power’.²⁵

²² John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 14.

²³ For such an interpretation of Derrida’s work see, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Displacement and the Discourse of Woman’, in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 43-72.

²⁴ Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance’, *differences*, special issue *Derrida’s Gift*, 16.3 (2005), 88-94.

²⁵ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 46.

In the thesis, this method is employed in order to provide interpretations of the concept of the university which would allow for its remaking beyond its phallogentric and neoliberal predicaments. Practically, the thesis focuses on close examination of a limited number of texts and the examination of the flows and the patters of the structural organization of their argumentation and terminological choices. The ‘close reading’ or the ‘textual analysis’ which is *deconstructive* has a particular character: it allows for 1) the identification and the tracing of structural elements within the analyzed text without reducing the multiplicity of its meanings; 2) the crossing of boundaries between different linguistic, epistemological and disciplinary registers; and 3) the development of interpretations which open possibilities for transformation within the work. The articulation and demonstration of these particular characteristics of deconstructive textual analysis can be considered to be the productive and concrete outcome of the thesis’ theoretical engagement with the question of the university.

Chapter outline

In this thesis, deconstructive textual analysis is employed on a limited number of theoretical texts which engage with the three following themes: the disciplinarity of women’s studies, the question of how can we resist the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university, and narratives of feminist studies. As it also follows from the methodological approach described above, the subsequent chapters do not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of theoretical approaches which have developed around these themes, but to closely examine groups of significant writings on each topic.

The choice of the corpus of texts examined in this thesis is related both to theoretical and methodological concerns. As argued previously, the underlying link between the chosen texts is their focus on the question of the possibility and the impossibility of an institutional space for free thinking and scholarship. The second link is that these particular texts engage with this question through textual or deconstructive textual analysis, with the exception of two texts which serve as the ground for these readings.

The thesis is divided into three sections, which each consists of two chapters, a preface, an introduction and a conclusion. The rest of this introduction further develops on how the three themes are discussed in the thesis and introduces the corpus of texts examined in each of the three sections.

The disciplinarity of women's studies

Examination of the theoretical debate on the disciplinarity of women's studies follows a premise that certain 'American' feminists began to account for the past and the present of feminism and its emergent disciplinarity in a way which Berger describes as 'intro-retrospective'. More specifically, this argument states that many contributions to the study of the institutionalization of women's studies reflect on the impossibility of its institutional enterprise, and do not allow for theorization of the premises under which institutionalization of the field can be generated.²⁶ My work seeks to contribute a particular perspective to this debate – a perspective which highlights that projects such as establishing a department of women's studies are

²⁶ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 2.

anything but simple.²⁷ In other words, I follow feminist theorists who identify the techniques through which the discourses that dominate the debate about women's studies' own emergent disciplinarity are secured and through which their status of a common sense is reproduced.²⁸ These scholars embrace the institutionalization of feminist scholarship within academia as an inherently ambiguous process with diverse or even conflicted political, theoretical and institutional effects, and conceptualize academic feminism and its disciplinary forms as having irreducibly paradoxical identities.²⁹

Using feminism's 'identity paradox' as a springboard, these interventions do not aim to create a metanarrative of feminism's institutionalization within the establishment of Western higher education. Rather, they trace assumptions, fantasies and knowledge practices through which women's studies' scholars produce narratives about the emergent disciplinarity of their field. This is done in order to identify points of intervention through which these discourses can be transformed.

In order to productively develop this debate, I closely examine texts by two scholars who have significantly contributed to it - Wendy Brown and Robin Wiegman. Brown's famous essay 'The Impossibility of Women's Studies', first published in 1997, can be considered an example *par excellence* of the 'intro-retrospective' mode many reflections within the discipline took in relation to its

²⁷ Apart from being a general invitation to take past and present relationships of feminist scholarship to the university seriously and complicate the question of institutionalization of feminism in academia, this proposition is also a particular reference. It echoes and tributes Ewa Ziarek's insightful reading of the famous seminar regarding Jacques Derrida 'Women in the Beehive' which Ziarek presented in LGS Summer Academy as the Pleshette de Armitt memorial lecture. While extensively drawing from Derrida's works, Ziarek nonetheless also questions Derrida for not paying enough attention to the particular and complex event of 'instituting women's studies' with his suggestion that one has to 'do more than simply institute a department of Women's Studies', an assumption which, as Ziarek showed, then haunts Derrida throughout the rest of the conversation. Ewa Ziarek, 'Reframing the Law: Derrida, Women's Studies, Intersectionality'. *philoSOPHIA* 7.1. (2017), 79-89.

²⁸ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 20.

²⁹ Scott, 'Introduction', p. 13.

institutional enterprise. In the thesis, the close reading of this essay serves as an introduction to the debate and a starting point for its critical and constructive re-reading. Further discussion relies on and develops work by Wiegman. Wiegman has been continually reflecting on the problem of how scholars theorize the institutionalization of women's studies in the U.S. since the late 1990s through various articles and book chapters.³⁰ There are two main reasons why Wiegman's work is central for my explorations. First, Wiegman examines the proceedings and effects of works produced by scholars who reflect on the emergent disciplinarity of women's studies. By closely examining the flows and the patterns of the structural organization of the argumentation, Wiegman identifies the techniques through which the discourses (that according to her dominate the debate) are secured and reproduced. The second reason why I decided to focus particularly on Weigman's work is related to the way in which she conveys her close examinations. Although Wiegman does not describe her methodological approach as 'deconstructive textual analysis', the proceedings and aims of her approach are very close to the method which this thesis both employs and develops. More specifically, similarly to deconstructive textual analysis, Wiegman does not take an 'oppositional' approach towards the texts she examines. Rather, working from 'within' these texts, she seeks to offer their transformative re-reading, to read the possibility into the impossibility

³⁰ These articles include: Robyn Wiegman 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', *Differences*, 11.3 (1999), 107-136; 'Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures', *New Literary History* 31.4 (2000), 805-825; 'Academic Feminism Against Itself', *NWSA Journal*, 14.2. (2002), 18-34; 'On Being in Time with Feminism', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 65.1 (2004), 161-176; 'The Possibility of Women's Studies', in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. by Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 40-60. Wiegman returned to Brown's article also in her book *Object Lessons* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012). She has also been an editor of volumes concerning the disciplinarity of women's studies: Robyn Wiegman and Diane Elam, eds. *Feminism Beside Itself* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); Robyn Wiegman, ed., *Women's Studies on Its Own* (Durham and London: Duke University, 2002).

of women's studies. By doing so, she seeks to allow for imagining feminism's 'future to be other than what we think it was or what we assume we now are'.³¹

Two propositions emerge as an outcome of Wiegman's work in relation to 'reading the possibility into the impossibility of women's studies'. First, she calls for fostering a radical relationship to the future through re-cultivating feminist utopian thought and, second, she argues for a deeper consideration of knowledge practices within the university as a whole. The rest of the first section and the second section of this thesis develop the latter named concern.

The discussion of the university proceeds in a way similar to that concerning the disciplinarity of women's studies. As a starting point, I introduce and closely examine a discourse on the university that Wiegman herself relies on, Bill Reading's influential book *The University in Ruins* published in 1997.³² My examination of this work however demonstrates that the structural organization of Readings' argumentation proceeds in a vein similar to Brown's account of women's studies and as such leads towards similar ends. I therefore propose we approach the university through paradigms which conceptualize the university differently, namely through deconstruction.

Throughout the thesis, when I focus on investigation of the university as a whole, I thus specifically examine and rely on works by scholars working within deconstruction, with the exception of Readings' text, which provides the ground for the development of my deconstructive textual reading. In the first section of the

³¹ Wiegman, 'On Being in Time', p. 167.

³² Bill Reading, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997). For other works focusing on the problem of the university which follow different theoretical traditions than deconstruction see Henry, A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); *Pedagogy And the Politics Of Hope: Theory, Culture, And Schooling: A Critical Reader* (Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press 1997); Thomas Docherty, *Universities at War* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015); *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution* (London and New York: Bloomsbury 2011).

thesis, it is work by Derrida which is at the centre of the examination. Over a period of more than 30 years Derrida wrote on the problem of education and the university (particularly concerning philosophical research, the teaching of philosophy and its relation to the university) on several occasions and for various purposes.³³ This strand of his oeuvre has also been explored by scholars working within deconstruction, as well as those working within the theory of education.³⁴

Within feminist theory,³⁵ the most influential of Derrida's texts on the university has been the transcription of a seminar at Brown University's Pembroke

³³ On Derrida's work on education see the introductions of *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?: Right to Philosophy 1* and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* which translate his *Du droit à la philosophie*. These two volumes contain most of Derrida's essays, interviews and reports on the university and education. Jacques Derrida, *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?: Right to Philosophy 1* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris, Galilée, 1990); An overview of Derrida's work on the university and pedagogy is also provided in the introduction of *Counter-institutions: Jacques Derrida and the Question of the University* by Simon Wortham (2006) or Derrida's biography by Benoît Peeters published in English in 2013. Simon Wortham, 'Introduction', in *Counter-institutions: Jacques Derrida and the question of the University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 1-24; Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

³⁴ See Simon Morgan Wortham, *Rethinking the University: Leverage and Deconstruction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); 'Auditing Culture', *parallax*, special issue *Auditing Culture*, 10.2 (2004), 3-18; *Counter-institutions: Jacques Derrida and the Question of the University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Gary Hall and Simon M. Wortham, eds., *Cultural Machine*, special issue *The University Cultural Machine*, 2 (2000) <<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/311/296>> [accessed 8 February 2017]; Peggy Kamuf, 'The University in the World it is Attempting to Think', *Culture Machine*, 6 (2004), <<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/3/2>> [accessed 8 February 2017]; 'Preface: Toward the Event', in *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. xi-xv; Gert Biesta and Michael A. Peters, 'Education, Accountability, and the Ethical Demand: Can the Democratic Potential of Accountability be Regained?', *Educational Theory* 54.3 (2004), 233-250; Michael, A. Peters and Gert Biesta, *Derrida, Deconstruction, and the Politics of Pedagogy* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009); Gert, J. J. Biesta and Denise Egéa-Kuehne, eds., *Derrida & Education* (London and New York : Routledge, 2001); Allen, Graham, ed., *The Pupils of the University*, special issue of *parallax* 40 (2006); Pericles, Peter, Trifonas, 'Auditing Education: Deconstruction and the Archiving of Knowledge as Curriculum', *Auditing Culture*, special issue *parallax* 10.2 (2004), 37-49; Peter, Pericles, Trifonas and Michael, A. Peters, eds., *Derrida, Deconstruction, and Education: Ethics of Pedagogy and Research* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Richard Rand, ed. *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Dawne McCance, 'The Architecture of Institution', in *Medusa's Ear: University Foundings from Kant to Chora L* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 27-46.

³⁵ For an account on the meaning and the history of 'feminist theory' see Teresa de Lauretis, 'Displacing Hegemonic Discourses: Reflections on Feminist Theorising in the 1980's', *Inscriptions* 3.4 (1988), 127-44; Anne E. Berger's section 'Crisis in Feminism, Feminism in Crisis' in *The Queer Turn* (126-130). On 'feminist theory' in relation to 'philosophy' and 'feminist philosophy' see Stella Sandford's 'Contradiction in terms: Feminist Theory, Philosophy and Transdisciplinarity', *Theory, Culture & Society* 32.5-6 (2015), 159-182. Another account is provided by Sarah Ahmed in her

Center for Teaching and Research on Women, which took place in 1984 and was chaired by Scott. The seminar was first published that year in *subjects/objects* under the title ‘Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida’ and addresses the question of the institutionalization of feminism in the university and the problem of its emergent disciplinarity.³⁶ However, in my thesis, I do not examine this famous seminar. The focus of my study lies in other texts where, as it seems to me, Derrida problematizes the question of the university and its disciplines in a more rigorous and complex way than in ‘Women in the Beehive’.³⁷ More specifically, I focus on essays where Derrida addresses the question which guides the whole thesis, the question of the possibility and the impossibility of an institutional space where free thinking and scholarship can develop.

These essays draw from Immanuel Kant, and particularly on one of the last works published during Kant’s lifetime, *The Conflict of the Faculties*.³⁸ This minor work of Kant’s is, as Richard Rand argues, ‘a work unknown even to many

article ‘Whose Counting?’. Ahmed proposes to grasp the issue by thinking about ‘where’ rather than ‘what’ counts as feminist theory as a way of avoiding both ‘relativism’ and ‘universalism’; Sarah Ahmed, ‘Whose Counting?’, *Feminist Theory* 1.1 (2000), 97-103.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, James Adner, Kate Doyle, and Glenn Hendler, ‘Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida’, *differences* 16.3 (2005), 139-157. Among the feminist authors who reflected on this text are Penelope Deutscher, ‘Women, and so on ...’, *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, 11.1 (2007), 101-119; Ellen, T. Armour, *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Naomi Schor, *Bad Object: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Diane Elam: *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. En Abyme* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Scott, Joan W., ‘Introduction: Feminism’s Critical Edge’, in *Women’s Studies on the Edge*, ed. by Joan Scott (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 1-13. For the most recent reflections on this seminar see already mentioned Ewa Ziarek, ‘Reframing the Law: Derrida, Women’s Studies, Intersectionality’; Tina Chanter, ‘Derrida and Beyond: Living Feminism Affirmatively’, *philoSOPHIA* 7.1. (2017), 6-17.

³⁷ Apart from McCance’s *Medusa’s Ear: University Foundings from Kant to Chora L* (2004) who offers a reading of the university with, or alongside, Derrida’s, and a chapter in Diane Elam’s book *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. En Abyme* (1993) see specifically Tuija Pulkkinen, ‘Identity and Intervention: Disciplinarity as Transdisciplinarity in Gender Studies’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 32.5-6 (2015), 183-205.

³⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979)

specialists in Kant studies’,³⁹ and has been considered to contain no important new ideas.⁴⁰ Yet, it is particularly this text which occupies a prominent position in Derrida’s reflections on the university.⁴¹ In his deliberations on how we can theorize its foundations and future, Derrida again and again returns to this book and re-opens, re-thinks and re-articulates Kant’s effort to conceptualize and negotiate a space where free thinking and scholarship would have been possible.⁴² According to my interpretation, and following Rebecca Comay, Derrida’s persistent and rigorous concern with and investment in this later and minor work of Kant is not insignificant.⁴³ It triggers not only a profound shift in the interpretations of Kant’s work by Kant scholars but also inaugurates a shift in how we understand the legacy of the Enlightenment in the context of the current globalized and virtualized world. At the same time, it puts the question of the university at the very heart of these deliberations.⁴⁴ As Kamuf argues in her commentary on Derrida’s last essay on the

³⁹ Richard Rand, ‘Preface’, in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, ed. by Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. vii-xii (p. vii).

⁴⁰ See Howard Caygill, ‘Kant and the “age of criticism”’, in *Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995), pp. 7-34.

⁴¹ Derrida’s attention to this text does not, however, imply that Kant’s *The Conflict of the Faculties* does not need further ‘deconstruction’ as for instance Peter Gilgen argues. Peter Gilgen, ‘Structures, But in Ruins Only: On Kant’s History of Reason and the University’, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 9.2 (2009), 165-193.

⁴² Derrida examines Kant’s *The Conflict of the Faculties* in two essays which I closely examine in this thesis - ‘Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality’ and ‘Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties’. It is also central to his other works on the university, namely ‘The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils’ and is mentioned in ‘Theology of Translation’, ‘Titles (for the College International de Philosophie), ‘Privilege: Justificatory Title and Introductory Remarks’. These texts are collected in Jacques Derrida *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990) translated into English as *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy?: Right to Philosophy 1* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). *The Conflict of the Faculties* is also central to Derrida’s last essay on the university, ‘The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (Thanks to the “Humanities,” What Could Take Place Tomorrow)’, in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities*, ed. by Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-57; and appears in an interview ‘Canons and Metonymies: An Interview Jacques Derrida’, in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, Richard Rand, ed. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 195-218.

⁴³ Rebeca Comey ‘Leverage’, presented at *2015 LGS Summer Academy: Right to Philosophy* (University College London, 24 June, 2015).

⁴⁴ For Derrida, the question of the university is intrinsically intertwined with that of democracy. On the question of Enlightenment-to-come see Jacques Derrida, ‘The “World” of the Enlightenment to Come (Exception, Calculation, Sovereignty)’, *Research in Phenomenology*, 33.1 (2003), 1569-1640;

university, ‘The Future of The Profession or The University without Condition ...’, in his writings on the university, Derrida strives to ‘renew the belief that the university must have a future for there to be a future of the world’.⁴⁵

In this first section which looks at the university specifically in relation to the disciplinarity of women’s studies, I examine Derrida’s essay ‘Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality’. Here, Derrida reflects on the university, drawing from Kant’s theorization of the position of philosophy within this educational institution. My reading of the essay demonstrates that the question of the possibility and the impossibility of an institutional space where free thinking and scholarship can develop is characteristic also of Kant’s theorizations. Developing this insight, I propose that we conceptualize the university as being structurally defined by this paradox. I argue that conceptualizing the university as a formation which is both ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’ may open up new theoretical ground, which is necessary to generate the university beyond its phallogentric and neoliberal predicament.

As a gesture towards rethinking the question of the disciplinarity of feminist scholarship within the university, the final chapter of this section examines how sexual difference operates within the university conceptualized as structurally defined by this paradox. In order to do so, I close read the final passage of Derrida’s essays ‘Vacant Chair’ and draw from Sarah Kofman’s work on Kant’s ethics in relation to sexual difference. My examination shows that the conceptualization of the university as both possible and impossible relies on the exclusion of the sexually

The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe’ (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992); *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
⁴⁵ Peggy Kamuf, ‘The University in the World it is Attempting to Think’. *Cultural Machine*, 6 (2004), <<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/3/2>> [accessed 8 February 2017].

other through a complex set of reversals and the appropriation of both sides of the dichotomy, the ‘feminine’ and ‘the masculine’, as they are inscribed within the phallogentric logic.

Resisting the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university

The second theme discussed in this thesis is the question of how we can theorize resistance to the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university. The problem of the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university is, however, not discussed directly but through following a particular theoretical debate on this problem. Specifically, the discussion proceeds through examination of how the definitions and uses of the word and the concept of ‘accountability’ figure in theoretical accounts which wrestle with the question of resistance to the so called ‘neoliberalization’ of the university.

Although as argued previously, my focus is work by scholars who address this problem from within deconstruction, the discussion opens with a re-reading of Readings’ book *The University in Ruins*. Specifically, I develop an argument which appears in this work, and which supplements but also contests Readings’ main proposition that the university is ‘non-referential’. This supplementary argument suggests that the university becomes ‘a bureaucratic corporation’ through implementation of a ‘generalized logic of accountability’ which reduces accountability to mere accounting and takes over every university activity.⁴⁶

Although Derrida’s work is important also for this section of the thesis, at the centre of my attention are works by other scholars working within deconstruction who have been continuously focusing on the problem of the university, such as

⁴⁶ Readings, *The University*, p. 3.

Peggy Kamuf and Samuel Weber.⁴⁷ In their work on how the university can resist ‘neoliberalization’, both Kamuf and Weber adopt an approach which is, I argue, a prevailing one among deconstructive theorists who address the problem of resisting the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university. These scholars examine and highlight the importance of developing procedures characteristic for the production and the study of ‘literature’ or ‘creative arts’ in general.⁴⁸ By examining particularly Kamuf’s work, I critically examine the pattern and the effects of this line of inquiry. My close examination demonstrates that if this line of inquiry does not position ‘the humanities’ and ‘science’ in other than oppositional terms, this approach does not allow for resistance to the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university which would not be ‘reactionary’, that is, non-effective. Following this insight, I therefore argue that the theorization of the university and its resistance to ‘neoliberalization’ must proceed differently.

⁴⁷ See Peggy Kamuf, *The Division / of Literature or the University in Deconstruction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); ‘The University in the World it is Attempting to Think’, *Culture Machine*, 6 (2004), <<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/3/2>> [accessed 8 February 2017]; ‘Accountability’, *Textual Practice*, 21.2 (2007), 251-266; ‘Preface: Toward the Event’, in *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. xi-xv; Peggy Kamuf and Dawne McCance: ‘Crossings: An Interview with Peggy Kamuf’, *Mosaic* 43.4 (2009), 227-243; Samuel Weber, ‘The Future Campus: Destiny in a virtual world’, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21.2 (1999), 151-164; Samuel Weber, ‘The Future of the Humanities: Experimenting’, *The University Cultural Machine* 2 (2000) <<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/311/296>> [accessed 8 February 2017].

⁴⁸ In addition to Kamuf and Weber, similar line of inquiry can be found also in the work of Simon Morgan Wortham, *Rethinking the University: Leverage and Deconstruction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); ‘Auditing Culture’, *parallax*, special issue *Auditing Culture*, 10.2 (2004); *Counter-institutions: Jacques Derrida and the Question of the University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Dawne McCance, ‘The Architecture of Institution’, in *Medusa’s Ear: University Foundings from Kant to Chora L* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 27-46.; Peggy Kamuf and Dawne McCance: ‘Crossings: An Interview with Peggy Kamuf’, *Mosaic* 43.4 (2009), 227-243.; Nicholas Royle, (Timothy Clark and Nicholas, Royle, eds., *The University in Ruins*, special issue of *The Oxford Literary Review*, 17.1. (1995), 3-14; Nicholas Royle, ‘The Holocaust of the Bankers’, paper presented at *the School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies*, University of Leeds, September 24 2015); Henry Miller ‘The University of Dissensus’, *The Oxford Literary Review*, 17.1. (1995), 121-144; Graham Allen ‘Transparency, incalculability, Mythologies today’, *Nottingham French Studies*, 47.2 (2008), 71-82.

At this point, my examination relies on the work of scholars who, while also working within a similar theoretical and methodological paradigm, nonetheless take a different route in their work on the university from the majority of deconstructive scholars, namely the cultural theorist John Mowitt and a historian of critical accounting and management, Keith Hoskin.⁴⁹

Mowitt's work is significant specifically for this section and the thesis in general in two respects. First, his earlier work provides a methodological framework for grasping deconstructive textual reading as 'antidisciplinary'. Importantly, as I show in this section, for Mowitt, the idea of 'antidisciplinarity' is not only meant to suggest that a transformative re-reading from 'within' a given text is possible and that it allows for political transformation, but situates this effort within Foucault's notion of 'disciplinarity'. Secondly, Mowitt's recent work, which engages with theories of resistance to the 'neoliberalization' of the university, and which itself implements a methodology of deconstructive textual reading which is 'antidisciplinary', provides a framework for my own examination of this question. More specifically, drawing from Mowitt's work, I propose that in elaborating the problem of resistance to the 'neoliberalization' of the university we, first, utilize the word and the concept of accountability and, second, do not treat accountability as a disciplinary power-knowledge technique but approach it as a textual problem. In the section that follows I introduce and further develop Peggy Kamuf's effort to found 'a counter-institution of resistance to the irresistible logic of accountability' which she calls 'accounterability'.⁵⁰ Accounterability, as I suggest, should however not be

⁴⁹ See, for instance, John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992); 'On the One Hand, and the Other', *College Literature*, 42.2. (2015), 311-336; Keith Hoskin, 'The Awful Idea of Accountability: Inscripting People into the Measurement of Object', in *Accountability, Power, Ethos and the Technologies of Managing*, ed. by R. Munor and J. Mourtsen (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1996), pp. 265-282.

⁵⁰ Kamuf, 'Accounterability', p. 251.

understood as opposing our ‘abilities’ to count or account but as a way of providing accountability with ‘resistance’ which will make accountability a useful term for our theoretical and political interventions. In the following section, I further explore the position of ‘counting’ and ‘accountability’ in Western philosophical discourse. Finally, drawing particularly from Derrida’s text, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, and Hoskin’s historical study of European elite education at the end of the eighteenth century, I propose that, despite what Readings and other current critiques of the neoliberalization of the university propose, the story of ‘counting’, ‘accounting’ and ‘accountability’ seems to be an ‘educational story’.⁵¹

Narratives of feminist studies

Drawing from the arguments developed in the section which examined the question of the possibility and the impossibility of an institutional space where free thinking and scholarship can develop in relation to the university as a whole, the third section returns to the problem of the particular. In this section, I examine two different feminist accounts. More specifically, I examine work by Clare Hemmings and Anne Berger, who explore narratives and discourses which dominate the current scene of feminist studies and try to provide their transformative re-reading from ‘within’.

There are two main reasons why I focus on the work of these two particular scholars. First, their work relies on close readings and textual analyses which seek to create effects which are ‘antidisciplinary’. Although it is particularly Berger who utilizes proceedings of deconstructive textual analysis in her exploration of gender

⁵¹ Keith Hoskin ‘The Awful Idea of Accountability: Inscribing People into the Measurement of Object’, in *Accountability, Power, Ethos and the Technologies of Managing*, ed. by R. Munor and J. Mourtisen (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1996), pp. 265-282 (p. 269).

and queer theories and their consequences for identity politics,⁵² similar patterns can be found also in Hemmings' work. More specifically, Hemmings examines what she calls the 'political grammar of Western feminist theory'. This consists of the examination of narrative forms of feminist discourses and the textual and grammatical mechanisms which underwrite them, such as the formation of binary pairs, exclusions, embedded temporality and a hierarchy of meaning and, particularly importantly for Hemmings' project, techniques of citation and textual affect.⁵³ Significant in this respect is also the thinking that guides Hemmings' work: in order to produce narratives which would be 'ethically accountable and potentially more politically transformative',⁵⁴ Hemmings suggests we tell feminist stories differently, rather than produce different stories.⁵⁵

The second reason why I examine Hemmings' and Berger's work is their common concern regarding the problem of how we can conceptualize intersections and differentiate between discourses on feminism, gender and sexuality which have 'feminist' and 'non-feminist' effects. Both Hemmings and Berger derive their explorations from a premise that 'an absolute distinction between feminist and nonfeminist mobilizations of gender discourses can or should be sustained'.⁵⁶ Yet, despite the professed impossibility of such a demarcation or, rather, because of it, they strive to conceptualize a possibility of making it.⁵⁷ It is particularly this effort

⁵² In addition to utilizing deconstructive textual reading, Berger also refers to Derrida's work, see namely chapter 'The Ends of an Idiom, or Sexual Difference in Translation' (Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 107-125.).

⁵³ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 139.

⁵⁷ For instance, Berger distinguishes between two kinds of 'postfeminism': 'First, a (post)feminism whose "immanent critique" aims less to discredit feminism than to refine its instruments of analysis', which is 'still faithful to the political and philosophical project of feminism' and, second, a postfeminism which, 'even as it assumes its genealogical link with feminism, resolutely regards the latter as inadequate and outdated'. Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 10.

which interests me in this section and which I attempt to examine specifically in relation to the question of how can we resist the ‘neoliberalization’ of the university.

Following this line of inquiry, the first chapter of this section provides a close reading of the notion of ‘amenability’ which Hemmings utilizes in order to conceptualize the intersection between feminist and nonfeminist discourses in her book *Why Stories Matter: The political grammar of feminist theory*. I examine and develop this notion specifically in relation to ethics and the notion of ‘accountability’.

As I interpret it, Hemmings proposes we proceed in a way which is intrinsically paradoxical: she suggests we take responsibility for the amenability of our narratives and we interrupt that amenability in order to make feminist storytelling more accountable which would, consequently, increase the chances of Western feminist theory bringing about political transformation. As I read it, these propositions bring a useful complication of the relationship between the narratives produced by Western feminist theory and the trends which, as identified and discussed in the previous section, dominate current universities. In order to support this line of inquiry, I propose to further radicalize the notion of accountability. Specifically, I propose we take, what I call ‘tremendous responsibilities’. I develop this conceptualization through a close examination of the opening passage of one of Derrida’s essay on the university, ‘Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties’ and of his work which addresses the problem of responsibility, *The Gift of Death*. As I show, in these two works, Derrida stresses the singular and irreplaceable character of responsibility and proposes to conceptualize responsibility as having the structure of an aporia. I argue that understanding responsibilities as ‘tremendous’ is a conceptualization of ethics that is adequate to the character and aims of feminist

interventions, which feminist theorists such as Hemmings seek to implement. Additionally, a conceptualization of ethics in this way is in contestation with the accountability movement which currently dominates the context of Western universities.

Taking ‘tremendous responsibilities’, does not, however, tackle an issue which, as I understand it, is no less important for the project of telling *feminist* stories differently – the articulation of the uses of ‘political grammars’ which would be ‘idiolectic’ to the storytelling of feminist theory.⁵⁸ The final chapter of this thesis focuses on the problem of ‘the particular’ or ‘the singular’ from this angle.

The chapter begins with a close examination of Hemmings’ essay entitled ‘Is Gender Studies Singular? Stories of Queer/Feminist Difference and Displacement’ from 2016, where Hemmings contests that there could be a single feminist theory of gender and seeks to ‘orient us toward multiplicity and away from singularity’.⁵⁹ Drawing from my close examination of her argumentation, contrary to Hemmings, I argue that we need to stop perceiving singularity as being associated only with ‘the dangers of exclusion’ and rethink the relationship between singularity and plurality as other than oppositional.⁶⁰ Following work by Berger, I argue that insisting on the singularity of feminist accounts is indispensable for feminist endeavours whose very *raison d’être* has been and continues to be ‘promotion of plurality’ and ‘the excavation of unrecognized or unwanted differences’.⁶¹

I offer two theorizations which may help us to conceptualize the relationship between singularity and plurality in other than oppositional terms – theorizations which utilize notions of translation and theatricality. The remaining part of the thesis

⁵⁸ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Hemmings, ‘Is Gender Studies Singular?’, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Hemmings, ‘Is Gender Studies Singular?’, p. 82.

⁶¹ Berger, abstract to ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’.

develops these two propositions in relation to narratives of feminist studies and the university.

The first proposition is that in order to help re-conceptualize the relation between singularity and plurality, we employ a notion of translation that is grounded in the recognition that the gap of difference between various lexicons and their grammars is, to a certain extent, unbridgeable. Drawing on the work of Berger, Derrida and Scott, I briefly outline the advantages this conceptualization implies for Hemmings' project of telling feminist stories differently.

However, it is the second notion, the notion of theatricality, which I discuss in more depth. While I particularly focus on the examination of Berger's use of theatricality within the realm of gender and queer theory and politics, the chapter opens with a debate which shows how this notion can be utilized in order to theorize resistance to the so called 'accountability regimes' which define current universities. At this point in my examination I draw from the work of scholars who argue that 'accountability regimes' are intimately bound up with 'vision' and 'visibility'. More specifically, the so called 'seeing through' and 'making what is invisible visible' are understood as the conditions, as well as the outcomes of accountability's accounting. However, also drawing from the methodological shift from disciplinary power to textual reading proposed previously, I argue that we should not grasp the relationship between the current university and its 'visions' as merely a 'disciplinary' and 'disciplining' problem.⁶² Relying on work of Marilyn Strathern, John Francis McKernan and Samuel Weber, I suggest that instead of grasping the university as a 'panoptical' institution, we conceive of it as a *scene* where visibility

⁶² For more on the proposed shift from 'disciplinarity' to 'textuality' see chapter III, 'From Disciplinary Power to Textuality', where I rely on work of John Mowitt.

is not simply opposed to invisibility but the two are interwoven by a range of more complex differences and diverse distributions of the visible, and its correlate, the invisible.⁶³

Further discussion situates this problem of ‘vision’ and ‘visibility’ in relation to the attempt to rearticulate the singularity of feminist political and theoretical endeavours outlined previously. Following Berger, I identify an ‘idiomatic feature’ of the political grammars employed by Western feminist theory. As follows from her argumentation in *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*, certain feminist and queer theories and their politics are defined by a desire to become visible, as if ‘liberation – or the struggle to achieve it – required catching the light; as if, to advance a cause one had to get spotlights to shine on it’.⁶⁴

The demand to be visible, which to a certain extent defines current feminist and queer politics, cannot, as Berger explains, be accounted for only as an implementation of the Western program of the Enlightenment. Nor it can be understood only to be a result of the ‘panoptical’ regimes which characterize contemporary societies. Berger suggests that there are two other sources to this demand. Both sources are tied to the political, intellectual and cultural specificity of ‘America’: first, it is the problematization of race by the American civil rights movements and, second, it is the articulation of ‘gender’ as a category that depends on a certain test of the visible, further perpetuated by its ‘queer’ questioning.

⁶³ For more on the shift in methodological approach I propose here see Derrida’s critique of Foucault’s treatment of the problem of in/visibility in *Discipline and Punish* (Jacques Derrida and Roudinesco, Elisabeth, ‘Choosing One’s Heritage’, in *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19 (p. 12).

⁶⁴ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p.27.

As I demonstrate with my reading, this theorization does not only provide an opportunity for further examination of how the ‘grammars’ of feminist storytelling entangle with the trends dominating current universities. More specifically, Berger’s work is not to be interpreted simply as providing evidence that the feminist and queer discourses embracing this view are, if not intrinsically, at least significantly tied to the regimes of visibility upholding accountability cultures which impose themselves with particular intensity in the context of the current ‘neoliberal’ university. Instead, I argue that Berger’s work allows us to theorize how these trends might be resisted from within feminist theory. As I show in the conclusion of the last chapter, by taking a ‘theatrical’ approach, both as a methodology and an ‘object’ of her explorations, Berger opens up a possibility for theorizing feminist resistance which will help to generate a university beyond its phallogentric and neoliberal predicaments.

The final section of the thesis concludes the study. After summarizing the concerns of the thesis, and highlighting some issues encountered in its journey, the conclusion signposts possible directions of future development.

Part I – The disciplinarity of Women’s Studies (Current Vacancies)

Chapter I – University Places

The ‘No There There’ of Women’s Studies

In ‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’ Wendy Brown wrestles with the question of how feminist academic work can and cannot take place institutionally within the context of the U.S. Higher Education system.¹ Her inquiry into institutionalized domains of feminist academic study and its intellectual premises is led from ‘within’, from a department of women’s studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Brown frames her essay by recalling an experience with curricula revision which her department undertook in the early 1990s. As she describes it, questions such as ‘what would constitute an intellectually rigorous as well as coherent program’ or ‘what a women’s studies curriculum should contain’ were questions Brown and her colleagues found themselves ‘completely stumped over’.² As Brown recalls it, this ‘practical exercise’ revealed an ‘important historical-political problem’ of the contemporary women’s studies. She expresses this unease at the opening of her essay with this question: ‘Why, when we looked closely at this

¹ ‘The impossibility of Women’s Studies’ was first published in the journal *differences* (1997). It has been republished in a collection of essay edited by Joan W. Scott *Women’s Studies on the Edge* (2008). It is this edition to which I reference in here. Brown has also included the essay in her book *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* published in 2005. All references made to Brown’s article in this thesis are to the 2008 edition.

² Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 19.

project for which we had fought so hard and which was now academically institutionalized, could we find no there there?’³

Clearly, Brown does not believe that other academic disciplines are fixed and solid entities with firm foundations. As she argues, ‘the definitions of all disciplines wobble, their identities mutate, their rules and regulations appear contingent and contestable’.⁴ Women’s studies, or, more precisely, ‘any field organized by social identity rather than by genre or inquiry’, is, nonetheless, somehow more problematic in this respect. Women’s studies is ‘especially vulnerable to losing its *raison d’être* when the coherence or boundedness of its object of study is challenged’.⁵

According to Brown, what lies behind the heightened vulnerability of women’s studies and other disciplines organized around social identity is their relationship to the world outside of the university and which is different from that of other, more traditional, academic disciplines. As Brown explains, women’s studies was founded in a direct continuation of the women’s movement. And, although she admits the profound importance of this ‘political moment in the academy’ in ‘which women’s movements challenged the ubiquitous misogyny, masculinism, and sexism in academic research, curricula, canons, and pedagogies’, she finds this heritage to be highly problematic for the contemporary women’s studies.⁶ Current women’s studies is, according to Brown - as an intellectual endeavour –significantly restricted by its political origins. The political limits its object of study to ‘social identity’ and its ‘categories’ such as ‘gender’ and ‘women’, and pre-determines its goals. The goals of women’s studies are not only ‘intellectual’ but also ‘political’ because

³ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 20.

⁴ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 23.

⁵ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 24.

⁶ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 21.

women's studies aims to contribute to gaining social justice for oppressed groups within the society.

For Brown it is therefore and clearly the dependency on the political, the circumscription of women's studies by women's movement which is behind the current unease of academic feminism. It is because of the delimitation of the 'intellectual' by what she perceives as its distinct and anterior 'other' – the political – that Brown and her colleagues could not find the so called 'there there' of their department.

Brown explains this 'trouble' women's studies experience in respect to one of the key objects this academic discipline focuses, gender. As she puts it:

paradoxically, sustaining gender as a critical, self-reflexive category rather than a normative or nominal one, and sustaining women's studies as an intellectually and institutionally radical site rather than a regulatory one – in short, refusing to allow gender studies and women's studies to be disciplined – are concerns and refusals at odds with affirming women's studies *as* a coherent field of study.⁷

As Brown understands this paradox, in order to sustain women's or gender studies as an intellectually and institutionally radical site, gender must be conceived as a critical and self-reflexive category. This demand is, however, in contradiction with the disciplinary demands, which, according to Brown, need gender to be conceived as normative and nominal. It is therefore the limitation which 'disciplined' gender (i.e. gender defined by identity politics) imposes on the intellectual work, that makes women's or gender studies impossible as an academic discipline.

⁷ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 24.

Furthermore, as Brown argues, the effects of such a circumscription are fatal not only for women's studies' intellectual mission but, at the end, also undermine political goals of the women's movement and feminism. The privileging of the political over the intellectual does not only make women's studies 'intellectually incoherent' and 'tacitly conservative' as an academic discipline ⁸ but, eventually, by

moving toward positivism ... [it] repeats the very eclipse of sociohistorical powers it was intended to challenge: these powers become fixed as categories of analysis, rendered as adjectives and nouns, rather than historicized and theorized.⁹

With her article Brown seeks to find a passage out of this intellectual, political and institutional impasse which, according to her, is caused by the merging of the two spheres (political and intellectual). The path she chooses to take is to address this problem through theory. As she recalls, this is an uncommon approach within the debates about institutionalization of feminism in academia and women's studies specifically. According to Brown, women's studies scholars who do recognize 'the problems and incoherence of the field' usually focus on formulating 'arguments on behalf of sustaining and building women's studies programs' through 'expressly political language' and, simultaneously, focus on stressing that 'women's studies programs continue to have irrefutable political value'. Although Brown does share the assumption of this argument 'to a degree', she finds it ultimately ineffective as it supports that which she identifies to be the core problem of women's studies in the first place: the privileging of the political value over the 'intellectual aporias'.¹⁰

⁸ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 21.

⁹ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 31.

¹⁰ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 33.

Instead of ‘political language’, Brown therefore chooses to lead her argumentation from the standpoint of ‘theory’. More specifically, she suggests we develop a non-positivist, theoretically rigorous and complex understanding of what she takes ‘to be one of the central problematics of feminist inquiry today and of the central conundrums facing women’s studies’, that is, ‘how to come to terms with the problem of the powers involved in the construction of subjects’.¹¹

As she stresses, the problem of a subject and its construction is, however, in itself, a kind of ‘conundrum’. The construction of subject is also ‘shaped by a paradox’:

[o]n the one hand, various marked subjects are created through very different *kinds* of power- not just different powers. That is, subjects of gender, class, nationality, race, sexuality, and so forth, are created through different histories, different mechanisms and sites of power, different discursive formations, different regulatory schemes. On the other hand, we are not fabricated as subjects in discrete units by these various powers: they do not operate on and through us independently, or linearly, or cumulatively. Insofar as subject construction does not take place along discrete lines of nationality, race, sexuality, gender, caste, class, and so forth, these powers of subject formation are not separable in the subject itself.¹²

Further in the essay Brown summarizes this point by claiming that a living subject is ‘a production that is historically complex and contingent’ and therefore exceeds ‘analytically distinct identity categories’.¹³ The subject is a kind of ‘fiction’ which always has ‘significant elements ... that exceed the accounting offered by such

¹¹ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 24.

¹² Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 24.

¹³ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 24.

lists'.¹⁴ The conclusion Brown makes from this theoretical argument for the issue of disciplinarity is that a discipline which forms its inquiry within the conceptual framing of analytically distinct identity categories (as women's studies does according to Brown) 'sacrifices the imaginative reach of theory' and is therefore inadequate for inquiry of subjectivity.¹⁵

In her article, Brown therefore seeks to suggest an alternative to this approach. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault she outlines a method of academic inquiry which would be adequate to the paradox of a construction of a subject. As she puts it,

[w]hat is needed is the practice of a historiography quite different from that expressed by notions of cause and effect, accumulation, origin, or various intersecting lines of development, a historiography that emphasizes instead contingent developments, formations that may be at odds with or convergent with each other, and trajectories of power that vary in weight for different kinds of subject.¹⁶

This 'different historiography' will, as Brown explains, have significant consequences for feminist inquiry and its position in the academia. It will problematize analytically distinct identity categories such as 'gender' and 'women' and, simultaneously, interrupt the dependence of women's studies on the political of social movements. As she puts it, it will 'add up to neither a unified and coherent notion of gender nor a firm foundation for women's studies'. Instead, this work, as Brown professes, may

¹⁴ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 31.

¹⁵ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 31.

¹⁶ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 32.

allow us to take those powerful founding and sustaining impulses of women's studies – to challenge the seamless histories, theories, literatures, and sciences featuring and reproducing a Humanism starring only Man - and harness them for another generation or two of productive, insurrectionary work.¹⁷

Following Brown's argument, one might have expected that the next step would be to suggest that the 'different historiography' inspired by Foucault should be implemented not only to the category 'subject' but also to the other categories she mentions in the essay, namely the categories of 'gender' and 'women'. One might have expected that Brown would make use of the 'imaginative reach of theory' and would venture to imagine 'gender' as 'paradoxical', as a notion which would not be 'unified and coherent' but 'historically complex and contingent' and thus would 'exceed accounting' and the logic 'of cause and effect, accumulation, origin, or various intersecting lines of development'.¹⁸

Finally, following the theoretical path she inaugurated, one might have expected that Brown would also want to re-conceptualize the institutional location where these categories were theorized and problematized, that is, women's studies. That she would want to interrupt the linear and simplistic narrative of women's studies being a direct continuation of the identity politics of social movements and would want to ponder the possibility of thinking specific institutional location of feminist academic work in a way which would not need the 'firm foundations'. Briefly put, the next step to take one might have imagined would be to use the theoretical tools she has invoked to challenge and re-define what 'gender', 'the

¹⁷ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 32.

¹⁸ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 32.

political', 'research', 'disciplinarity', 'feminism' and 'the university' were and could be.

Brown, however, takes a different path from those suggested above. She proposes we abandon the category of 'gender' and 'women', and the endeavour of imagining a possibility of a specific place within the university where this category could be problematized all together. For Brown, the intellectual work which would be able to conceive a subject and its construction in its paradoxicality cannot proceed through these particular categories. In her view, they are inadequate to 'the problem of representing and addressing the construction, the positioning, and the injuries of complex subjects [...]'.¹⁹ Consequently, nor can such a theoretical work take place within women's studies. As Brown argues, women's studies, because it has 'gender' or 'women' as its 'primary' or 'structuring' object 'will never accurately describe or trace the lines of a living subject'.²⁰

Although Brown is hesitant to offer any alternatives in her essay, as it follows from the conclusion of her article, the solution to the 'no there there' of women's studies, is not theorizing 'gender', 'women' or 'feminism' as 'contingent formations'. Neither does she want to 'fill' the space of women's studies with 'theory', nor to imagine the possibility of women's studies with the help of theory. She envisions the future of work which used to be women's studies' and feminist scholarship as follows:

[h]owever much it is shaped by feminism, this work will no longer have gender at its core and is in that sense no longer women's studies. To the extent that women's studies programs can allow themselves to be transformed - in name, content, and scope - by these and allied projects, they will be renewed

¹⁹ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 30.

²⁰ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 31.

as sites of critical inquiry and political energy. To the extent that they refuse this task and adhere to a founding and exclusive preoccupation with women and feminism, they will further entrench themselves as conservative barriers to the critical theory and research called for by the very scholarship they incited and pedagogical practices they mobilized over the past two decades.²¹

The impossibility of imagining gender and women as other than a ‘normative and nominalistic’ identity category which brings only exclusions of other categories leads Brown ‘beyond’ both ‘gender’ and ‘women’. It also leads her, as the quotation suggests, ‘beyond’ feminism as her understanding of feminism is firmly attached to the conceptualization of gender invoked above. For Brown, this theoretico-political move (*away from* gender, women and feminism) implies also an institutional clearing. Although, as Brown argues, she affirms the constitution and development of institutionalized women’s studies programs in the past, she suggests we avoid investing in further development of specific disciplinary sites and instead focus on mobility and dispersion of feminism across the university. As she argues,

The story of women’s studies suggests that our current and future contests over meaning and knowledge, and freedom and equality, should probably avoid consolidating victories in the form of new degree-granting programs in the university.²²

Practically, the effects of this move would be that feminist courses should become part of and be taught in general curriculum of other ‘disciplinary and especially

²¹ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 32.

²² Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 36.

interdisciplinary programmatic sites'.²³ She suggests we disperse women's and gender studies' content to other academic disciplines.

Surely, Brown is aware of some of the limitations of her approach (as she argues, her essay 'does not tell us what to do instead').²⁴ My unease at her account does not, however, rely on critiquing Brown for not delivering what she did not promise, i.e. concrete and practical solutions. In the conclusion, Brown argues that the task those working within women's studies should address today is 'thinking'. She argues that, in this current moment, when women's studies is losing its *raison d'être* we should, instead of developing 'new degree-granting programs', 'consider where we have been so that we might, in a Nietzschean vein, affirm our errors' which is, as she explains, 'a moment for thinking'.²⁵

It is thus not only 'Foucauldian historiography' but, as follows from her conclusion, 'thinking' as such which, for Brown, seems incompatible with women's and gender studies and its primary objects of study such as 'women' or 'gender'. It seems that for Brown, in order to 'think', one must first *clear the space*, one must *make a room* for it by wiping out 'gender', 'women' and 'feminism' as well as 'women's and gender studies' as if those categories, politics and locations were in the way of the possibility of 'thinking'. It seems as if Brown wanted to start 'from scratch', from the very 'beginning', that is, without relying on any previous feminist work for assistance.

As I interpret it, Brown's article is exemplary of how some current feminist scholars wrestle with and try to make sense of (politically, intellectually and institutionally) the presence of academic feminism and of its history. More

²³ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 35.

²⁴ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 36.

²⁵ Brown, 'The Impossibility', p. 36.

specifically, ‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’ can be read as a gesture by which one approaches this problem through attempting to separate oneself from feminism as a political, intellectual and institutional project. Brown thus belongs, as Anne E. Berger puts it, to the current of feminist scholars who ‘took a melancholic turn’ and in whose work ‘feminist theory [and, consequently, its disciplinary presence in the university] became the site and the target of endless mournful reflection on its impossibility of its own enterprise’.²⁶

For Brown, however, ‘vacating’ women’s studies in the name of ‘thinking’ is above all, a pragmatic choice.²⁷ In her view, getting rid of women’s studies will help solve the key problem she finds with women’s studies – the lack of intellectual rigor. The inclusion of feminist courses in different disciplines will, as Brown argues, prepare students for ‘thinking’. It will help, according to Brown, ‘develop background knowledges as part of students’ work in philosophy, cultural studies, literature, anthropology, or critical theory so that they would actually be armed to engage and contest the arguments they encounter in feminist theory and in postcolonial, queer, and critical race theories as well’.²⁸

Thinking the Possibilities of ‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’

‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’, since it was first published in the journal *differences* in 1997, has been re-published several times and received

²⁶ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 128. As I will develop further in the final chapter of this thesis, this critical feminist reflection which may result in a certain – if not ‘post-feminist’ but certainly ‘post’ or ‘anti’ women’s and ‘gender studies’ position, is also related to the problem of avoiding the task of articulating what is specific (i.e. singular) about feminist thinking and politics.

²⁷ It is, precisely, a retrieve to a certain ‘pragmatism’ which, according to my interpretation, is one of the key obstacles for ‘imagining’ not only disciplinary possibility of ‘academic feminism’ but also, as I will show with my analysis of Readings’ *The University in Ruins*, the university as a whole.

²⁸ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 35.

many diverse reactions and commentaries from feminist scholars. However, I do not want to downplay Brown's concerns by pronouncing them to be simply an expression of frustration resulting from a bad personal experience. Neither do I wish to dismiss her article and the issues it raises as being solely a problem of U.S. academia, where 'identity politics wars' have taken particular shape. Nor do I wish to argue that women's and gender studies have, since Brown's article was first published, overcome their troubles and consolidated their intellectual and institutional positions.²⁹ My reading follows Robyn Wiegman who suggests we take Brown's wrestling with the locations and modalities of academic feminism as a productive insight.

'The Impossibility of Women's Studies' is pivotal particularly for Wiegman's work which discusses institutionalization of feminism in the university.³⁰ In these various texts, Wiegman seeks to transform Brown's pessimism and generate a possibility of conceptualizing an institutional location where 'gender', 'women' and 'feminism' can be problematized and theorized.

To be clear, however, Wiegman does not dispute Brown's doubts about women's studies' intellectual rigor. Nor does she disagree with her observation that the field increasingly focuses on social identity and its categories. Similarly to Brown, Wiegman identifies women's studies' heterogeneity, particularly the relationship between its political and academic registers, as its

²⁹ At this point, my understanding differs from Tuija Pulkkinen's account of how we can conceive disciplinarity of academic feminism. Tuija Pulkkinen, 'Identity and Intervention: Disciplinarity as Transdisciplinarity in Gender Studies', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 32.5-6, 183-205 (p. 195).

³⁰ These articles include already mentioned 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure' from 1999, 'Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures' from 2000, 'Academic Feminism Against Itself' from 2002, 'On Being on Time with Feminism' from 2004 and 'The Possibility of Women's Studies' from 2005. Wiegman returns to Brown's article also in her book from 2012 entitled *Object Lessons*.

key defining feature. Echoing Brown, Wiegman also critiques the privileging of the political over the academic that accompanies feminism's institutionalization and the restrictions it imposes on the intellectual demands of the field. As she argues,

any attempt to write movement subjectivity as the field's origin and reproductive goal is not simply wrong headed but counterproductive precisely because it generates *as a disciplinary imperative* a certain understanding of the political (and with it the relation between theory and activism).³¹

Yet, Wiegman's reading of Brown's article brings further insight into the current debates about feminism's emergent disciplinarity. The problem Wiegman has with Brown's article is that Brown does not question key premises on which the discourses she critiques rely, but instead only reverses their assessment. Giving priority to the 'intellectual' over the 'political' as Brown does it, only confirms the two premises Brown sought to critique – firstly, the seeming anteriority of 'the political' over the 'academic', and, secondly, the fantasy of a singular and original feminism uncontaminated by 'intellectual work' and 'disciplining'.³²

As follows from Wiegman's readings, conceptualizing the institutionalization of feminism on the two premises that Brown shares with the discourse she opposes, produces, on the one hand, contradictory assessments, and on the other, similar ends. Women's studies is, at once, considered to be too theoretical and not theoretical enough, too political and not political enough. Thus, these evaluations are not only contradictory but also lead towards similar ends: academic

³¹ Robyn Wiegman, 'Academic Feminism Against Itself', *NWSA Journal*, 14.2. (2002), 18-34 (p. 20).

³² Robyn Wiegman, 'The Possibility of Women's Studies', in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. by Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 40-60 (p. 52).

institutionalization of feminism is always understood as a failure,³³ as something which is ‘bringing feminism to an end’.³⁴

Drawing on this insight, Wiegman calls discourses which follow this structural organization ‘narratives of failure’ and points out that the debate about feminism and its relationship to the university has not always proceeded under those terms. More specifically, the political (as a set of social movement ideals), and the institutional (as a project of academic transformation), were not always firmly opposed. Although, as Wiegman notes, ‘feminism, in particular, has struggled over the dynamic of knowing and doing, over the difference that each constitutes to the other, weighing one over the other, weighing one over the other [...]’,³⁵ it was only in the early 1990s when feminism began to pose ‘the academic *against* feminism’ and narrate the ‘political failure [but also intellectual failure as we can see from Brown’s essay] in academic feminism’s institutional success’.³⁶

Accounting for feminism’s emergent disciplinarity through positioning ‘politics’ or ‘feminism’ against ‘academia’ relates to the second assumption on which ‘failure’ narratives rely – a representation of feminism as a given and fully knowable entity. Brown, as well as those she critiques, seem to act as if she knows, what ‘feminism’ was. In her account, feminism seems to coincide with a political ideal of the women’s movement towards which, according to those she critiques, ‘academic feminism’ has to return or, from which, according to Brown, it has to separate itself. As follows from Wiegman’s readings of accounts of feminism’s institutionalization in the university, however, what feminism is and was, and how it

³³ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 32.

³⁴ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 23.

³⁵ Robyn Wiegman, ‘Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure’, *differences*, 11.3 (1999), 107-136, p. 109.

³⁶ Wiegman, ‘The Possibility’, p. 41.

has related and relates to the university is, precisely, irreducible to one singular narrative. Through Wiegman's readings, feminism and women's studies respectively arise as inherently conflicted and paradoxical sites. Wiegman argues that

[f]eminism itself provides no stable referent, no coherent point of origin, no comprehensive political project for the social justice needs of present change or for the intellectual horizons, methodological requirements, or pedagogical desires of the field, women's studies, that is organized in political commitment to its name.³⁷

For Wiegman it is not, therefore, the privileging of the political *per se* which is the cause of the 'growing uneasiness, often overt despair, among feminist scholars about the agenda, languages, and political consequences of feminism's academic enterprise'.³⁸ Nor does the current vulnerability of women's studies to losing its *raison d'être* arise out of feminism. Instead, for Wiegman, what is behind 'the problem of academic feminism' is 'having institutional power',³⁹ the problem academic feminism has is its own 'struggle with the forms and consequences of *academic feminism* itself'.⁴⁰

Similarly to Brown, Wiegman wants to perform what she calls a 'Foucauldian reversal', i.e. to understand disciplines '*as a consequence of acts of knowledge production*'. She argues that this approach assumes 'that efforts to define objects of study are always implicated in the construction of the knower as a subject'.⁴¹ Her grasp on this methodology, however, takes a different road from Brown. Wiegman

³⁷ Robyn, Wiegman, 'On Being in Time with Feminism', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 65.1 (2004), 161-176, p. 175.

³⁸ Wiegman, 'The Possibility', p. 40.

³⁹ Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism', p. 112.

⁴⁰ Wiegman, 'The Possibility', p. 42.

⁴¹ Wiegman, 'Academic Feminism', p. 30.

understands the two premises which uphold discourses of failure, i.e. the binary ‘political/academic’ and the related positioning of feminism ‘as a stable and knowable entity’ are, in themselves, ‘acts of knowledge production’ which produce the discipline of women’s studies and its ‘failure’ accounts. In her work Wiegman therefore wants to ‘break ranks’ with such ‘stabilizing temporal formulations that have accompanied [...] historicizing deployments of feminism’ characteristic of Brown’s and others’ narratives.⁴²

Starting from a premise that ‘feminism is not and never has been solely an entity, an action, or a movement in time’, Wiegman proposes to approach the issue of feminism’s institutionalization in academia by conceptualizing feminism as defined by ‘constitutive otherness’ and thus as being unable ‘to remain identical to itself’.⁴³ By this she means less to point out that there are various kinds of feminism or that we each understand, practice and experience feminism differently, but rather to suggest that invoking feminism as otherness (or, ‘our most challenging other’ as she puts it elsewhere) means that there is no ‘temporally singular, or coherently knowable – and knowing feminism’.⁴⁴ Feminism is, as Wiegman conceptualizes it, both more than what we use it to know and less than what we invest it to answer’.⁴⁵ Echoing historiographical work by Joan Scott, rather than seeking a knowable – let alone coherent – set of discourses, commitments and political agendas, Wiegman affirms and emphasizes discontinuities, discords and differences with and within feminism. This approach allows her to overturn the fatum of a failure inscribed in the work of Brown and those she critiques, and instead to think through the conditions of generating possibilities which are currently unimaginable within their

⁴² Wiegman, ‘On Being in Time’, p. 163.

⁴³ Wiegman, ‘On Being in Time’, p. 175.

⁴⁴ Wiegman, ‘On Being in Time’, p. 165.

⁴⁵ Wiegman, ‘On Being in Time’, p. 175.

discourses. It allows her, as she puts it, to inhabit ‘the spectre of failure that haunts contemporary academic feminism’.⁴⁶

In her text ‘Academic Feminism Against Itself’, Wiegman overturns the logic of failure narratives by examining the two concerns raised by Brown (the lack of intellectual rigor and the focus on social identity) as related to the university’s organization and economy on the whole. The lack of intellectual rigor Brown identified within women’s studies Weigman relates to the status and the political function of the humanities at the contemporary ‘transnational university’. As Wiegman points out, within feminist ‘failure narratives’, it is the humanities-based intellectual work (its problematization of subjectivity, language, representation and cultural production) which is usually accused of ‘de-politicizing’ feminism.

Wiegman, in order to disclaim this view, argues that today’s humanities are ‘less the antithesis to feminism’s political aspirations than a site’ whose lack of incorporating ‘national’ vision opens up ‘political possibilities’ for feminism and for the project of feminism’s institutionalization in the academy.⁴⁷ As she explains, in the same vein to Bill Readings’ famous account of the current university and its history, ‘the statutes of culture, language, and literacy have changed radically as the Cold War university and its reliance on the specificity of national culture has given way’.⁴⁸ The humanities, ‘[i]n the loss of its nationalist value as the productive homogenizing force for a certain kind of culturally literate citizen’ became an ‘unruly site’. The value of the humanities for feminism, Wiegman argues, rests, precisely, in its ‘unruliness’, in its failure to be instrumentalized by the university and, by proxy, the (trans)national state.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wiegman, ‘The Possibility’, p. 41.

⁴⁷ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 28.

Wiegman argues that if academic feminism wants to have a non-instrumentalized relation to knowledge production, it has to insist on its interdisciplinarity and refuse the disciplinary-based distinction which is being currently reinforced, i.e. the distinction ‘between theory and practice that reiterates the social sciences as the domain of material and social concern and the humanities as its abstract and narcissistically-obsessed other’.⁵⁰

In her deliberations on the possibilities of women’s studies Wiegman agrees also with Brown’s second objection that women’s studies puts increasing methodological and epistemological emphasis on the social identity and its categories as its proper objects of study. She develops Brown’s argument further and shows how this emphasis helps sustain the paradigm where the authentic ‘real world’ of experience coincides with the ideal of the political and of feminism, which are narrated against the academic and the intellectual. In this context the latter (intellectual) is, furthermore, understood as ‘patriarchal’. Wiegman argues,

To be in contact with “her”, no less than to be (autobiographically) “her,” has served to generate an equivalency between experience, consciousness, and critical practice that is often presented as the real world antithesis to theory’s abstracted engagements. “She” *is* the place, indeed the placeholder, of the real, and it is her self descriptions that have been made to facilitate women’s studies’ own anxious relation to institutionalization by repeating, so as to instantiate as a seemingly inaugural fact, the field’s proclaimed distinction: that women’s experience - no matter how mediated, socially constructed, complexly self-narrated, or internally differentiated – is the necessary thematic and methodological counter to patriarchal discipline.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 27.

⁵¹ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 29.

While showing and critiquing the ways in which emphasis on ‘her’ and ‘her experience’ shape the field and support the dominant narratives about feminism’s emergent disciplinarity, Wiegman, nonetheless, also recognizes that emphasizing ‘identity’, ‘consciousness’, ‘experience’ and the ‘real world’ are by no means trends which dominate only women’s studies. According to Weigman, the focus on identity is not a trend which has appeared at the university with the advent of women’s studies. Instead, it is a sign of an ‘allegiance to the foundational categories of the political that underlie not only the twentieth century women’s movement in America, but forms of subjectivity in enlightened modernity’.⁵² Wiegman therefore concludes that ‘knowledge production as we know it today is also an identitarian project’. At the university, ‘one does not simply study literature, politics, or social organization’, but one *is* a ‘biologist, philosopher, political scientist, even a critical theorist’.⁵³ As she further points out,

that these intellectual identities have come to rest in enlightened modernity on their dis-establishment from the corporeal does not make them less identitarian: rather it reveals how profoundly shaped by structures of identity is the domain of academic knowledge production on the whole.⁵⁴

Following Janet Newman, Wiegman then traces the current reinforcement of ‘identitarian’ political and ethical discourses and examines their role in the production of ‘transnational managed subject’. As she points out, it is not only women’s studies but all the humanities and qualitative social sciences are being currently reorganized in a way which reinvests ‘in human consciousness, called

⁵² Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 30.

⁵³ Weigman, ‘The Possibility’, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Weigman, ‘The Possibility’, p. 53.

critical thinking, as the domain of social responsibility and ethics' so as to forge 'a new kind of managed subject for an increasingly mobile and transnational knowledge economy'.⁵⁵

Peggy Kamuf in her article entitled 'Accountability' calls this trend the 'accountability movement'. The problem here, as the title of Kamuf's essay also suggests, is that it is not only scholarly discourses which try to intervene and challenge the unjust 'disciplinary order' and who call for 'situated knowledges, ethics, and social implementation', but also, and more increasingly, this rhetoric is mobilized by discourses which want to support and further strengthen the current *status quo*.⁵⁶ Wiegman also suggests that the instrumentalization of identity we witness in the current university does not only change this particular institution, but also plays significant role within the economics and politics on the global scale. As she explains, within the context of the U.S., it upholds

democratic progress narrative of the nation-state whereby the production and social recognition of injured identities becomes the means ... to extend its imperial mission into a seemingly ethical globalizing human rights agenda (and with it 'various forms of economic "development" that reiterate the U.S. nation-state as a transnational political formation).⁵⁷

From this perspective, the trends which, according to Wiegman, currently dominate women's studies, the humanities and social sciences respectively therefore stand less outside or against the unequal global power relations than they function as an increasingly managed and managing site which sustains and reproduce them.

⁵⁵ Wiegman, 'Academic Feminism', p. 22.

⁵⁶ Kamuf, 'Accountability'.

⁵⁷ Wiegman, 'Academic Feminism', p. 22.

Recognizing that the two concerns Brown raised in relation to women's studies are not a consequence of discipline's relation to women's movement and feminism but are, instead, part and parcel of the wider organization of knowledge production in the university, allows Wiegman to critically assess Brown's suggestion voiced in the conclusion of 'The Impossibility of Women's Studies'. As described earlier, Brown, in order to find a way out of the problems she diagnoses with women's studies, suggests we 'vacate' the institutional sites where feminism, gender and women are primary objects of study, and disperse its content and course work to other disciplines within the university. Following Wiegman's analysis, however, it becomes apparent that such a move will not rescue feminist scholarship from its troubles related to complex and problematic entanglements of subject formation and knowledge production. It will not resolve problems with *raison d'être* neither of those particular disciplinary sites, nor of disciplinarity in general. It will not make feminist scholarship less 'identitarian'. Rather, as Wiegman argues, this move will, in the end, only obscure 'the extent to which traditional disciplines themselves are identity formations'.⁵⁸

Finally, leaving women's studies will not help feminists to produce more intellectually rigorous work and produce instead the work Brown calls for: the study 'of the powers involved in the construction of subjects'. As Weigman notes, Brown is, 'paradoxically, too optimistic' in her assessment of the current situation in higher education.

The contemporary university, according to Wiegman, 'offers quite literally "no there there" for such a kind of inquiry'.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Wiegman, 'The Possibility', p. 50.

⁵⁹ Wiegman, 'The Possibility', p. 55.

When, following Brown, we wanted to call for a moment of ‘thinking’, ‘for considering where we have been so that we might, in a Nietzschean vein, affirm our errors’, we would have to, Wiegman argues, take into account ‘*this* [that is, not only women’s studies but the university’s] institutional failure’. Such considerations will, according to Wiegman, function as a preamble not for ‘dismiss[ing] women’s studies as an academic endeavour, but in order to extend the critique of identitarian belonging to the disciplinary formations that currently structure women’s studies’ own knowledge production’.⁶⁰

Following Wiegman’s arguments, but also taking the work of the two scholars who at the time of addressing the issue of the disciplinarity of women’s studies were both affiliated with women’s studies (Brown and Wiegman) as examples, it seems that women’s studies, through its analytic work, rather than stopping, enables critical examination of the problematics of knowledge production and identity. From this perspective, women’s studies, rather than an obstacle which makes ‘developing a complex model of power’ impossible – seems to facilitate such a possibility.

This is, precisely, the direction in which Wiegman's argumentation proceeds in order to envision the possibility of women’s studies. As she argues, ‘women’s studies’ does not have to, and should not, be taken ‘literally’ – that is, as if its content has to ‘be compatible, if not coterminous, with modes of inquiry, objects of study, and field domain names’. As Wiegman argues, we must ‘refuse the assumption that intellectual domains and their objects of study are referentially the same’.⁶¹ Such an assumption would only repeat mistakes Brown warns against in her

⁶⁰ Wiegman, ‘The Possibility’, p. 55.

⁶¹ Wiegman, ‘The Possibility’, p. 55.

article. Assuming that a name of a discipline is fully referential of its object of study and that this object can accurately describe or trace the lines of a living subject is to ‘sacrifice the imaginative reach of theory’ and ‘inevitably’ move

toward positivism, and in this way repeats the very eclipse of sociohistorical powers it was intended to challenge: there powers become fixed as categories of analysis, rendered as adjectives and nouns, rather than historicized and theorized.⁶²

Wiegman, therefore, provides a different conceptualization of women’s studies. Drawing on her analysis, she seeks to imagine that what is unimaginable within the framework of failure narratives – the possibility of women’s studies. In her envisioning of its ‘contingent positivity’, she conceives it as a discipline which provides ‘complex elaborations on identity and thus also re-configure[s] the organizational principles of knowledge production and practices’. This elaboration, as her argument in ‘Academic Feminisms Against Itself’ suggests, and as she further develops in a footnote to that essay,⁶³ involves several reconsiderations.

Firstly, this possibility relies on conceptualizing feminism not as a given and fully knowable entity but on understanding feminism as defined by ‘constitutive otherness’, as being unable ‘to remain identical to itself’. This, according to Wiegman, will interrupt academic feminism’s dependence on a certain conceptualization of the political and its consequent demand it makes on feminist thought.

⁶² Brown, ‘The Impossibility’, p. 31.

⁶³ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 34.

Secondly, re-conceiving feminism as defined by constitutive otherness entails a non-instrumental relation to feminist thought. Leaving the affiliation among feminism's various modalities open will enable us to re-imagine what the ongoing project of feminism's academic institutionalization might politically yield. By envisioning feminism as 'non-identical to itself', Wiegman therefore also argues for re-cultivation of feminist 'utopian thought'. As she articulates it, it will generate possibilities for feminism's 'future to be other than what we think it was or what we assume we now are'⁶⁴ and therefore, it will keep, as Wiegman invoking thought by Elizabeth Grosz argues, 'the radical openness of the future'.⁶⁵

Thirdly, the possibility of women's studies relies not only on developing a critique of knowledge practices within women's studies but also on forging a deeper consideration of the knowledge practices within the university. Specifically, the critique of 'identitarianism' as, for instance, developed by Wendy Brown in relation to knowledge practices in women's studies, must be extended to a broader critique of university knowledge practices. As Wiegman argues, this work entails not only 'the problem of making social identity into disciplines' but also 'a rethinking of the disciplines as identity formations'.⁶⁶ It involves understanding and critique of the identitarian as belonging to the disciplinary formations that structure not only women's studies internal practices of knowledge production, but the broader shape and scope of the university's organization of bodies and knowledges as well.

⁶⁴ Wiegman, 'On Being in Time', p. 167

⁶⁵ Wiegman, 'The Possibility', p. 57.

⁶⁶ Wiegman, 'Academic Feminism', p. 34.

Women's Studies at The University in Ruins

In line with Wiegman I propose we approach feminism as non-identical to itself, cultivate radical relationships to the future through utopian thought and forge a deeper consideration of knowledge practices within the university. However, I also argue that we need to recognize that 'university knowledge practices' are not a 'given' but that the way we understand what the university is and was also relies on particular narratives. We need to pay attention to and distinguish between various narratives concerning the current university and its history.

More specifically, it is not only feminists who believe that their movements and disciplines have lost their *raison d'être* and who, as a consequence, narrate their own history as a failure. Instead, this trope which has circulated around the discourse on feminism since the 1990s, resonates with and can be understood as a part of a more general trend. As Clare Hemmings shows, '[b]roader social and cultural theory reproduces the same story in relation to its own "lost politics"'.⁶⁷ To Hemmings' insight my work adds another point: the tropes of loss and failure also proliferate through and govern discourses which account for the presence and the past of the university. Particularly, accounts which dominate the discussion about the university since the 1990s seem to narrate the current university as if this institution has also reached its end.

Brown's 'The Impossibility of Women's Studies' perhaps most noticeably resembles one of the most influential texts on the university from the 1990s, Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*. In my interpretation, it is, however, less the

⁶⁷ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 7.

appeal and provocativeness of these titles, than it is the structural organization of their argument which connects the two texts.

In his book *Readings* conceptualizes the modern university as being ‘organized in view of a single regulatory idea’,⁶⁸ an idea ‘that functions as its referent, as the end and meaning of its activities’.⁶⁹ This ‘referential’ idea, although it has never been exclusively and solely a university’s property, functions as a foundation of the modern university and defines its character: the university has an autonomous structure but only in order to serve a clear function outside itself, as ‘a model for rational political community at large’.⁷⁰

As *Readings* represents the development of this educational institution, it begins as a Kantian university of reason which is later replaced by the unifying idea of culture. Culture then leads to the even ‘looser’ referent of literature which is then not replaced by a new referent but, instead, is released of its referentiality. The current university, according to *Readings*, has lost its very ‘definition’, it has lost its content, its *raison d’être*. It is not characterized by a ‘new referent’ but is empty of any idea and becomes a non-referential university of excellence. As such, the current university of excellence is a self-contained, self-referential ‘technology’. As *Readings* explains, this is a result of various pressures and changes both within the society and the university, namely of the collapse of the nation-state and the dismantling of the traditional disciplines and their axioms. The genealogy which leads toward the contemporary non-referentiality, is, however, not gradual and coherent, but the university, in its ‘final’ –that is, our – stage breaks connection with its previous stages. The present university ‘turns’ against its past. As *Readings*’ title

⁶⁸ *Readings, The University*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ *Readings, The University*, p. 54.

⁷⁰ *Readings, The University*, p. 180.

suggests and as he argues, today, we find ourselves ‘at the twilight’ of the modern university, in its ‘posthistory’.⁷¹

The aim of Readings’ book, however, is not only to account for the past and present of the university but also to think through the possibilities of how we might, in the future, ‘dwell in the ruins of the University’.⁷² In his elaborations of this question, he does not recommend we resuscitate any of the previous ideas (reason, culture or literature), neither does he recommend we re-conceptualize them. Nor does Readings seek to fill the empty university space with a ‘new idea’. Such a move would, he argues, only be a nostalgic gesture which would, like the ‘old’ ideas, bear exclusionary effects in its desire to encompass and demarcate the university’s content. Readings suggests that instead we need to employ an ‘institutional pragmatics’ which relies - on the contrary - on behaving ‘without *alibis*, without “elsewheres,” [without] a truth whose name might be invoked to save us from responsibility for our actions’.⁷³ In his view, if ‘students and teachers are ready to abandon nostalgia and try to move in ways that keep questions open’ we can turn the ‘dereferentialization of the posthistorical university to good advantage’. ‘Dereferentialization’ will allow ‘considerable room for manoeuvre’. As he specifies further in his text, this would consist in developing new ‘Thought’, a ‘thinking without identity and unity’, which, in return, will, refigure ‘the University not as grounded upon and reinforced by common cultural identity but as ‘a locus of dissensus’.⁷⁴

Readings conceptualizes this place where ‘thought takes place beside thought, where thinking is a shared process without identity or unity’, the so called

⁷¹ Readings, *The University*, p. 7.

⁷² Readings, *The University*, p. 172-178.

⁷³ Readings, *The University*, p. 168.

⁷⁴ Readings, *The University*, p. 192.

‘community of dissensus’, through contrasting it to the community of consensus. As he argues, traditionally, ‘the community’ has been conceptualized as being ‘founded upon the autonomous decision of individuals to communicate with each other as subjects of a state’.⁷⁵ In this sense, ‘the modern community is inherently universalizing, since it is based upon the assumption of a shared *human* capacity for their essential humanity’ and the possibility of transparent communication.⁷⁶ The possibility of the autonomous subject is conditioned by one’s subjection to the state by which a subject’s singularity and difference are reduced. In the process of ‘becoming a citizen’, she is therefore torn away from her personal and singular experience, sexual difference and specificity, ethnicity, history, context as well as from her connections to others, from her dependencies and obligations towards the society.

Against this traditional view, Readings introduces another conceptualization, a community which will be ‘heteronomous rather than autonomous’. This means that the community of dissensus will not be ‘grounded in sharing commonalities (such as ethnicity or language)’ but, as already argued, in sharing ‘without identity or unity’. This implies, as Readings further develops, that, in the community of dissensus, there are ‘no consensual answers’. The community of dissensus does not ‘pretend to have the power to name and determine itself’. It is a ‘sharing which does not establish an autonomous collective subject who is authorized to say “we” and to terrorize those who do not, or cannot, speak in that “we”’.⁷⁷

In order to further elucidate that such a community might have looked like, Readings, at the end of his book, turns to Kant. The community of dissensus, he

⁷⁵ Readings, *The University*, p. 181.

⁷⁶ Readings, *The University*, p. 182.

⁷⁷ Readings, *The University*, p. 187.

argues, 'would have to be understood on the model of *dependency* rather than emancipation'. This is because,

we are, bluntly speaking, addicted to others, and no amount of twelve-stepping will allow us to overcome that dependency, to make it the object of a fully autonomous subjective consciousness. [...]. [W]e cannot emancipate ourselves from our dependency on others. We remain in this sense immature, dependent - despite all of Kant's impatience.⁷⁸

As Readings envisions it, a community grounded in the concept of dependency rather than in the Kantian model of emancipation, will turn the university's 'ruins' to our advantage because it will fail to provide a model of community for the state. It will 'no longer serve as the *answer* to the question of the social function of the University'. According to this vision, the university will become '*one place among others* where the question of being-together is posed rather than an ideal community' [my emphasis].⁷⁹

Clearly, Brown's 'The Impossibility of Women's Studies' and Reading's *The University in Ruins* are, in many respects, very different kinds of works.⁸⁰ Yet, despite all those differences, one finds striking similarities between the two texts. As

⁷⁸ Readings, *The University*, p. 190.

⁷⁹ Readings, *The University*, p. 127.

⁸⁰ Readings and Brown, for instance, belong to two different disciplines where they, furthermore, occupy markedly different positions. Comparing the two shows how texts and their authors are treated differently within feminist scholarship and in a field of 'critical theory'. *The University in Ruins* has an established and recognized position within its discipline. In fact, as it seems to me, the text has been, right from the start, 'elevated' to the 'canonical' level. Brown's text, on the other hand, does not seem to receive such support. Although her text does not take rank with the provocativeness of Readings' book, and although it is well known and widely cited within feminist scholarship, it has not reached similar status. Brown's work seems to be invoked rather as an example of an 'extreme' position which is to be readily dismissed or, alternatively, it is approached in the way Wiegman - or I attempt to treat her text in this chapter - as a trigger for developing further critical thought. This difference, as it seems to me, is also one of the factors which influences the specificity of the field of feminist research and why, 'academic feminism' is less likely to become, to use Derrida's formulation, 'just another cell in the academic beehive' (Derrida, 'Women in the Beehive', p.142).

I interpret it, Readings' account of the university's past and present entanglement with the society and his envisioning of its future, follows structural organization of narratives which Wiegman calls 'narratives of failure'.

Similarly to Brown's account of feminism and women's studies, Readings reduces the complexities and paradoxes of the university's history into a single, linear narrative which is grounded in the conceptualization of the university as having one unifying idea and function. The inability to imagine the university as an inherently paradoxical institution and relationality as other than a clear unambiguous connection (i.e. the university has only one single function within the society) leads Readings to the opposite but symmetrically extreme position. It leads him to propose that the current university is 'non-referential'. This narrows not only his analysis but also the resulting propositions. More specifically, the community of dissensus based on 'thinking without identity and unity' replicates and establishes with further strength what it originally wanted to oppose – the university as self-identical, autonomous space without any relations to its outside.

In fact, as Samuel Weber also points out, 'the thinking without identity and unity' Readings envisions as a foundation of the community of dissensus resembles the very 'modern' premise of the 'self-doubting thought, through which a subject finds the assurance of oneself', the Cartesian *dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum* ('I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am') on which the conception of the modern subject relies. As Weber argues in relation to Readings' 'non-referential' university, 'non-referentiality' is

[p]erhaps the distinctively modern form of reference, even since Descartes invoked the notion of doubt in order to determine the absolutely certain ground upon which the modern subject could take its stand. *Excellence*, like

the Cartesian cogito, distinguished itself from all others, above all from the objects of its representations. It divests itself of all 'content' in order thereby to demarcate its own self-identity, henceforth to be determined as nothing but *the process of representing as such*, which is to say, as the process of 'doubting' as opposed to the determination of that which is doubted.⁸¹

From this perspective, Readings' 'non-referential' university rather than a radical break with the traditional modern university and its theorizations, seems to be its fulfilment. Weber continues,

[i]t is as if Readings, in his effort to discern what is distinctive in the contemporary form of the university, himself falls prey to the traditional temptation of construing the university as an institution that is utterly self-contained, identifying simply such self-containment with a 'bureaucratic system' of management that administers 'excellence' in terms of its own self-interest. It is as if the dream of the university to rid itself finally off all external tutelage seems to reach fruition, albeit in a nightmare, when Readings asserts that: 'the University is no longer primarily an ideological arm of the nation-state but an autonomous bureaucratic corporation.'⁸²

As Weber argues, the University of Excellence repeats and re-inscribes the modern concepts of knowledge and identity formation and thus fulfils the 'modern' dream of self-identical and autonomous university. Weber suggests, however, that at the same time this turns the dream into a 'nightmare'. This is, as I interpret it, because in the process of separating itself from the society, emptying itself of any idea and function, the university itself disappears. Readings' formulation that 'the University

⁸¹ Samuel Weber, 'The Future Campus: Destiny in a virtual world', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21.2 (1999), 151-164, p. 160. The essay has been republished as 'The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge' in 2000 and included in an extended edition of Weber's book *Institution and Interpretation* in 2001 originally published in 1987.

⁸² Weber, 'The Future Campus', p. 158.

becomes *one place among others ...*’ which describes the ‘future’ community of dissensus, would support such an interpretation. For if the university loses its singularity, its specificity which distinguishes it from other research or educational institutions or places where the question of community is posed, if it becomes one place among others, then there is no need to call this place the university anymore - there is no need for the university.

This movement ‘forward’ or ‘ahead’, that is, ‘beyond the modern university’, can thus also be interpreted as a movement ‘backwards’; as a regression. Contrary to what Readings suggests, the university which ‘no longer gives the *answer* to the question of the social function of the University’, the community of dissensus, will *not* fail to provide a model of a community for the state. According to my interpretation, in his deliberations, Readings fails to recognize that *to refuse to give an answer is, nonetheless, still an answer*. The community of dissensus, in its rejection of any answers and functions – still offers ‘a model’ for a society. The society based on this model is a society without the modern university. It is a society of the age *before* the modern university, that is, before the ‘modern – Kantian – age’.

This is also an interpretation which Reading’s description of the community of dissensus grounded on dependency rather than emancipation at the end of his book implies. By opposing the community of dissensus as based in dependency to emancipation, Readings implies a society in its ‘pre-modern stage’ – a ‘feudal’ society of dependence and tutelage, of a complete subjugation of subjects to their rulers. By arguing for ‘immaturity’ and ‘dependency’ (or even ‘addiction’ as he puts it) Readings, erases not only the institution of the university but also the frontier through which Kant sought to limit the state’s power and censorship and create a

room for intellectual freedom, for free thinking, which would, ultimately, lead, towards political freedom.

That such Kantian demarcations are problematic and paradoxical has been clear from the ‘beginning’ of the modern university.⁸³ Erasing those frontiers, as Readings’ suggests, however, will not resolve this paradox in a way which would allow us to create a possibility of conceiving institutions such as the university, neither to re-imagine the project of emancipation and freedom. Nor will it, at the end, allow what Readings seeks to create – a room for ‘free thinking’. According to my interpretation, the ‘failure’ of Readings’ narrative is, therefore, not only the impossibility of imagining the university other than in ‘ruins’. Readings’ also fails to deliver what he promised – a concept of community where free thinking would be possible.

Weigman’s examination of the structures of feminist narratives of feminism’s institutionalization in the university thus opens a new perspective for the examination of how the university and knowledge production is conceptualized. More specifically, it enables us to identify elements in Reading’s argumentation in *The University in Ruins* which are similar to those Wiegman critiqued in Brown’s work. Yet, that Readings’ university discourse is *just another* ‘narrative of failure’ is a point which Wiegman does not recognize in her work. Although she understands

⁸³ This is a problem which Derrida demonstrates throughout his various readings of the ‘foundations’ of the modern university, particularly of Kant’s late book *The Conflict of the Faculties* published in 1798. To this insight I would add that the paradox of this limit which seeks to create a room for intellectual freedom has appeared even before that. Already in his famous essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’, which precedes Kant’s later book on the university by more than ten years, Kant, after arguing why it is in the interest of the state to allow its citizens to think and speak freely (i.e. practice ‘public use of reason’), says, after the famous proclamation ‘Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!’ that ‘[t]his reveals to us a strange and unexpected pattern in human affairs (such as we shall always find if we consider them in the widest sense, in which nearly everything is paradoxical)’. Immanuel Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’ in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 54-61 (p. 59).

that the two premises which uphold feminist narratives of failure are themselves ‘acts of knowledge production’ which produce the discipline of women’s studies and its current theoretical accounts, when she reflects on knowledge production at the university as a whole, she relies on accounts of the university which produce effects similar to those she identified in Brown’s work.

This is not only apparent from references to Readings in her texts⁸⁴ but also from the way she narrates the ‘story’ of knowledge production in the university. Particularly the way Wiegman describes the current position of the humanities is reminiscent of this approach. As already outlined, in Wiegman’s account, the humanities traditionally functioned as a means of unification of a nation state. And yet, currently, because of the collapse of the nation state, the humanities has lost its function. The humanities, in Wiegman’s view, is a site which fails to offer an incorporating ‘national vision’. The humanities, ‘[i]n the loss of its nationalist value as the productive homogenizing force for a certain kind of culturally literate citizen’ became an ‘unruly site’. For Wiegman, the value of the humanities for feminism rests, precisely, in its ‘unruliness’, in its failure to be instrumentalized by the university and, by proxy, the (trans)national state.⁸⁵

As it follows from my reading of Brown and Readings, however, and as Wiegman herself admits in her work, there is never an ‘empty space’, an ‘unruly’ site. A pure and empty space is just another ‘modern’ fantasy. Even non-reference is, after all, as Weber argues, still a kind of reference. Furthermore, this ‘referentiality’ is not ‘an unruly site’ but is always organized and demarcated in a particular way. Indeed, as I will specifically address in the second part of the thesis, the idea that the

⁸⁴ Wiegman refers to Reading’s work in already mentioned book co-edited with Diane Elam, *Feminism Beside Itself* from 1995 or in ‘The Possibility of Women’s Studies’ (2005).

⁸⁵ Wiegman, ‘Academic Feminism’, p. 27.

humanities' key value is that it resists 'instrumentalization' is as useless as it is widespread. As I will show throughout my analyses, the discourses which argue 'against' 'instrumentalization' in such a manner are in fact one of the key obstacles for the theoretization of the university as other than 'in ruins'.

For now, however, I will conclude this chapter by arguing that the problem I see with Wiegman's way of imagining the possibility of women's studies is that her overall argument is based on the premise that it is not women's studies but that the university as a whole 'is an institutional failure'. This is not only because her conceptualization of the university and the humanities draws on or is similar to that of Readings, but also from her arguments that the lack of 'intellectual rigour' is not only a problem of women's studies, or from her argument that the whole of 'knowledge production as we know it today is also an identitarian project'.

Following Wiegman's attempt to read a possibility into the 'Impossibility of Women's Studies', I argue that we indeed need to move beyond conceptualizing 'feminism' as identical to itself. In addition, I argue that we also need to move beyond theorizations which conceptualize the university (and its humanities) as once having an 'identity' which now is in a 'crisis'. I argue that, instead of theorizations which reduce the university's development to a single narrative firmly grounded in a conceptualization of the university as a given and knowable entity, we need to work through accounts which, to borrow Wiegman's vocabulary, conceptualize the university as being defined by 'constitutive otherness'. By doing so we may not only counter the currently increasing focus on social identity and its categories within women's studies, as critiqued both by Brown and Wiegman, but we may also begin to conceptualize the disciplinary character of academic feminism in terms other than those of identity.

Chapter II - Out of Place

In this chapter, I will again re-open the possibility of the impossibility of women's studies. I will, however, not open it by arguing that women's and gender studies have, since Brown's article was first published in the 1990s, overcome their troubles and consolidated their intellectual and institutional positions, that they have found their 'proper' *raison d'être* and stabilized their disciplines. Nor will I attempt to go in a direction similar to Wiegman's interpretation in which she proposes that we make women's studies possible by overcoming Brown's pessimistic approach through showing that the problems which women's studies encounters relate to university knowledge production as a whole. In other words, by arguing that the whole university is a 'failure'.

Both Brown and Wiegman understand 'impossibility' as the other or negative side of possibility. It is understood to be 'the not-yet possible', and thus as something which is to be rendered possible, that is, acquired and assimilated within the field and reach of already existing options and possibilities. Against this traditional understanding, my reading suggests that we do not conceive 'impossibility' simply as a negative of possibility, as something which has to be 'overcome' and rendered possible. I suggest that in order to conceive women's or gender studies as a formation which is open to its unknown future, as Wiegman argues, we also have to reconsider the relationship between the possible and the impossible. In short, the proposition is that imagining the possibility of women's studies consists in being and doing the impossible.

How can this be possible? How can we fulfil such a tremendous task?

In order to outline how we may proceed, I will introduce a discourse which

addresses the question of the possibility of the impossible in relation to the foundations of the modern university. More specifically, I will discuss an essay by Jacques Derrida entitled ‘Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality’ where Derrida explores the foundations of the modern university through reflections on how Immanuel Kant wrestled with this new situation both in his theoretical discourse and his own position within this new institutional setting through the question of censorship.

In the first section of this chapter, I will show with my interpretation of this essay that whether academic disciplines are, in their impossibility, possible, how the two can be negotiated and how impossibility can or cannot be translated to its institutional possibility, was always at stake. I argue that the thinking through one’s discipline, the self-reflection of one’s position within institutional knowledge production and its possibilities and impossibilities, is limited neither to academic feminism nor to the historical moment of its emergence. I argue, instead, that such reflections have been central to discourses on the modern university since its very beginning. It is, in fact, this reflection of oneself as being both a ‘thinker’ and a professor or a teacher at the public institution which makes the university ‘modern’. I thus argue that the modern university is, structurally, an unsuitable formation, always inappropriate to the circumstances and locations of its time. In short, the modern university as such, is ‘out of place’.

This, however is not bad news for the current debates on how feminism can or cannot take place in the university. The second section of this chapter will examine how sexual difference operates in Derrida’s re-reading of Kant’s discourse on the university and censorship. Through a close examination of its

final passage, I will show that it is not, as Derrida suggests, only ‘metaphysics’ on which the university relies but also ‘phallogentrism’. In other words, Kant founds his discourse on the university through the exclusion of the sexually other. As my interpretation shows, this exclusion is done through a set of reversals of (sexual) powers and roles within the phallogentric economy.

Vacant Chair: The impossible foundations of the department of philosophy

‘Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery and Magisteriality’ is a part of a lecture series titled ‘Transfer *Ex Cathedra*: language and institutions of philosophy’ which Derrida delivered at the University of Toronto in 1985. ‘Vacant Chair’ is the third of the four lectures and opens with pointing at a certain ‘transfer *ex cathedra*’, a particular transformation of the position of philosophy and philosophers at the end of the eighteenth century and the foundation of the modern university.

Derrida explains this shift in relation to the theme of the previous lecture where he discusses national and natural languages in relation to Descartes’ philosophical discourse and language. Descartes, as Derrida explains, is an example of a philosopher who, although he struggled with all sorts of institutional authorities and posed a series of pedagogical questions, ‘never did so as a *teaching* philosopher, as a *professor* and *civil servant* in a State university’. He did not have to ‘deal with a teaching of philosophy organized by the State and entrusted to teachers who are also servants of the State’.¹ This situation, as Derrida further develops, however, changed

¹ Jacques Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality’, in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 43-63 (p. 43).

everywhere in Europe at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. It influenced both the procedures and the content of philosophy, as well as philosophy's (and those practising it, i.e. 'philosophers') position in the society. In fact, this transformation created a new space - a State university where philosophy is located as a discipline, and a new figure - a teaching philosopher, that is, a philosopher who simultaneously is a civil servant.

As already suggested, the construction of this new place, the modern university, is approached through reflections on Kant's university discourse through the question of censorship. The path Derrida takes through his elaborations is, however, rather unusual for a philosopher. In contrast to what one might have expected, Derrida does not go straight to 'philosophy', to 'philosophy' understood as a universal set of ideas independent of its cultural, intellectual and political context. In order to pose the question of censorship, of 'censorship, as it might be posed between Reason and the university', Derrida does not drive straight into philosophical works where Kant discusses censorship or censorship in relation to the university and philosophy but first recalls the political and intellectual climate in Prussia during Kant's age.²

'Kant's age', as the Prussian philosopher famously argued in his essay 'The Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' published in the monthly magazine *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1784, is 'an age of enlightenment'.³ Two years after the publication of this article, however, the king whom Kant in this essay calls 'a ruler who is himself enlightened and has

² Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 44.

³ Immanuel Kant, 'The Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', p. 58.

no fear of phantoms', Frederick the Great, was replaced by his nephew, Frederick William II.⁴ This transfer from an old to a new king significantly changed the political and intellectual climate in Prussia. Specifically, it resulted in reinforcement of censorship. Although, as the translator of Kant's work, Mary J. Gregor argues, the mechanisms of censorship did exist under Frederick the Great, they were, 'applied very mildly in scholarly affairs'.⁵ Within the two years after Frederick's the Great death, however, everything changed in this respect. Frederick William II was not, unlike his predecessor, in favour of enlightenment but 'rigorously orthodox and mystically inclined'.⁶ During his rule, the power of the church rose significantly which resulted in the reinforcement of censorship from the State authorities. In 1788, the law against the freedom of the press was declared and after the French Revolution, in 1792, a censorship commission was established in Berlin.

These changes also affected Kant and his work. In 1792, the censorship commission prohibited the publication of his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Kant protested against this decision and managed to publish the book in 1793. The Preface to the first edition of *Religion*, where Kant discusses the question of censorship, arose out of the circumstances surrounding its publication. It was also this publication which, as Derrida also recalls, earned Kant Frederick William's II famous reprimand which Kant, together with his response, published in the Preface to *The Conflict of the Faculties* from 1798. In 1795 the commission also issued an order to the academic senate in Königsberg, forbidding any professor to lecture on Kant's philosophy of

⁴ Immanuel Kant, 'The Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', p. 59.

⁵ Mary J. Gregor, 'Translator's Introduction', in *The Conflict of the Faculties/ Der Streit der Fakultäten* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. vii-xxiv (p. ix).

⁶ Gregor, p. ix.

religion.⁷ Neither did the book on the university, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, escape repressive measures. The book could be published only after Friedrich William II's death in 1797.⁸

Recalling these socio-political and institutional shifts, transformations and conflicts, and situating Kant's philosophical texts on the university within them, is crucial for Derrida's reading of the modern university. It outlines the way in which he conceptualizes the modern university. In 'Vacant Chair' and other texts on the university, Derrida reads Kant's university discourse as a response to this complex set of structural changes within the political, cultural and intellectual context from within philosophy. He reads it as an event which both constitutes the concept and the institutions of the modern university and changes philosophical thought itself. In other words, for Derrida, 'context' (geo-political, intellectual, cultural, linguistic but also, as I will show with my analysis of the conclusion of 'Vacant Chair' in the following section, 'sexual') is not extraneous to philosophy.⁹ For Derrida the university has never been – as for instance Bill Readings conceives it - an institution 'organized in view of a

⁷ Gregor, p. xi.

⁸ For more on the shifts in the political, intellectual and cultural context of Prussia in relation to Kant's work, see 'Translator's Introduction' to *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1979) by Mary J. Gregor, or 'Introduction: Kant and the language of philosophy' in *A Kant Dictionary* (1995) by Howard Caygill (Howard Caygill, 'Kant and the "age of criticism"', in *Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995), pp. 7-34. Both Gregor and Caygill read Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties* as an elaboration of his earlier discussion of Friedrich the Great's dictum 'argue but obey'. However, Kant himself does not use the same terminology in his latter text. In his writings on the university, Derrida also does not refer to Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'.

⁹ In 'Vacant Chair', Derrida reads the Kantian university as a response to censorship. In his essay 'Mochlos; or, The Conflict of the Faculties' (1980) the institutionalization of the modern university is grasped as a 'responsible response', as an attempt to develop 'a university responsibility' (Jacques Derrida, 'Mochlos; or, The Conflict of the Faculties', in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, ed. by Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 3-34 (p. 3). In his last text on this theme, 'The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the 'Humanities that would take place tomorrow)' delivered in 1991, Derrida conceives his essay as a 'profession of faith in the modern university' (Jacques Derrida, 'The Future of the Profession or University without Condition (Thanks to the "Humanities," What Could Take Place Tomorrow)', in Jacques Derrida and the Humanities, ed. by Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-57 (p. 24.).

single regulatory idea'¹⁰ which 'functions as its referent, as the end and meaning of its activities'.¹¹ Derrida does not conceive of the modern university as if it ever had a clear and unambiguous relation to the State and the society. In his various accounts, the modern university has never been only 'a model for rational political community at large',¹² a means of unification of the nation-state as for instance Readings proposes. Instead, Derrida reads the modern university, its foundations and relation to the State and the society as inherently ambiguous and conflicted.

In 'Vacant Chair' specifically, the modern university is presented as an attempt to resist the State's censorship. Kant's university discourse is read as an attempt to create a space which would be withdrawn from the state's power and its censorship, as an attempt to create a room for free thinking and freedom of expression.

The motif of censorship threads throughout the whole essay. In his considerations of how censorship relates to the university, Derrida draws on Kant's definition which appears in the censored work for which Kant received the king's reprimand, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In the 'Preface' of this book, Kant defines censorship as 'a critique that has power'. Censorship is a '*critique* that has force at its disposal' and which 'prohibits, reduces to silence, or limits the manifestation of thought, the written or spoken word'. For Kant, as Derrida further explains, the 'power' or the 'force' which prohibits is always 'a political force linked to the power of the State'. It is a legal force, *Gewalt*.¹³

¹⁰ Readings, *The University*, p. 14.

¹¹ Readings, *The University*, p. 54.

¹² Readings, *The University*, p. 180.

¹³ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 48.

Drawing on this specification, Derrida therefore argues that censorship is defined by two features: it is always tied to reason and it always takes place within the public domain. He then discusses the link between reason, publicity and censorship in three ways. Firstly, he invokes the etymology of the word ‘censorship’. He points to the semantic ‘chain’ which ‘links *ratio* to accounting, calculation, censorship’. He emphasises that the Latin word ‘*censere* means to evaluate [*réputer*], to count, to compute’. He recalls that the “‘census’ is the [public] enumeration of citizens and the evaluation of their wealth by the censors (the census takers)”.¹⁴

Secondly, he argues that censorship ‘never presents itself as a brutal and mute repression’. Although censorship uses force and uses it against a particular discourse, it, nonetheless, always does so ‘in the name of another discourse’. Censorship always presupposes the existence of a discourse and of a framework of rights, laws, and a tribunal. Censorship, as Derrida argues, is a ‘judgment with power’. It presupposes institutions, experts, authorities and it proceeds ‘through public acts’. It ‘only exists where there is a *public domain*, with state-like centralization’.¹⁵

The third link between censorship, reason and publicity which Derrida discusses in his essay is the one created by Kant in his discourse on the university. As Derrida describes it,

within or beyond that which can link the possibility of reason to that of censorship (technical calculation and enforced examination, by force, of that

¹⁴ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 49-50. The question of the overdetermined notion of ‘accounting’ and problematization of how it is employed in the discourses reflecting on the current university under the unprecedented pressure of ‘marketization’ is explored in the second part of this thesis entitled ‘Accounting for the University’.

¹⁵ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 49-50.

which must and must not be uttered), Kant wants to give the reason for censorship in a discourse on the university. He wants to speak the truth about censorship from the stance of reason. In doing and saying this, he would like to protect reason itself from censorship.¹⁶

According to Derrida, all Kantian politics can be interpreted as an enterprise ‘whose aim is to *take note* and *delimit*: to take note of a censoring power – and of a legitimacy of State reason as a censoring reason, the power of censorship - but also to delimit this power’.¹⁷ Yet he also notes that this delimitation of State’s power and censorship is a distinctive one. Although Kant ‘*takes note* and *delimits*’, he, in contrast to what one might have concluded from the definition of censorship outlined above, does not envision himself as a censor. The way in which Kant delimits the State’s power and censorship does not, as Derrida interprets it, happen by opposing the State’s power using a ‘counter-power’, but rather by using a sort of ‘non-power’. In other words, Kant founds the university on an idea of reason which is heteronomous to power.

Within the Kantian university schema, this ‘non-power’, that is, ‘reason’, inhabits the Faculty of Philosophy. In his argumentation, Kant always insists that this University Faculty does not have any executive power, that philosophers and their Faculty are not able to give orders. They do not have the power to censor, the legal force, *Gewalt*. This Faculty is therefore not only withdrawn from censorship but also incapable itself of censorship. It is a space of pure reason without any power or force. Yet, as Derrida also points out,

¹⁶ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 52.

¹⁷ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 49.

there is 'no doubt [that] Kant wants this faculty to have, under certain conditions, the right to censor'.¹⁸

How is this possible? How can Kant claim power for the Faculty of Philosophy, while, at the same time, arguing that it has no power?

The answer Kant gives is 'reason', an a priori rationality which grounds the empirical reality. It gives reason to and reasons for censorship. More specifically, according to this schema, the State's censorship is not simply an exercise of a brutal force but it is a use of force *with* reason. The king - as Kant already argued in his famous essay 'What is Enlightenment?' which precedes the change of the political and intellectual climate in Prussia - is himself 'enlightened'.¹⁹ In other words, the State and its government is itself inspired by reason. Thus, although the university is in conflict with the state and its interests (and this conflict, as follows from the title of Kant's book, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, proliferates the university, but also, as Derrida shows, the Faculty of Philosophy and even 'splits' the figure of the philosopher-teacher), the two – the State and the university - are, at the same time, at 'peace'. Because both – the State and the University - are grounded in reason, they are, at the end of the day, in 'harmony'.²⁰

This peculiar limitation implies two key and intertwined consequences for the modern university and society:

On the one hand, reason legitimizes and justifies the State's censorship. Kant, in fact, rationalizes an empirical fact (the existence of the State and its censorship). He argues that censorship is not only a 'factual situation' but is

¹⁸ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 49. Kant even uses the word 'censorship' in the conflict of the faculties'

¹⁹ Kant, 'What is Enlightenment?', p. 59.

²⁰ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 57.

given ‘a priori’. Censorship is thus ‘found in reason’.²¹ As Derrida argues drawing on his reading of the ‘Preface’ to *Religion*, the essential argument Kant offers for this is the ‘finitude and the fallibility of man’. Derrida, quoting from *Religion*, explains that ‘since the sublimity of moral law “shrinks” in the hands of man, respect must be imposed from the outside, by “coercive laws”’, that is, by censorship.²²

Yet, on the other hand, a priori rationality also allows Kant to argue for freedom of thought and expression, to demand a withdrawal of the Faculty of Philosophy from the State’s power and censorship. Furthermore, it also allows him to reverse the ‘forces’ in play. It allows him to claim for the Faculty of Philosophy the ‘upper hand’.

The explanation Kant provides in order to claim this reversal is that although the State censors, and it has the right to do so, it, nonetheless, cannot explain nor give reasons for its actions, and thus nor for its censorship. The State therefore needs someone who would be able to rationalize censorship, to tell ‘the truth’ about censorship. In other words, the State government needs ‘experts’ who, in order to do so, would, however, be independent from the State, experts who would not be subjected to the State’s authority and would be exempt from its censorship. These experts, to whom ‘the truth of censorship is accessible’, are, as Kant envisions it, the philosophers and their Faculty, the Faculty of Philosophy.²³

I believe that it is because of this particular move – i.e. claiming that reason is ‘everywhere’ (it rules over the commonwealth and ‘beyond’, i.e. is

²¹ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 44.

²² Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 45.

²³ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 52-53.

universal) and yet, simultaneously, has a singular, unique place (the Faculty of Philosophy) in this particular way - that Derrida repeatedly returns to Kant's university discourse to re-examine and further deconstruct it.²⁴ It is Kant's delimiting and at the same time crossing beyond this limit, and the effects (theoretical, but also political and institutional) this particular move implies, such as the reversal of powers between the 'powerful' State and the Faculty of Philosophy which has no power, is weak and vulnerable, why Kant's discourse on the university occupies such a privileged position within Derrida's deliberations on the university.²⁵

In 'Vacant Chair', Derrida's 'guiding thread', in the accounting for this paradox in Kant's university discourse, is the motif of censorship. The university, as a public institution of the State, was, as he stresses, 'in Kant's time and remains to a certain extent today a very sensitive place for tracing this limit between censoring and censored reason'. Today, although we find ourselves in a different situation from Kant, the theme of censorship in relation to the university is, as Derrida reminds us, by no means, anachronistic. Although 'academics are no longer prohibited from publishing a paper, either spoken or written', by a government which would base its decision on the opinion of a censorship commission, 'it would be naïve to conclude that censorship disappeared'. Although censorship 'does not necessarily originate

²⁴ Although, as I show, Kant uses a certain 'paradox' in his argument, this does not mean his university discourse is a deconstructive discourse and therefore does not need deconstruction as Peter Gilgen argues in his reading of it. Peter Gilgen, 'Structures, But in Ruins Only: On Kant's History of Reason and the University', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 9.2 (2009), 165-193.

²⁵ As Rebecca Comey argued in her paper entitled 'Leverage', Derrida's reading of *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant's work on the problem of the university significantly diverts from his previous work on the question of enlightenment. Comey argues that within Kant's oeuvre, *The Conflict of the Faculties* is something like the 'fourth Critique' which, rather than serving as a 'bridge' (such as the third Critique), leads towards paradox and irreconcilability, i.e. aporia. Rebeca Comey, 'Leverage', presented at *2015 LGS Summer Academy: Right to Philosophy* (University College London, 24 June, 2015).

from a central and specialized organism, from a person (the king or his minister), from a commission officially established for this purpose', it is still present today in the university. What has changed, since Kant's time, 'is the form the use of this force takes, the place and machinery of its application, of its distribution, the complexity, the diversification, and the overdetermination of its pathways'. Today, censorship proceeds '[t]hrough a highly differentiated, indeed contradictory, network'. Even today, Derrida emphasises further, 'there are things that cannot be uttered within the university- or outside of the university': 'There are certain ways of saying certain things that are neither legitimate nor authorized'. There are 'objects' which one cannot study or analyse in the university or elsewhere.²⁶

Additionally, as Derrida argues, the way censorship works is not, necessarily, by reducing a discourse to an 'absolute silence' - 'not to "legitimize" something, according to this or that criterion, not to give it the means to manifest itself, is already to censor':

A book of which two thousand copies are published, an untranslated book, remains, today almost a confidential and private document. [...] Censorship exists as soon as certain forces (linked to powers of evaluation and to symbolic structures) simply limit the extent of a field of study, the resonance or the propagation of a discourse. [...] The moment a discourse, even if it is not forbidden, cannot find the conditions for an exposition or for an *unlimited* public, discussion, one can speak of an effect of censorship, no matter how excessive this may seem.²⁷

²⁶ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 46.

²⁷ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 47.

As the quotation suggests, for Derrida, unlike for Kant, there is no way out of censorship. As he argues in several places in 'Vacant Chair', 'the censoring delimitation remains unavoidable in a finite and necessarily agonistic field'.²⁸ 'There is never any pure censorship or pure lifting of censorship'.²⁹ The university is, therefore, 'always censored *and* censoring'.³⁰

As I interpret it, however, his reading does not only show how the university is always censored and censoring but also further complicates the concept of censorship itself. More specifically, while the main theme of the essay seems to be 'censorship *stricto sensu*', Derrida – according to my interpretation importantly - also suggests that it is not only the question of censorship we are dealing with when we encounter the university. Specifically, he argues that we cannot 'limit the question of repressive or prohibitive force to that of censorship'. For instance, there is no private censorship - 'one does not speak of censorship in the case of repressive acts or of suppression directed toward a private discourse (even less in the case of thoughts without discourse)'. Censorship is also ineffective in restricting instances of 'contraband, translation, substitution, or disguise'.³¹ At this point Derrida refers to Freud's use of the figure of censorship as a way of describing the process of repression. This figure, Derrida argues, is 'felicitous' 'only insofar as it appeals to a principle of order, the rationality of a central organization with its discourses, its guardians/experts, and above all its representatives'.³² But there are, as he further argues - and not only within one's psyche - other 'procedures,

²⁸ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 47.

²⁹ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 47.

³⁰ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 46.

³¹ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 50.

³² Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 51.

techniques, strategies, and ruses' which 'prohibit'. There are other ways of prohibiting and marginalizing, other mechanisms of prohibition which are not 'subjected to a process of State reason, or without declaring itself publicly'.³³

These mechanisms of prohibition, as Derrida further points out, 'already existed and were already very complex in Kant's time'. Kant, however, does not discuss them in his work. These mechanisms of prohibition, furthermore, exist also '[i]n industrial societies with supposedly liberal and democratic regimes, even if State censorship is very reduced'. Today, there are

mechanisms of prohibitions, suppression, repression, *without censorship (stricto sensu)*: an increasing multiplicity, refinement, and over-determination of marginalization or disqualification, delegitimation of certain discourses, certain practices, and certain "poems."³⁴

Kant, as I already argued, does not, in his discourse, pay attention to other means of prohibition than censorship even though, as Derrida says, they were present and were already very complex in his time. Neither does Kant consider 'lapses' or 'disturbances' within 'a system' to be, potentially, means of resistance against censorship. For Kant, on the contrary, such instances are always undesirable and therefore must be limited. Kant's university layout presupposes the establishment of a border, of a pure and decidable limit which withdraws the university from the State's power and censorship. Yet, as Derrida's deconstructive reading of Kant's university discourse shows, it is – precisely - the transgression of the limits that Kant himself sets up which

³³ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 51.

³⁴ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 51.

enables his university discourse. When Kant claims power for the Faculty of Philosophy which has no power, he himself makes use of a certain ‘lapse’, of ‘contraband’ or a ‘disguise’.

This peculiar demarcation, as Derrida reads it, implies several consequences for the topology of the university and its position within the society:

1. As already argued, Kant legitimizes and justifies the State’s censorship of free thinking and the freedom of expression anywhere but the university. This move thus can be understood as being in contradiction with ‘the enlightenment proper’, with Kant’s previous attempts of establishing freedom of thinking ‘for all’.³⁵ Kant’s university discourse which sets up the line between the state’s censorship and the university thus has been criticized by some of Kant’s followers and contemporaries. Johann Erich Biester, the editor of the already mentioned pro-enlightenment *Berlinische Monatschrift* considered it to be a ‘betrayal’ of enlightenment. In a letter to Kant from 1794, Biester interprets Kant’s argumentation as a sign of Kant’s withdrawal from the struggle for enlightenment, leaving it to others to ‘continue to work on the great philosophical and theological enlightenment that [...] Kant [had] so happily begun’.³⁶ Yet, as I attempt to show, following Derrida and the interpretation of Rebeca Comey,³⁷ and in contrast to most of the scholarship on Kant’s work, Kant’s deliberations on the university are not a retreat from the

³⁵ A careful reading of this proposition in Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’ would however show, that the paradox as well as the strategy of ‘disguising’ Derrida finds in Kant’s university discourse has already been foundational for the claim for ‘public use of reason’. Kant, ‘What is Enlightenment?’.

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, ‘From J. E. Biester, December 17. 1794’, in *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-1799* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967), p. 220.

³⁷ Comey, ‘Leverage’.

ideals of Enlightenment. Rather, they signal a path towards another kind of enlightenment.³⁸

2. Although Kant legitimizes the State's reason as a censoring reason, as having the right to censor in certain conditions and within certain limits, he also wants, at the same time, to withdraw pure reason, the Faculty of Philosophy and the University respectively, from all censoring power. The limit between the State's censoring reason and reason without power does not, however, circumvent the university but passes right through it. In Kant's university layout, the university consists of two classes of faculties. The Higher Faculties (Theology, Law and Medicine) and the Lower Faculty (Philosophy). The Higher Faculties are linked to the state which they also represent, and they are subjected to its authority. In the Lower Faculty, on the contrary, the State cannot exercise its censorship as long as philosophy does not intervene in the State's affairs, that is, as long as it limits itself to speaking within the university and not outside of it.³⁹

3. The border line which secures the division of the rights and the authorities of the Kantian university schema not only prefigures and configures the singular place of the department of philosophy but also a definition of the philosopher as the 'teacher of pure reason'.⁴⁰ The faculty of philosophy is a place where a 'teacher of pure reason' is located. However, as I argued in the introduction of this section, in this 'new situation', i.e. in the modern university, the philosopher is not simply an individual subject. He is also 'a

³⁸ E.g., Howard Caygill. Howard, Caygill, 'Kant and the 'age of criticism'', in *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1995), pp. 7-34.

³⁹ Indeed, one of the key 'methodological' paths Derrida takes in order to deconstruct Kant's university discourse in his other works is through the distinction between constative and performative speech acts. The discussion in the chapter V elaborates on this.

⁴⁰ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 53.

teaching subject in an institution, a competent subject and civil servant' who spreads a doctrine. He is, as Derrida puts it, a "Dozent," someone who teaches disciples and whose qualifications are recognized by the State. He has a status, which is no longer the status that dominated in philosophy before Kant'. This 'Kantian moment' is therefore a moment of 'becoming-institution, more exactly, a becoming-state-institution of reason, a becoming-faculty of reason'.⁴¹ However, the 'transfer *ex cathedra*', a transfer toward a position of authority and power, the institutionalization of philosophy within the university is not, as Derrida shows with his various readings of it, as straightforward and unequivocal as it might seem.

4. The teacher of philosophy seems to be occupied only with reason, with a priori rationality, and not with other issues – issues which are discussed within the Higher Faculties, let alone outside of the University. Such issues seem, according to Kant's delimitations, not to be within the official competence of the teaching philosopher. This is, however, only an appearance. As Derrida stresses, 'it *seems* to be this way'. It is 'truth' only 'in certain respects'.⁴² For as I already argued, from another point of view, the philosopher and the Faculty of Philosophy claim to observe the *entire* field of the other university faculties and thus, by proxy, also the affairs of the State. The teacher of pure reason, although he is located in a particular department and has no power, in his vision and his critical inspection is, nevertheless, able to comprehend the entire field of knowledge.

⁴¹ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 55.

⁴² Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 54.

Drawing on the paradoxical character of this topology, Derrida concludes that the teacher of pure reason therefore must have two places: a circumscribed place and a non-place that is also a panoptical ubiquity. This bears consequences for the university and its topology. More specifically, the result of the Kantian university topology is a ‘double bind’ which implies that the teaching philosopher has a particular relationship to power. The institutional consequences

result from this double bind that knots itself around the sublime body of the teacher of philosophizing, of his evident and unavoidable absence. For in his very withdrawal, he remains unavoidable. He haunts the scene more than he dominates it; he dominates it, indeed, as would a phantom. One could say that he fascinates and seduces, if these connotations were not too closely tied to sensibility and imagination: for reason should break the charm.⁴³

Derrida pushes this paradox in Kant’s university discourse forward with his interrogation at the end of the essay: How can it be possible that a ‘phantom’ rules the university? How can the university, teaching, and the Faculty of Philosophy, Derrida asks,

constitute institutional places [...] for a teacher of pure reason who *in fact* does not exist and is nowhere to be found (*aber da er selbs do nirgend*)? How can one think this corporate body without a body proper? [...] Nowhere, everywhere: how to order this topology? How to translate it into an institution?⁴⁴

⁴³ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 62.

⁴⁴ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 63.

That Kant's university layout is caught in a double bind is not, as Derrida points out, his own observation. It is an objection which has already been raised by Kant's contemporaries and his followers, such as Friedrich Schelling. As Derrida recalls, according to Schelling, 'Kant is wrong to wish there were something like a specialized institutional place, a department for philosophy. Since philosophy is everywhere, one must not reserve a place for it. Above all, one must not assign it a place'.⁴⁵

Derrida, in his explanation of how 'one can [or, I would even argue that one has to] assign it a place', in showing how the topology of 'nowhere' and 'everywhere' still *translates* into an institution, takes a different direction to Schelling. In the last paragraphs of his essay he argues that if this impossible topology can take place, if this topology of 'nowhere' and 'everywhere' can be ordered into an institution, it is due to 'rational metaphysics' that is also the censor in the Faculty of the Philosophy. With this proposition Derrida deconstructs the border which Kant suggested (or, rather seemed to suggest), to draw and maintain between censorship and domains which are withdrawn from it. For Derrida, unlike for Kant, the question therefore is not that of 'censorship' and 'non-censorship' but, as he concludes in 'Vacant Chair',

the debate [...] remains that of the best censorship. For a teacher, or for a finite being, there is never any lifting of censorship, only a strategic calculation: censorship against censorship. Is this strategy an art?⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 63.

⁴⁶ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 63.

Does the conclusion of 'Vacant Chair' that there is 'never lifting of censorship' imply that we should not seek to found and further develop institutional places such as universities or specific departments where 'free and critical thinking' can be pursued? Does Derrida's insight, that neither 'thinking' of a philosopher like Kant is - if not conditioned by - at least inseparable from his socio-political context, parallel Brown's critique of women's studies? In particular, does it parallel her argument that it is its exorbitant relationship with its political origin which makes women's studies impossible as an academic discipline? Or, as the final sentence quoted above would suggest, is Derrida trying to propose that 'founding' educational institutions, like that of the university, rather than being a business of philosophy is an artistic project?

As I interpret it, for Derrida, the recognition that censorship is unavoidable does not imply we cannot strive for freedom of thinking and expression. Neither does it imply that we should not try to demarcate locations where these freedoms can be pursued and that the faculty of Philosophy or any other department and the 'rational' university are impossible. Derrida does not turn against the Kantian idea of emancipation and autonomy, against an idea of 'rational community' as Readings does with his 'community of dissensus'. Yet, as his conclusion implies, nor does he pursue a fantasy of a place fully free of external strings.

As Derrida explicitly professes in other works where he addresses the question of the university or reflects on the problem of enlightenment, he believes in the possibility of the future of the modern-Kantian-university and affirms concerns for independence and autonomy yet, simultaneously he puts these concepts and institutions into question.⁴⁷ As it seems to me, it is this belief which, however, does

⁴⁷ This appears, as already argued in the Introduction, in texts such as 'Mochlos', in 'The future of the profession or the university without condition', 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils', in his essay 'Privilege' as well as in the essay 'The 'world' of the enlightenment to

not exclude but rather feeds on radical interrogation, which differentiates Derrida's university discourse not only from that of Schelling's but also from that of Readings and Brown who both, at least with the works discussed in here, seem to walk in Schelling's footsteps.

'Vacant Chair', a reading of the foundations of the modern university as wrestling with the possibility of philosophy as an academic discipline, with how philosophy can take place institutionally, thus offers an insight into how we can conceptualize the disciplinarity of academic feminism, how we can conceptualize women's studies as both a possible and an impossible disciplinary formation. As my interpretation shows, whether academic disciplines are, in their impossibility, possible, how the two can be negotiated and how impossibility can or cannot be translated to its institutional possibility, was always at stake. Indeed, such reflections are structural to the modern university. Following Derrida's reading of Kant's university discourse, we can argue that, in this sense, the modern university is structurally, an unsuitable formation, always inappropriate to the circumstances and locations of its time. In short, the modern university is 'out of place'.

Affinities, discrepancies and folds of tremendous formations

The idea of being 'out of place' is thus not unique to women's studies. What, however, is unique to women's studies is *the place from which it is out*.

Clearly, that which we call 'women's studies', 'gender studies', 'feminist studies', 'academic feminism' or even 'feminist theory' is not

come', in 'The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe'. Derrida discusses this through Kant also in the interview 'Canons and Metonymies' with Richard Rand.

‘philosophy’.⁴⁸ ‘Feminist theory’, as Stella Standford says in her consideration of the relationship of this endeavour to philosophy, is ‘indeed at odds with, and pose[s] a threat to, the traditional insularity of the discipline of philosophy’.⁴⁹ To the extent that philosophy understands itself as a self-sufficient and all-explanatory discipline able to provide univocal explanations, as long as philosophy considers itself to be ‘the queen’ of disciplines and of all knowledge (which is a limitation which, as Standford argues, philosophy is ‘perversely proud of’), feminist theory and its disciplinary locations such as gender or women’s studies, are in conflict with philosophy and make its foundations tremble.⁵⁰

The reason for this is not only because academic work conveyed in women’s studies is ‘all over the place’ (that is, ‘inter-’ or ‘trans-’ disciplinary) but also because of the ways in which women’s studies is ‘out of place’ and which are implied by the particularity of the enabling limits of its emergence. Feminist theory and women’s studies did not, as Standford argues and as the work of Brown and Wiegman also testifies, constitute themselves primarily in relation to any specific discipline, or the disciplines in general. They are not like, for instance, philosophy or the humanities which constitute themselves particularly through a relation to what we call ‘natural sciences’. In philosophy and the humanities, this encounter has most commonly taken the form of denunciation and consequential exclusion of natural sciences. As such, and as I

⁴⁸ That concepts and categories are non-identical entities does not, however, as for instance Brown seems to believe, make them unusable. For me, the point of showing that ‘feminism’, ‘gender’ or ‘women’ or ‘gender studies’ are problematic and paradoxical, is not an encouragement to abandon those categories. Although their meaning is unstable and always reaches beyond them, it is, according to my opinion, still meaningful and necessary to speak about and differentiate between ‘gender’, ‘women’, ‘feminism’, ‘feminist theory’ or ‘philosophy’ and ‘deconstruction’.

⁴⁹ Stella Standford, ‘Contradiction of Terms: Feminist Theory, Philosophy and Transdisciplinarity’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 32.5-6 (2015), 159-182, p. 159.

⁵⁰ Standford, ‘Contradiction of Terms’, p. 175.

will discuss in the second part of the thesis, it continues to be one of the key obstacles of imagining the university as other than in ‘ruins’.

The enabling condition of the emergence of feminist scholarship are different from the one described above. As Stanford puts it, the decisive relation for this discipline has been, above all, the relationship to ‘practice, that is, *politics*’.⁵¹ Or, as Wiegman argues, academic feminism has constituted itself particularly through struggling ‘over the dynamic of knowing and doing, over the difference that each constitutes to the other, weighing one over the other, at times defending real world politics as a culmination of both’.⁵²

It is thus the tie to the women’s movement, to the broad and collective response to what some call ‘the inequality between men and women’ and others ‘patriarchy’ or ‘phallogentrism’ which makes feminist scholarship particularly ‘out of place’. As such, ‘women’s studies’ is ‘out of place’ not only in the sense that it is not restricted only to the university. It is not only because ‘feminism’ has various and incommensurable modalities (i.e. political, intellectual, etc.) but also because it does not properly belong to the current circumstances, to this patriarchal society. Thus, it does not only point at or critique the inadequacies of this current ‘place’ but also seeks to transform it so as to make possible futures which would be more just than our past and present.⁵³ It therefore does not belong in at least two ways: First, it is ‘out of place’ in the sense that it is not particularly welcomed (and that is why, as Pollock argues, feminism is experienced as ‘traumatic’ by both men and women, why it is a ‘bad memory’). Second, it is not fully in this current world

⁵¹ Stanford, p. 174.

⁵² Robyn Wiegman, ‘Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure’, *differences*, 11.3 (1999), 107-136, p. 109.

⁵³ See for instance Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, p. 185.

as it seeks to step or leap into this ‘other’, ‘unknown’ and ‘uncertain’ place called ‘future’ (Pollock calls this modality of feminism the ‘virtual future’).⁵⁴

No ignorance of disciplinary frontiers and contextual differences on my part then. The political, intellectual and cultural specificities of historical contexts and resulting specificities of the two are related *but* significantly different. The disciplinary projects, philosophy and women’s studies, are clearly incommensurable in this sense.

Yet, apparently, philosophy is not the only academic formation with which feminist inquiry is incommensurable. It is neither synonymous with other ‘tremendous’ formations which emerged in the academia or in its vicinity within the same time and which are akin to it. In other words, what we call ‘feminist theory’ is not ‘critical theory’ or another tradition of thinking which I mobilize specifically in my thesis, ‘deconstruction’.⁵⁵

That ‘feminist theory’, ‘critical theory’ or ‘deconstruction’ share strong affinities can be confirmed by a brief look into university curricula. Courses titled ‘critical theory’ contain texts which were written by feminist scholars, address problems which are central to feminist inquiry or discuss texts and concepts which were not primarily taking feminist critique into account from ‘feminist perspective’. Neither is it uncommon that feminist authors and themes feminist scholarship focuses on appear on syllabi on ‘deconstruction’ or seminars discussing Derrida’s work.

‘Critical theory’, ‘deconstruction’ and ‘feminist theory’ also often ask similar questions and their inquiries proceed along similar paths. Sometimes,

⁵⁴ Griselda Pollock, ‘Is Feminism a Trauma, a Bad Memory, or a Virtual Future?’, *differences*, special issue *Transatlantic Gender Crossings*, 27.2 (2016), 27-61.

⁵⁵ On the further discussion on the relationship between ‘critical thought’, ‘theory’ and ‘feminist theory’ see Berger, *The Queer Turn*, 126-127.

they even create similar intellectual and political effects. This is hardly surprising, after all, as they have emerged out of mutual conversations and provocations. Despite these affinities, they are, however, still formations which are in important ways different from each other. Thus, although deconstruction has a particularly strong relationship to political transformation and seeks to imagine more just futures, and although it has been, undoubtedly, in its emergence and since then influenced by ‘revolutions’ triggered by social and political movements,⁵⁶ its relationship to them is different from that of feminist theory. ‘Deconstruction’ emerged as a ‘tremendous project’ from within philosophy and one of its key enabling limits was, as Derrida explains in ‘Punctuations: the Time of a Thesis’ which he first presented at his oral defence for the *doctorat d’état* in 1980, an encounter with literature.⁵⁷ The kinds of trembling deconstruction triggers thus have a different character to that of feminist theory.

Yet, as I interpret it, that deconstruction and feminist theory, in all their affinity, are unique and have different abilities and focuses, is not a weakness but the strength of their alliance. For my part, it is the places where the two fold into each other which cause the most interesting and profound trembling. Identifying and exploring instances of their folding particularly in relation to

⁵⁶ This is, at least, according to my understanding and also according to other scholars such as Drucilla Cornell or Elizabeth Grosz. See Cornell’s two seminal works *The Philosophy of the Limit* (1992) and *Beyond Accommodation* (1991). Grosz explains how deconstruction, or Derrida’s work relates to feminism in ‘Ontology and Equivocation’ (1995) or ‘Derrida and Feminism’ (2005).

⁵⁷ Jacques, Derrida, ‘Punctuations: The Time of the Thesis’, in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 113-128. The first title of the doctoral thesis which Derrida registered in 1957 under the supervision of Jean Hyppolite was *The Ideality of the Literary Object*. Derrida says in ‘Punctuations’: ‘I have to remind you, somewhat bluntly and simply, that my most constant interest, coming even before my philosophical interest, I would say, if this is possible, was directed toward literature, toward that writing that is called literary’ (116).

the questions of academic disciplines and the university is, indeed, one of the aims of this thesis.

In the essay ‘Vacant Chair’, one of these ‘folds’ manifests itself in the conclusion where Derrida, after recalling Schelling’s criticism that Kant’s university is paradoxical and one therefore cannot ‘assign a place to philosophy’, explains how the topology of ‘nowhere’ and ‘everywhere’ translates into an institution. The way Derrida narrates the institutionalization of philosophy seems striking to me: It is metaphysics that translates this impossible topology into an institution. *She, according to Derrida’s choice of pronouns*, is also a censor in the faculty of Philosophy and, as Derrida suggests, *perhaps* exercises censorship against the censorship of the State. In this ‘story of origin’, ‘metaphysics’ is, indeed, presented as ‘she’ and the whole scene is narrated as a ‘love story’, as a ‘lovers’ story’ or a ‘love affair’ between the philosopher (master) and his ‘mistress’, metaphysics.

In the following section, I will closely examine this final passage. Drawing on my reading, I will propose that it is not only ‘censorship against censorship’ we are dealing with when we consider the foundations of the modern university. Nor that it is only metaphysics that translates the impossible university topology into an institution. According to my interpretation, the ‘other forces’ and ‘means of prohibition’ which Derrida mentions earlier in his text, and on which the university relies, are not only ‘metaphysical’, but also ‘phallogocentric’. In other words, the university is founded by the exclusion of the sexually other which the teaching philosopher masters by playing a ‘double game’, by using ‘sexual powers’ which are both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.

The invocation of the ‘love affair’ between the master and the mistress is thus an instance which allows us to critically examine the complexity of the way phallogentrism operates within Kant’s paradoxical university discourse. It thus also allows us to situate, within the university, a possibility of ‘certain discourses, certain practices, and certain “poems”’ Derrida mentions in his essay and which are subject to various mechanisms of prohibition, suppression, repression, *without censorship (stricto sensu)*. As I interpret it, this passage thus also signals the possibility of particular ‘poems’ which the university hides from itself - ‘poems’, which suggest *The Sex which is not One*, tell the *Tales of Sexual Difference*, and ask: ‘*What Does a Woman Want?*’⁵⁸

The Mistress, Misstery and the Missery of Kant’s University

In order to examine the final passage of ‘Vacant Chair’, let me quote it in its entirety. After recalling Schelling’s criticism that Kant’s university is paradoxical and one therefore cannot ‘assign a place to philosophy’, Derrida writes:

Nowhere, everywhere: how to order this topology? How to translate it into an institution? [...]

There is the teacher [*maître*] – and he is absent. But he has a mistress – metaphysics. Kant presents metaphysics as a cherished lover (*Geliebte*) to whom one always returns after quarrelling. This teacher’s mistress [*maîtresse du maître*] is also a censor: in the department or in the (lower) Faculty of philosophy. She is, therefore a censor without public force. Perhaps this

⁵⁸ Readers familiar with feminist thinking undoubtedly recognize that these are also references to the seminal works within the field. Particularly, they belong to feminist tradition which seeks to imagine sexual difference as ‘other’ sexual difference, that is, beyond phallogentric logic. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985); Hélène Cixous, ‘Tales of Sexual Difference’, in *The Portable Cixous*, ed. by Marta Segarra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 48-60; and Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and sexual difference* (Maryland: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

the censor exercises her censorship against the censorship of the State. Censorship against censorship, censorship of reason, serving and not opposing reason.

But, by defining this rational metaphysics as *Censoramt*, one acknowledges a censoring structure of reason.

The debate thus remains that of the best censorship. For a teacher, or for a finite being, there is never any lifting of censorship, only a strategic calculation: censorship against censorship. Is this strategy an art?⁵⁹

As discussed in the previous section, in ‘Vacant Chair’, Derrida describes the emergence of the modern university and the institutionalization of philosophy as an academic discipline as processes intimately tied to censorship. Drawing on Kant’s definition, Derrida conceives of censorship as a power inspired by reason which relies on the existence of public domain and its institutions. The final passage quoted above however further complicates this proposed schema.

Firstly, as we read in the passage, metaphysics is a censor located in the lower faculty, in the faculty of philosophy. Metaphysics thus, as Derrida argues, does not have, unlike the State’s censorship, public force. This specification would suggest that metaphysics is a power which operates through the other ‘forces’ and ‘mechanisms’ Derrida mentioned earlier in the essay. In other words, it would suggest that metaphysics belongs to ‘prohibitions’ which do not declare themselves publicly and thus operate on the level of ‘the private discourse’, or ‘thoughts without a discourse’, that is, on a level which, as he also points out, eludes censorship *stricto sensu*. Metaphysics thus seems to belong to this more clandestine and concealed mechanisms of prohibition, to the ‘illegal traffic’ which proceeds through strategies

⁵⁹ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 63.

such as ‘disguise, substitution, contraband and translation’ which Derrida enumerated earlier in the essay and which can also oppose the State’s censorship.

Secondly, in order to describe how the university can take place, Derrida does not speak about metaphysics only as a censoring and prohibiting power but also as a productive power. In other words, it is a power which institutes, a power which puts institutions in their place. Metaphysics is thus a censor who ‘orders’ the topology of ‘nowhere and everywhere’ into an institution. The way Derrida describes how this at once restrictive and productive force works seems to me to be peculiar. Derrida says that Kant’s topology of ‘nowhere’ and ‘everywhere’ is a paradox which ‘orders’ into an institution through *translation*: as we read in the quotation, he asks ‘How to translate it [the topology of ‘nowhere’ and ‘everywhere’] in to an institution?’⁶⁰ Metaphysics thus, as the final passage of ‘Vacant Chair’ suggests, not only censors but also translates.

Does this terminological choice imply that ‘translation’ is a ‘metaphysical operation’? Or, does it imply that translation is a kind of censorship? Does Derrida want to suggest that ‘translation’ is a process of ‘expurgation’, that translation ‘cuts’ words as a censor cuts portions of a book, film, or letter?

Clearly, the term ‘translation’ is used in a broad sense in this passage. This terminological choice is however, according to my interpretation, not without significance.⁶¹ In the ‘Roundtable on Translation’ which accompanies another of

⁶⁰ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 63.

⁶¹ Consulting the other three texts which belong to the lecture series ‘Transfer *Ex Cathedra*: Language and Institutions of Philosophy’ would support this assumption (it is published in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, pp1-81). The two essays which precede ‘Vacant Chair’ are entitled ‘If There is Cause to Translate I: Philosophy in its National Language (Toward a “litterature en francois”)’ and ‘If There is Cause to Translate II: Descartes’ Romances, or the Economy of Words’. In these two lectures Derrida explores the implications of Descartes writing the *Discourse on Method* in French rather than in Latin and of French becoming a State language. The last lecture of the series, ‘Theology of Translation’, examines consequences of Schelling’s ‘institutional translation’ of Kant’s ‘conflictual’ university schema into a layout secured by the idea of the ‘unity of the originary world’ (75).

Derrida's texts on education,⁶² Derrida argues that we can understand translation not only, as Jakobson's classification of translation proposes, in 'intralingual' sense (as paraphrasing) or as 'interlingual translation' (a translation from one language to another) but also as an 'inter-semiotic' operation, that is, as a re-encoding of verbal signs into non-verbal sign systems.⁶³ Additionally, he points out that 'translation is not one', also in a sense of there being various conceptualizations of translation. The traditional understanding, as Derrida explains, such as Jakobson's classification, is grounded in the belief in self-identity and purity of language systems and the resulting possibility of transparent translatability.⁶⁴ This conception of translation 'presumes the existence of one language and of one translation in the literal sense, that is, as the passage from one language into another'. It is grounded on the idea that translation is a 'transfer of a meaning or a truth from one language to another without any essential harm being done'. It wants to 'fix' the seeming univocality of meaning, or, at least, 'master' its plurivocality.⁶⁵

Such an understanding of translation, as Derrida further explains, does not characterize only Jakobson's classification but sustains the project of philosophy. This implies significant consequences for philosophy: When the translation fails to transfer meaning transparently, philosophy also finds itself defeated. This is what Derrida sought to show in his famous text 'Plato's Pharmacy' through the word '*pharmakon*' whose 'body', as he puts it in the roundtable discussion, 'is in itself a constant challenge to philosophy':

⁶² Jacques Derrida, 'Roundtable on Translation', in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. by Christie McDonald (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), pp.93-161.

⁶³ Derrida, 'Roundtable', p. 95-105.

⁶⁴ Derrida, 'Roundtable', p. 100.

⁶⁵ Derrida, 'Roundtable', p. 119.

Philosophical discourse cannot master a word meaning two things at the same time and which therefore cannot be translated without an essential loss.

Whether one translates *pharmakon* as ‘poison’ or ‘remedy’, whether one comes down on the side of sickness or health, life or death, the undecidability is going to be lost. So *pharmakon* is one of the limits, one of the verbal forms – but one could cite many others and many other forms - marking the limit of philosophy as translation.⁶⁶

Derrida, in contrast to traditional philosophers, does not seek to ‘fix’ meaning or master plurivocality. For him, as he argues, translation is an ‘agreement’ which implies ‘the difference of languages rather than transparent translatability’.

Transparent translation is therefore always a failure, and thus is always impossible.

This, however, does not imply that one should not translate. Although translation is, in this sense impossible, we cannot do anything else *but* translate. For Derrida, translation thus operates in the form of a ‘promise’: It ‘never succeeds in the pure and absolute sense of the term’ but ‘succeeds in promising success, in promising reconciliation’.⁶⁷ ‘Good translation’, Derrida argues, ‘is one that enacts that performative called a promise with the result that through the translation one sees the coming shape of a possible reconciliation among languages’.⁶⁸

Derrida’s understanding of translation not as a ‘transparent transfer’ but as a multiplying generative force, would explain why he chooses this word to describe the process of university’s institutionalization.⁶⁹ More specifically, conceiving of institutionalization as translation opens the possibility of instituting the university

⁶⁶ Derrida, ‘Roundtable’, p. 120.

⁶⁷ Derrida, ‘Roundtable’, p. 123.

⁶⁸ Derrida, ‘Roundtable’, p. 123.

⁶⁹ Derrida explains in ‘Letter to Japanese Friend’, ‘the question of deconstruction is also through and through *the* question of translation, and of the language of concepts, of the conceptual corpus of so-called “western” metaphysics’. Jacques Derrida ‘Letter to Japanese Friend (Prof. Izutsu)’, in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. Robert Wood and Rober Bernasconi (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1-5 (p.1).

otherwise, of a possibility of translation which would be founded on other 'agreements' than those which are currently in place. Furthermore, his understanding of translation as a promise, as a necessary even though impossible task, would also explain why, in contrast to other inheritors of Kant's discourse on the university (like Schelling, Readings or Brown in the case of women's studies), he insists on the possibility of 'translating' Kant's 'impossible' topology into an institution, that is, the necessity of founding institutions and academic disciplines.

Finally, as already indicated, in this closing passage, metaphysics is not described only as a censor and a translator but also as 'a cherished lover'. However, describing metaphysics as a lover is not Derrida's own idea. It is a *repetition* and a *translation* of Kant's comment made in *Critique of Pure Reason* where the latter says that 'we shall always return to metaphysics as to an estranged beloved [*entzweiten Geliebten*], since reason, because essential ends are at issue here, must work without respite [...].'⁷⁰ As regards Derrida's invocation of the theme of love, apart from this instance, he makes only one brief allusion to it earlier in the essay. In this earlier reference, just as in the conclusion, this reference appears in close vicinity to the invocation of creativity and artistic skill. (To recall, in the conclusion, after narrating how the department of philosophy takes place as, what is seems to be a 'love story', and arguing that 'there is never any lifting of censorship, only a strategic calculation: censorship against censorship' Derrida closes his essay with a question: 'Is this strategy an art?').

The earlier reference to love (or sexuality) and creativity appears in a place where Derrida speculates on the character of the philosophers' power. As discussed

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 700 (A 850/B 878).

previously, according to Derrida, the philosopher (who has two places, a circumscribed place and a non-place that is also a panoptical ubiquity), dominates the university ‘as would a phantom’: ‘he haunts the scene more than he dominates it; he dominates it, indeed, as would a phantom’. And, as already suggested in the previous section, Derrida adds a further specification to this description. He argues that one could say that the philosopher ‘fascinates and seduces, if these connotations were not too closely tied to sensibility and imagination: for reason should break the charm’.⁷¹

Apart from the description of the philosophers’ haunting power as a power of seduction and fascination, which, as Derrida implies would problematize Kant’s idea of reason and the university, the theme of love has no precedent in this text.⁷² A depiction of censoring metaphysics as a ‘cherished lover’ to whom ‘one’ (the philosopher, perhaps Kant), ‘always returns after quarrelling’ in the conclusion therefore comes as a surprise. It thus makes one wonder: Why account for the foundations of the modern university and depict the transformation of philosophy into an academic discipline as what is seems to be a ‘love story’? Why describe the institutionalization of philosophy within the modern university as a lovers’ story, as a love affair between the philosopher and his mistress?

In an essay entitled ‘Derrida and Gender: The Other Sexual Difference’ from 2002 Peggy Kamuf argues that using sexualized language is a deliberate gesture on Derrida’s part. For Derrida, according to Kamuf, ‘sexualisation of the general language of philosophical or analytic discourse is a strategic move’ which is ‘against or at least in tension with the kind of neutralization of sexual difference that has

⁷¹ Derrida, ‘Vacant Chair’, p. 63.

⁷² ‘Love’, is, however, mentioned in ‘If There is a Cause to Translate II: Descartes’ Romances, or the Economy of Words’ (37, 39), a lecture which precedes ‘Vacant Chair’.

traditionally characterized it'.⁷³ Another scholar who also works within feminist theory and deconstruction, Anne Berger, develops this insight further. Berger, drawing on her analysis of the famous interview 'Choreographies' and other texts where Derrida thematises the problem of sexual difference, argues, that Derrida's 'attention to the ways in which "sexual difference" figures or not and occupies or not a certain place or space in philosophical endeavours that he reads and values [...] does not amount to a simple endorsement of such a notion'. Instead, Berger argues,

his interest in "sexual difference" is precisely what leads him to forcefully question, hence deconstruct, the binary logic that underwrites traditional notions of sexual difference and of sexuality in general (to begin with, the oppositional divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality). All aspects of what he calls "sexuality" come under his critical scrutiny. He doesn't leave sexual difference at rest: he doesn't leave it in place.⁷⁴

For my part, I do not find enough indications to make a decision about Derrida's intentions with the sexualized language used in this particular essay. It is undecidable whether, as Kamuf argues, the sexualisation of language is a deliberate gesture in this particular case, or, whether, as the quotation from Berger's work would suggest, Derrida's reference to Kant's presentation of metaphysics as a 'cherished lover (*Geliebte*) to whom one always returns after quarrelling' is not a simple endorsement of the notion of 'sexual difference' but a manifestation of his deconstructive approach which 'doesn't leave sexual difference at rest', which 'doesn't leave it *in place*'.

⁷³ Peggy Kamuf, 'Derrida and Gender: The Other Sexual Difference', in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 82-107 (p. 88).

⁷⁴ Anne E. Berger, 'Sexing Differences', *differences*, 16.3 (2005), 52-67, p. 56.

Rather than deliberating on Derrida's intentions, I want to focus on and examine the effects of this particular way of narrating the foundations of the modern university. The question which interests me is 'What does narrating the institutionalization of the modern university as what seems to be a love affair between a philosopher and his lover, metaphysics, imply for how we can understand Kant's conceptualization of the modern university and how it can help us further develop and complicate insights which Derrida makes in his reading of this university discourse?'

Mistranslations in the sexual economy of the modern university

That the gender of metaphysics is feminine is clear from the beginning. However, it is not the expression 'lover' which reveals it. If Derrida wrote in English and used only the word lover, we would not know the gender of the philosopher's lover, the gender of metaphysics. Neither could we discern whether the philosopher's love of metaphysics is a 'homosexual' or a 'heterosexual' one. This all would have remained unclear. Derrida, however, as we know, does not write in English, but in French. In French, as in German, which are both gendered languages, metaphysics' grammatical gender is discernible immediately.

In English, the gender of philosopher's lover is revealed due to another locution Derrida uses in this passage; the word 'mistress'. In this passage, 'mistress' functions as a synonym (that is, as an 'interlinguistic translation') of the word 'lover'. Yet, the meaning of the word 'mistress' is not exactly the same as that of 'lover'. In English, 'lover' is 'cut' from its gender ambiguity. Or, perhaps, the other way round: by translating the word lover as mistress, additional parts are attached to

it, such as gender and other meanings Derrida plays on in order to describe this academic scene.

The plurivocality of this word, its ambiguous meanings which work in English and French, however, cannot be translated in the language in which Derrida reads this essay, that is, German, without an essential loss. In German, there is a clear difference between the various meanings of this word. ‘Mistress’ as a lover, as for instance a woman who has a continuing sexual relationship with a man who is married to someone else, is called *Geliebte*. A woman in a position of authority, a woman who has a control over something or someone, a woman who directs or reigns, is in German called *Meisterin* or *Herrin*. Even the meaning which refers to a woman who has mastered a skill or branch of learning, a female teacher, a schoolteacher, or a scholar, is not called ‘mistress’ in German but *Lehrerin* or *Gelehrerin*.⁷⁵ In French and in English, the languages into which Derrida translates Kant’s *Geliebte*, on the other hand, the ambiguity remains.

The word ‘mistress’, as Amy Louise Erickson shows in her study, has proliferated with these multiple and parallel meanings from the very beginning.⁷⁶ ‘Mistress’ comes to English from French and the sexual connotation and the inference of power date back to at least the later Middle Ages, to the fourteenth or fifteenth-century sources. Throughout its history, the various meanings referring to sexuality and power have changed and intertwined. In some contexts, the two overlap significantly, as it is in the case of European courts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where mistresses often wielded great power and influence. Furthermore, their relationships with kings were ‘an open secret’.

⁷⁵ ‘Mistress’, *Collins English-German Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-german/mistress> [Accessed 28 March 2017].

⁷⁶ Amy Louise Erickson, ‘Mistress and Marriage: or, a Short History of the Mrs’, *History Workshop Journal*, 78.1 (2014), 39-57.

Neither has been the sexual meaning of the word ‘mistress’ univocal. As Erickson referring to Johnson’s dictionary from 1755-6 shows, the word ‘mistress’ has been used in a romantic sense, as referring to a man’s beloved or sweetheart. However, it also denoted a ‘wife’ of an important member of a community, a ‘concubine’ and a ‘whore’. Additionally, the word has also come to denote a particular kind of ‘lover’, a ‘kept woman’. ‘Kept woman’, just like a wife of a wealthy man is maintained and financially supported, although, and in contrast to a wife, without legal binding. Simultaneously, while a mistress is ‘kept’ so as to be available for man’s sexual pleasure, she is not a ‘whore’ or a ‘prostitute’. A relationship with a mistress implies more than an exchange of sex for money. It involves emotional and social bonds, a romantic and possibly ‘faithful’ love.⁷⁷

The brief excursion into the convoluted history of this word and the concept could perhaps help us understand why philosopher’s lover, metaphysics, is ‘kept’ in the Lower Faculty (like one keeps a secret or hides a precious treasure) and why, although she has a force at her disposal, it is not a public one. Furthermore, following Derrida’s comments made in the ‘Roundtable on Translation’ on philosophy’s inability to master words which mean more than one thing at one time, we could also argue that ‘mistress’ might perhaps represent yet another limit of philosophy as translation. Just like *pharmakon*, ‘mistress’ could be seen as a word meaning more things at one time, as a word and a concept which cannot be translated without an essential loss. Whether one translates ‘mistress’ as ‘lover’, ‘teacher’, ‘scholar’ or ‘woman who reigns’, as we have seen on the case of German, whether one comes down on the side of love/sex, education or power, the undecidability is going to be

⁷⁷ In modern times, the meaning of the term ‘mistress’ shifts again. In today’s English, the ‘monetary’ aspect of its meaning has disappeared and ‘mistress’ is used to describe a woman in an illicit relationship with a married man, a man’s lover who is not his wife (Erickson, 55).

lost. To paraphrase Derrida then, ‘mistress’s ‘body’ – like that of *pharmakon* – thus might be ‘in itself a constant challenge to philosophy’.

Yet, there is an additional sense in which ‘mistress’ could be considered ‘untranslatable’. The word does not translate transparently not only – to use Jakobson’s classification again – in an ‘intralingual sense’ (as a synonym of a word ‘lover’), or, in an ‘interlingual sense’ (from English to German). It does not translate transparently in – what we could call – an ‘intrasexual sense’. In other words, although the term ‘mistress’ is, linguistically, a feminine version of the word ‘master’, mistress is not a translation of ‘master’ into feminine. In fact, there is no feminine equivalent term for the word and the concept of ‘master’.

This particular ‘untranslatability’ would perhaps explain why the word ‘mistress’ appears in the conclusion of ‘Vacant Chair’. As already suggested, Derrida, in contrast to traditional philosophers, does not want to ‘fix’ meaning or master plurivocality. The effect of deconstruction, as Berger also rightly describes in her essay, is not that of a dismissal of the deconstructed term but that of multiplication’.⁷⁸

The invocation of ‘mistress’ at the end of ‘Vacant Chair’ can be, indeed, understood as an example of this process. In other words, her appearance is a consequence of a process of multiplication which if not intrinsic to deconstruction is at least made visible by it. The multiplying logic of this endeavour always implies that there is an ‘other’. As deconstruction famously teaches us, there is always ‘an outside’ which intrudes ‘the inside’. In the conclusion of ‘Vacant Chair’, one of the ways in which the effects of this teaching ‘materialize’ is in the figure of a mistress.

⁷⁸ Berger, ‘Sexing Differences’, p. 56.

We can even argue that, in this sense, ‘mistress’ has been present in the essay from its very beginning. She has been there from its very introduction where Derrida links the discourse on the university to Kant and describes the political, cultural and intellectual context in which his reflections on the university took place. The figure of a ‘master’ who is, furthermore a ‘split subject’, a teaching-philosopher, already problematizes the unity and universality of philosophical discourse. In the moment when philosophical discourse is not understood as a self-contained and self-sufficient entity but has its ‘master’, it also calls for the problematization of his position and his ‘mastery’. The philosopher, as Derrida seeks to show with ‘Vacant Chair’, is not ‘the master of his house’, that is, of his claim that philosophy and philosophers are ‘powerless’ and therefore cannot censor. He deconstructs Kant’s claim that philosophers have no censoring power. He shows that the philosopher is not powerless but has a power and that there is censorship in the faculty of philosophy. Reason and its ‘department’, the Faculty of Philosophy, despite Kant’s proclamations, do censor.

As I argued earlier, unlike in traditional philosophy, for Derrida there is no desire to fix meaning or to master plurivocality. He understands translation as an ‘agreement’ which implies ‘the difference of languages rather than transparent translatability’. Translation, as Derrida argues in the ‘Roundtable Discussion’, thus operates in the mode of a ‘promise’. It ‘never succeeds in the pure and absolute sense of the term’ but ‘succeeds in promising success, in promising reconciliation’. To quote from Derrida again, ‘good translation is one that enacts that performative called a promise with the result that through translation one sees the coming shape of a possible reconciliation among languages’.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Derrida, ‘Roundtable’, p. 123.

The questions which arise from this discussion are the following: ‘What is this “agreement” upon which this particular translation (that of the “master” into “mistress” and the impossible topology of the university into an institution) relies? What kind of “promise” is it? What kind of success and reconciliation does this translation promise? And among which and whose languages?’

My proposition is that the agreement on which the institution of the university relies, and which manifests itself in the invocation of a ‘mistress’ in the conclusion of Derrida’s essay, is the exclusion of the sexually other, an exclusion which Kant masters by ‘playing double’, by playing both ‘the master’ and ‘the mistress’. But first, we need to develop on what I call the ‘intrasexual untranslatability’ in relation to the word and the concept of ‘mistress’.

Although the word ‘mistress’ is ambiguous, its various meanings do not occupy equal positions. Although we can hear the reference to ‘a woman teacher’ or ‘a woman who governs’ in the word ‘mistress’, in today’s English or French, the sexual connotation is clearly privileged. The socio-cultural and political effects which the word and the concept of ‘mistress’ at once produces and bears witness to, has been examined in a book by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. *Old Mistresses* explores and critiques how Art History ‘structurally and actively excluded women from being considered able to participate in the realm of art, and from being considered an artist’.⁸⁰ As Parker and Pollock explain, in English or in French, ‘there is no equivalent term of respect such as “Old Master” to designate the artist-women who also made Renaissance, Baroque and subsequent art in the West’.⁸¹ ‘Mistresses’, however, as the book sought to point

⁸⁰ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, ‘A Lonely Preface (2013)’, in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, 2nd edn (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2013), pp. xvii-xxviii, (p. xviii).

⁸¹ Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, p. xix.

out, do not occupy positions similar to those of ‘masters’ only in art. What the analysis shows is that ‘the problem of a sexual hierarchy in art is already being in language’. The phrase and the book ‘Old Mistresses’⁸² thus seeks to expose ‘the ideological, that is to say interested, partial and exclusionary, underpinnings of language in general’.⁸³

It is thus not only, as Derrida seems to suggest, metaphysics which translates the impossible topology of philosophy into an academic institution. It is not the philosopher’s mistress who has this at once censoring and productive power as one of the old meanings of the verb form of ‘mistress’ would suggest (‘to mistress it’, according to the OED, is to ‘play the part of mistress, to have the upper hand’).⁸⁴ It is not her power which translates the ‘impossible idea of the university’ into an institution, but the power which produces this particular structural organization, a system of ‘master-mistress’. In other words, the system which, to quote *Old Mistresses* again, ‘structurally and actively excludes women,’ the sexual hierarchy which is not limited only to art history, philosophy or the university, but is also the ‘underpinnings of language in general’.

But how does this sexual economy exclude women? And does this exclusion operate in a same way everywhere in the society, or does the privileging of the masculine over the feminine take different forms, for example, in art history and art, and still a different one in the philosophical discourse on the university? And, after

⁸² As Parker and Pollock note, the phrase ‘Old Mistresses’ was first used by Elizabeth Broun and Ann Gabhart for an exhibition of women artists of the past in 1972 (xix). For a problem of ‘mistress’ or ‘playing a mistress’ in philosophy see Grosz’ discussion of Irigaray’s mimicry (Grosz Elizabeth ‘Lacan and feminism’, in *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 147-187.

⁸³ Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, p. xix.

⁸⁴ ‘Mistress, v.’, *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/120148?rskey=TIq3MB&result=2#eid>> [accessed 9 February 2017].

all, is not the invocation of a 'mistress' rather a sign of women's inclusion? Does it not create a possibility if not 'having the upper hand', at least a possibility of 'having an equal hand'?

In order to address these questions, it is necessary to add yet another interpretation of a 'mistress'. In this - that is, phallogentric - sexual economy, 'mistress' is not defined only in relation to her male lover. Or, more precisely, her relation to him is defined by how she is positioned in relation with other women. She is a part of and has her proper place in a system where 'mistresses' are taken up and kept alongside other women, particularly those to whom the masters are married, their wives. If, then, she had any powers, they would have been used not so much or only in order to overpower her married lover as to claim an upper hand over the woman against whom she had been put into a competition. To put this into structural terms, in this economy, 'mistresses' are taken up and kept in order to introduce and formalize an 'outside' of the (marital) system. They thus help create and make functional an allegedly diverse and antagonistic field where women are presented as those in charge, as having powers over men. These powers are, however, only a projection. They are projected on women as a result of the master's insecurities and anxieties over his power, his identity, and his mastery. According to this interpretation, 'having a mistress' is a strategy of camouflage: it at once hides the master's fear of the sexually other, of the 'the feminine', and, by way of this disguise, it protects him from 'her'.

The word and the concept of 'mistress', which means more than one thing at one time, whose meaning is not univocal but multiple, does not, according to this interpretation, represent a challenge to philosophy. It is not that philosophical discourse - and the philosophers - cannot master 'her'; rather the opposite. The

mistress and her 'plurivocality', her 'untranslatable' and thus 'unmasterable' character, as well as the power she allegedly has, are a part if not a condition of the functioning of this sexual economy. She is a means and a symptom of the phallogentric system: the mistresses' 'mastery', that is - if we were to provide an 'intrasexual translation' - her 'misstery', is not as much of a misstery, or even mystery, as it is a mis-s-ery.

Clearly, feminist scholars do not have to engage with deconstruction or critical theory in order to find out that the university is phallogentric. A recognition that the university is 'man-centred' that it is, as Adrienne Rich puts it 'a breeding ground not of humanism, but of masculine privilege' is, together with the desire to change it, that what triggers feminist political and intellectual endeavours.⁸⁵ What the discussion in 'Vacant Chair' seems essential for is the exploration of how the university is phallogentric and how we can explore it in a way which rather than only confirming this fact would also open a possibility of theorizing the possibility of its transformation. More specifically, the questions my interpretation of Derrida's essay helps us address are questions concerning the complexities of how the binary logic, the privileging of the masculine over the feminine, and the resulting exclusion of the sexually other, operates in the theoretical discourse of this particular institution. It helps us examine the intricacies of how phallogentrism operates within a discourse which wants to create a place where freedom of thinking and expression - and thus also, consequently, of feminist scholarship and its disciplinary formations such as women's studies - would have been possible.

As described in the previous section, in 'Vacant Chair' specifically, the modern university is presented as an attempt to resist the State's censorship.

⁸⁵ Rich, 'Toward a Woman-Centred University', p. 127.

Derrida reads it as an attempt to create a space which would be withdrawn from the State's power and its censorship, as an attempt to create room for free thinking and freedom of expression. As he recalls, the way in which Kant justifies the existence of the university, the Faculty of Philosophy, and claims the reversal of the powers between the State and his faculty, and how Kant claims an upper hand for philosophy, is through arguing that rationality is given 'a priori'. It is this argument which backs his claim for the reversal of powers between the 'powerful' State and the Faculty of Philosophy which has no power, which is weak and vulnerable.

However, as we read in 'Vacant Chair', the teacher of pure reason, despite Kant's declarations, is not powerless. Although, his power is not the same as that of the State, the philosopher still has power. His power does not only stem from his assigned position, *ex cathedra*. His chair, as Derrida suggests, 'is empty'. In a sense, the philosopher does not even need to have a 'chair', he does not need socially accepted status and authority, in order to execute his power. He does not need legal and public power in order to dominate (her) and claim the upper hand for philosophy. His power is 'produced' *elsewhere*.

Derrida describes the philosopher's power as 'haunting'. As Derrida puts it, the teaching philosopher haunts the scene more than he dominates it; he dominates it, indeed, as would a phantom'. And, as already quoted, he adds a further specification to this description: one could therefore say, Derrida claims, that the philosopher 'fascinates and seduces, if these connotations were not too closely tied to sensibility and imagination: for reason should break the charm'.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 63.

The philosopher's power, as it seems, therefore does not need a priori reason as it needs other powers; such as the power of imagination. One could, indeed, conclude, and Derrida's reference to art in the very end of the essay would support such interpretation, that instituting a university is not so much a philosophical project as it is an artistic one. When founding a university, rather than reason, one needs imagination; or both. Philosophers thus, and despite Kant's argumentation which Derrida also includes in 'Vacant Chair', also might be an artist or, at least, have some 'artistic skills'.⁸⁷

Undoubtedly, such a proposition would complicate the relationship between the modern university defined as a 'philosophical' or 'scientific' institution on the one hand, and artistic practice on the other. Yet, according to my interpretation, the quarrel between a 'philosopher' and a 'poet' is not what is at stake. The question is not whether the institutionalization of the university proceeds 'scientifically' or 'artistically', whether one employs reason or imagination. What follows from my analysis is that when conceiving the foundations of the university, one does not need only reasoning and perhaps artistic skills, but also – or most importantly - powers which are 'sexual'. More specifically, it seems to me that in his discourse on the foundations of the university, Kant makes use of a logic similar to that I identified as that which produces the invocation of 'mistress' in the end of Derrida's essay in a particular way.

This 'master', as I showed, dominates the mistress by way of projecting power onto her. He secures his position of mastery by creating and formalizing an 'outside' to a closed (marital) system, and thus creates an allusion of a diverse and antagonistic field where women are presented as dominating men.

⁸⁷ See Derrida, 'Vacant Chair', p. 56-57, 62-63, 69.

Yet, simultaneously, this academic master is not only ‘a master’. He also plays the part of the ‘mistress’. The way Kant claims the upper hand for the Faculty of Philosophy is by mimicking a mistress’s power. By way of fascinating and seducing, by using charm and disguise, Kant claims for the Faculty of Philosophy a position which is similar to that of a ‘mistress’ within a phallogentric sexual economy: a formalized outside space (the Faculty of Philosophy as a place without censorship) to the system of the State’s censorship. We could, indeed, say that Kant ‘mistresses’ the State. The withdrawal of the university from the State’s censorship takes the form of playing at ‘emasculatation’, by hiding one’s masculinity, one’s masculine identity and power.

As already argued, what translates the impossible topology of the university into an institution is therefore not only ‘metaphysics’ but also ‘phallogentricism’. The way the ‘agreement’ (between the king and the philosopher, between the state and the university) is made possible does not, however, proceed simply through the exclusion of the feminine. Rather, this agreement needs the feminine as its enabling ‘other’. It excludes it by ‘incorporating’ it through a complex set of reversals and appropriations. The way Kant founds the university and sustains this sexual economy is by playing both ‘sides’ of this economy, ‘the master’ and ‘the mistress’, the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’.

Other Vacancies

My interpretation of how ‘sexual economy’ functions within Kant’s university discourse supports and further develops Sarah Kofman’s deconstructive reading of ethical discourse proposed by Kant presented in her essay ‘The Economy of Respect:

Kant and respect for Women'.⁸⁸ Interestingly, Kofman delivered this article first as a talk in Derrida's seminar on respect in the works of Kant which took place in *École Normale Supérieure* during the academic year 1980-81, that is, a few years before Derrida gave his lecture series 'Transfer *Ex Cathedra*' (of which 'Vacant Chair' is a part).

In the essay, Kofman deconstructs Kantian ethical discourse by showing that, firstly, men's respect of women is not just an application of the moral imperative, one of the cases where a free being respects another free being, but is foundational to Kant's ethics and, secondly, that 'the holding women in respect – at a certain respectful distance – [...] serves as a cover for an operation of a completely different order, an operation of mastery'.⁸⁹ In other words, Kofman shows that Kant's ethics is not 'universal' or 'natural' but is founded on a bias which privileges the masculine over the feminine and which men's respect for women both conceals and keeps functional.

As Kofman argues, in *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant presents the relation between the sexes as 'one of moral relations wherein each respects the other as representative of the sublimity of the moral law'. Yet, recalling Kant's *Anthropology*, Kofman shows that in Kant's view, the relation between the sexes is 'rather one of warlike relations in which each struggles for domination'.⁹⁰ As she describes it,

in this war it is the so-called weaker sex which has the upper hand – just because of its weakness; men are thereby disarmed, constrained to respect as well as to a whole series of compensations: the right of women to respect

⁸⁸ Sarah, Kofman, 'The Economy of Respect: Kant and Respect for Women', in *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant*, ed. by Robin May Schott (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 355-372.

⁸⁹ Kofman, p. 357.

⁹⁰ Kofman, p. 357.

seems from the beginning to be a right acquired by their weakness, a measure of protection granted to the weak by the strong.

As always there arises a downright reversal: the weakness of women and all the traits which characterizes them are so many levers for controlling men and using them at their will. If women cannot dominate by force, they dominate by indirect means, by the obliqueness of ruse, the art women have to use men for their own ends. Thanks to their charms, to the love they inspire, women enchain their victims and master them through their particular abilities.⁹¹

As Kofman further argues, ‘the respect for women’ sets up the ‘sexual economy’ of a certain ‘respite’: ‘the woman refuses, the man demands’. She ‘must appear cold, not respond too easily to the demand, under pain of her own dishonour’. It is, as she argues, ‘her reserve, her modesty’ which makes ‘humanity possible’, that which prevents men from the fall into ‘animality’.⁹² Yet, the respect for women is not, as the quotation above also indicates, simply an expression of men’s benevolence and moral virtues. What seems to be a generous and virtuous ‘gesture’ of respect and protection on the part of the strong (men) for the benefit of the weak (women), in fact conceals the ‘real’ nature of the ‘war of sexes’. Rather than benevolence and the will to compensate for unequal ‘powers’, it is the fear of women which leads men to respect them. As Kofman argues with her deconstructive and psychoanalytic reading of this sexual economy,

To respect is to hold them in awe at a distance, in order not to be tempted to lift their veil or master them, an act culpable because of the prohibition of incest, but above all dangerous and doubly dangerous. The lifting of the veil would risk confounding man, crushing him, paralyzing him, *and* depriving woman, the mother of all her phallic dignity, emasculating her. To put

⁹¹ Kofman, p. 355-6.

⁹² Kofman, p. 358-9. To connect it to the issues discussed previously, according to this interpretation, her modesty would thus also be a kind of ‘censorship’.

women/mothers on high, to respect them, is to avoid seeing that they have no penis, “that they have nothing to hide.” The economy realized by respect is that of the agony of castration, communicated with a gesture of fetishism.⁹³

According to Kofman’s interpretation then, men’s respect for women, as well as all Kantian ethics, are bound to the anguish of castration. In effect, Kofman concludes, ‘respect for women’ is reversed ‘misogyny’. It requires

the rejection in oneself and beyond oneself of femininity, from fear of being in one way or another contaminated by it and perishing from it. Respect for women is always the glorious, moral obverse of the “misogyny” of men.⁹⁴

As follows from Kofman’s work, ‘respect for women’ is therefore yet another device for dominating women. It is an ‘umbrella’ which both conceals the operation of mastery of men over women and by ‘pushing’ women onto the pedestal of worship and thus keeping them at a ‘safe’ distance. The universal moral respect and whole of Kant’s ethics can be ‘established only by excluding women in the same move by which they seem to be included’.⁹⁵ It is claimed that Kant’s ‘ethical theory veils again and again his horror of recognizing that the feminine infiltrates the masculine; that inclination, sexuality, and desire pervade reason; and that the hidden force driving moral law is feminine, sexual, and powerful’.⁹⁶

My interpretation of the final passage of Derrida’s ‘Vacant Chair’ supports and further develops these conclusions. As I have shown, a similar logic of reversals

⁹³ Kofman, p. 369-70.

⁹⁴ Kofman, p. 369.

⁹⁵ Natalie Alexander, ‘Rending Kant’s Umbrella: Kofman’s Diagnosis of Ethical Law’, in *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*, eds. Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 143-158 (p. 157).

⁹⁶ Alexander, ‘Rending Kant’s Umbrella’, p. 156.

which Kofman identifies in Kant's ethics is at work also in his university discourse. It is not 'reason' or 'metaphysics' which are foundational to the university. It is not the 'mistress' who has the power at her disposal. Rather, 'the mistress' and the power she allegedly has are part and parcel of the sexual economy which excludes women. Seemingly including women and showing them as those who dominate over the men hides the fear of women and keeps them in 'respite'.

Yet, additionally, in the case of the university founding, Kant himself makes claim to similar 'respect'. He positions himself and the Faculty of Philosophy as those who, in relation to the State, are weak and vulnerable and do not make any claims to power. As such the faculty of the philosophy and philosophers should be, according to Kant, granted protection and the rule of non-violation. The State is obliged not to exercise its power over philosophers and their faculty. Yet, as Derrida shows, this is only a deception as Kant wants to gain the upper hand for the Faculty of Philosophy. The strategies Kant uses in order to perform this reversal remind of those which, according to Kofman, Kant attributes to women.

Kofman argues that 'respect for women is always the glorious, moral obverse of the "misogyny" of men'. It is 'the rejection in oneself and beyond oneself of femininity, from fear of being in one way or another contaminated by it and perishing from it'.⁹⁷ The question is then what does the repetition of this logic in Kant's discourse on the university imply. Could this repetition signal - rather than 'rejection' - an acceptance 'in oneself and beyond oneself of femininity'? Or, does it at least signal openness to accept it? Does it create an opening for freeing us from a fear of being 'in one way or another contaminated by it [femininity] and perishing from it'? Or, is Kant's utilization of strategies associated with women within the

⁹⁷ Kofman, p. 369.

phallogentric sexual economy simply just another ‘observe of the “misogyny” of men’? Or, is his theorization of the university even a misogyny multiplied?

What my reading of Derrida’s deconstruction of Kant’s university discourse shows is that the theorizations as well as politics of the ‘sexual forces’ need to be taken into account if we wish to theorize the university and its disciplines, and imagine their futures beyond its phallogentric predicament.

This proposition, as I take it, leads to a particular ‘school’ within feminist theorising. This ‘school’ suggests we explore concepts and paradigms which have been, as it seems from my vantage point, rather on the periphery of the focus of feminist theory. More specifically, I am drawn to theorizations such as that of Elizabeth Grosz who, in her text entitled ‘The Force of Sexual Difference’, argues that

it is time to move beyond the very language of identity and gender, to look at other issues left untouched, questions unasked, assumptions unelaborated, that feminist and queer politics need to address in order to revitalize themselves and to propel themselves into new conceptions of desire, power, pleasure, and into the development of new practices.⁹⁸

For Grosz, such a shift in ‘language’ will allow feminists ponder questions which are currently ‘underdeveloped and unasked’ and which have been ‘deemed the most offensive and disputed within the last decades’ such as that of ‘messy biology, matter, materiality’ and particularly ‘sexual difference, that untidy and ambiguous invocation of the pre-structuring of being by irreducible difference’.⁹⁹ Grosz, who,

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘The Force of Sexual Difference’, in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (London and New York: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 171-184 (p. 171).

⁹⁹ Grosz, ‘The Force’, p. 171.

as she says, follows the work of Irigaray and Deleuze, conceptualizes sexual difference as that which

both preconditions and destabilizes gender and bodies, that which problematizes all identity, that which discourse and representation cannot contain and politics cannot direct: sexual difference as force; and force itself as divided, differentiated, sexualized.¹⁰⁰

For Grosz, this theorizing will also transform how we conceive the political. As she develops on such a potential, sexual difference, which is conceived of as not

tied to opposition, difference not determined by identity, difference not subsumed by comparison, difference as an ontological force – can disturb and displace the politics of identity on which most feminist, queer, and minority politics are currently based, and can provide new research questions and new political experiments by which these political programs may revitalize themselves.¹⁰¹

Indeed, my interpretation of the operation of sexual difference in Derrida's reading of Kant's university discourse can be seen as an examination of 'sexual difference' as Grosz envisions it. In other words, it is an exploration of sexual difference as an 'untidy and ambiguous invocation of the pre-structuring of being by irreducible difference', as a 'force' which is itself divided, differentiated and sexualized and which both 'preconditions and destabilizes gender and bodies', 'problematizes all identity' and is that 'which discourse and representation cannot contain and politics cannot direct'.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Grosz, 'The Force', xxx, p. 172.

¹⁰¹ Grosz, 'The Force', xxx, p. 172.

¹⁰² Grosz, 'The Force', p. 171-2.

Yet, if there is a lesson to be learned from my discussion of these ‘Current Vacancies’ in Part II of my thesis, it is that we also need to think about *how* are we to propose such shifts in our theoretical and political focus. Following the journey and the places encountered along it, it seems necessary to deliberate carefully on how the ‘force of sexual difference’ is going to be claimed, on how this distortion is going to be accounted for.

Part II – Resisting to the ‘neoliberalization’ of the University (Accounting for the University)

Chapter III - University Values

Bill Readings’ Accounts

In Bill Readings’ *The University in Ruins* published in 1997 appears a supplementary thread which develops but also leads away from his main proposition that the current university of ‘Excellence’ is a ruined institution. This supplementary thread leads from his examination of the publication by UNESCO of Alfonso Borrero Cabal’s *The University as an Institution Today* (1993) which Readings first outlines in his introductory chapter. Drawing on this text, Readings proposes that the university becomes a ‘bureaucratic corporation’ through implementing a ‘generalized logic of “accountability”’.¹ This phrase, ‘generalized logic of accountability’, is meant to capture two aspects – firstly, ‘accountability’ becoming a synonym for ‘accounting’, and, secondly, ‘accountable accounting’ becoming a logic which structures not only university book-keeping but proliferates and takes over every university activity such as teaching and research. As I interpret it, following thus in the steps of Simon Morgan Wortham, Dominik LaCapra and Samuel Weber, the shift in analytical approach allows Readings to grasp the university without following the structural organization characteristic of his key

¹ Readings, *The University*, p. 3.

argument and thus opens a possibility to theorize the university as other than ‘ruins’.²

Applying this approach, Readings grasps the university as a paradoxical formation which produces ambiguous effects for those inhabiting it. This is best demonstrated when he considers the ‘Excellence’ mode in relation to types of knowledge and groups hitherto excluded from higher education. As we read in the chapter ‘The Posthistorical University’, although in his final analysis, the equating of accountability with accounting ‘only serves to prop up the logic of consumerism that rules the University of Excellence’, Readings nonetheless does not narrowly-mindedly denounce the new ‘logic of evaluation’ but recognizes its ambivalence.³ On the one hand, the ‘generalized logic of accounting’, because it ‘pretends indifference to the gendering or other forms of marking of the bodies that it evaluates’, perpetuates and further strengthens already existing hierarchies and privileges.⁴ On the other hand, however, it is the generalized logic of accountability that ‘has permitted the speed with which feminism and African-American studies have risen to powerful positions in the disciplinary order’.⁵ Drawing on the insight

² LaCapra argues: ‘Somehow incidentally, “accountability” takes him [Readings] beyond the measure of excellence and as such might be incompatible with Readings’ historical narrative which although supposedly allows for “divergent and noncontemporaneous discourse” (Readings p.14), retains a certain telos somewhat at odds with the dissensually non-linear thought he advocates’. Dominick LaCapra, ‘The University in Ruins?’, *Critical Inquiry* 25.14 (1998), 32-55, (p. 55). Also Weber, who is otherwise critical of Reading’s analysis, sees this moment as close to marking ‘the possibility of thinking the future [of the university] as “promise”’. Samuel Weber, ‘The Future Campus: Destiny in a virtual world’, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21 (1999), 151-164 (p. 161). Wortham’s, Lacapra’s and Weber’s interpretations are in odds with Nicholas Royle’s. *The University in Ruins* was the subject of heated debate between LaCapra and Royle in the journal *Critical Inquiry* during 1998 and 1999. Royle replied to LaCapra’s ‘The University in Ruins?’ with ‘Yes, Yes, the University in Ruins’ (Nicholas Royle, ‘Yes, Yes, the University in Ruins’, *Critical Inquiry* 26.1 (1999), 147-153) to which LaCapra replied with ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes ... Well, Maybe’ (Dominick LaCapra, ‘Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes... Well, Maybe: Response to Nicholas Royle’, *Critical Inquiry* 26.1 (1999), 154-158. For a different development and interpretation of Readings’ work see special issue *The University in Ruins* published in *Oxford Literary Review* in 1995 edited by Timothy Clark and Nicholas Royle (Timothy Clark and Nicholas Royle, eds., *The University in Ruins*, special issue of *The Oxford Literary Review*, 17.1 (1995), 1-160).

³ Readings, *The University*, p. 134.

⁴ Readings, *The University*, p. 144.

⁵ Readings, *The University*, p. 146.

that the effects of the ‘general logic of accountability’ can be both positive and negative, Readings argues that he does not simply want to denounce accountable evaluative modes or evaluation in general. Instead, he claims that it is the question of value and evaluation which are at stake in the current university.

Such a proposition significantly complicates the two main arguments of *The University in Ruins*. Firstly, it challenges the idea that the university has lost its content and is thus ‘non-referential’. In other words, taking up the question of value and evaluation seems to suggest, against Readings’ repeated proclamations, that the referent of ‘Excellence’ is – after all – not ‘empty’. It reveals that ‘Excellence’ is not a neutral, unmotivated ‘lump’ of technology and measurement but is determined by forces which represent particular cultural, political and economic interests.

Excellence, although it presents itself as empty of any idea *is* still ideological.

Specifically, it is determined by market forces and its aim is to contribute to the marketization and the corporatization of the university. The supposed ‘emptiness’ or non- character of the university is then rather a strategy which is used to mask its ideological content and thus help promote its interests.

Secondly, conceiving the university through the notion of accountability also allows a more complex theorization of the historical development of the university. Rather than relying on ‘oppositional thinking’ (referent/non-referent), Readings conceptualizes the genealogy of the university as a displacement of the question of value; as a shift from focusing on the ‘content’ or ‘nature’ of value, to focussing on its function. As Readings argues, the question ‘what’ (i.e. what is the value) ceases to matter in the University of Excellence. Measures themselves become the targets. All university content, teaching, research, and the university’s relationship to the society at large, are reduced to an undifferentiated ‘mass’ easily subjected to the

logic of costs and benefits. This reduction then also bears significant political and ethical consequences for the university. What was once called the ‘social responsibility of the University, its accountability to society’, Readings argues, is now ‘solely a matter of services rendered for a fee’.⁶

Finally, the shift in analytical approach also influences Readings’ view on how the resistance against the mode of Excellence should be conveyed. Drawing on the argument that it is the ‘general logic of accountability’ through which the Excellence mode operates, Readings proposes that a strategy to help resist it must intervene within the domain of evaluation. Also at this point, rather than relying on oppositional thinking, as with his argument on (non)referentiality, Readings proceeds through a strategy of a ‘double move’:

It is imperative that the University responds to the demand for accountability, while at the same time refusing to conduct the debate over the nature of its responsibility solely in terms of the language of accounting (whose currency is excellence).⁷

In other words, academics should intervene in the language of evaluation which reduces accountability to mere accounting by taking responsibility which would not let itself be reduced to accounting. This, as Readings further specifies, will consist in resisting ‘accounting solutions’ by making decisions and ‘critical judgments’. These decisions and judgments will, however, not be treated as ‘methods’ of finding what ‘constitutes true value’. Readings does not wish to set up new criteria for ‘measuring’ value but seeks to find ways ‘*to keep the question of evaluation open*’,

⁶ Readings, *The University*, p. 32.

⁷ Readings, *The University*, p. 8.

of holding the question of ‘value’ and its ‘measurement’ as ‘a matter for dispute’.⁸ In this way, Readings argues, ‘evaluation can become a social question rather than a device of measurement’: ‘Holding open the question of value is a way of holding open a capacity to imagine the social otherwise’.⁹

In order to further define how the holding of the question of value opens as a capacity to imagine the social otherwise may proceed, Readings turns to Lyotard’s notion of ‘differend’¹⁰ and, interestingly, to a tradition which Readings otherwise repudiates in the book, to deconstruction.¹¹ Specifically, Readings suggests we turn to Paul de Man’s understanding of ‘the reading of literature as a necessary and impossible task’ and implement it onto the way we approach the question of evaluation in the university.¹² Raising the question of value as something that is ‘finally both unanswerable *and* essential’ implies, as he further develops, a production of ‘a judgment of value that seeks to grapple with and take responsibility for itself as a discursive act’. In other words, approaching university accountability in this way will involve radical interrogation of the process and the scene of judging itself. Questions which, as Readings suggests, must be continuously posed and worried over, such as ‘to whom and to what the University remains accountable’ will act as vehicles for the practice of this new university accountability.¹³

As I interpret it, Readings’ elaborations on ‘responsible responding’ as a means of resisting the general logic of accountability which rules the current university open a possibility of thinking the university and its futures as other than in

⁸ Readings, *The University*, p. 130.

⁹ Readings, *The University*, p. 120.

¹⁰ For the discussion of Lyotard’s ‘differend’ in relation to disciplinarity of feminist research see Tuija Pulkkinen, ‘Feelings of Injustice: The Institutionalization of Gender Studies and Pluralization of Feminism’, *differences*, special issue *Transatlantic Gender Crossings*, 27.2 (2016), 103-124.

¹¹ Readings, *The University*, p. 124.

¹² Readings, *The University*, p. 132.

¹³ Readings, *The University*, p. 134.

‘ruins’. At this point, Readings’ thinking is close to works of Peggy Kamuf and Jacques Derrida who conceive the university specifically in relation to accountability and responsibility.¹⁴ But before I proceed in this direction, I wish to draw attention to another aspect of Readings’ discussion. It will help further specify what in Readings’ account of accountability still seems to defeat the mission of taking a university responsibility as it is outlined above. Furthermore, importantly, it will explain the motivations for the intervention in the current debates about the university which I propose in this part of my thesis.

Deconstructing the Critique of the Neoliberal University

According to Readings, it is particularly the question of the value of teaching which will allow us to pursue resistance against the Excellence mode which defines the current university. In the chapter entitled ‘The Scene of Teaching’, Readings argues that pedagogy ‘has a specific chronotope that is radically alien to the notion of accountable time upon which the excellence of capitalist-bureaucratic management and bookkeeping depend’.¹⁵ Pedagogy, as he argues, is ‘markedly at odds with the logic of accounting that runs the University of Excellence’.¹⁶

What makes pedagogy so resistant to excellence according to Readings arises from its inherent ‘irreconcilability’. This is because, as he explains, the question of the value of teaching is always ‘posed from a subjective standpoint that is taken to be central’ (e.g., from the standpoint of the teacher, the student or the administrator).

¹⁴ Kamuf addresses this problem particularly in her article ‘Accountability’ published in 2007 which I will closely examine in the chapter ‘Reading Accountability as a Text’. Derrida conceives a ‘university responsibility’ particularly in his essay ‘Mochlos; or, The Conflict of the Faculties’. I will examine this essay and particularly its opening in the chapter entitled ‘Taking Tremendous Responsibilities’.

¹⁵ Readings, *The University*, p. 151.

¹⁶ Readings, *The University*, p. 154.

Pedagogy thus resists the reduction to an umbrella-like evaluation which administrators impose on university activities. With teaching, the current attempt of administrators to position themselves as ‘meta-evaluators’ fails. They cannot synthesize the different, and sometimes conflicting, interests of the three groups (professors, students and administrators) into one general formula.¹⁷

Drawing on this assumption Readings therefore suggests we pursue the quality harboured in pedagogy in our attempts to resist the ‘general logic of accounting’. With this proposition, however, he does not want to re-centre pedagogy at the University of Excellence, to put ‘old’ teaching ‘back to the center of things’.¹⁸ As Readings explains, he does not want to promote an old view which embraces teaching as a path from dependency to autonomy, as a means of emancipation which, for him, always entails the constitution of a sovereign autonomous subject. In contrast to this traditional approach, Readings wants to embrace pedagogy as ‘*the question of justice*’,¹⁹ which, for him, entails understanding education as a ‘*relation, a network of obligation*’.²⁰ This also involves an obligation ‘to listen, without knowing why, before we know what it is that we are to listen to’. In this way, we will be able to centre the university and its pedagogy on the ‘attention to the other’.²¹

Although I am sympathetic to the direction in which Readings is aiming, i.e. centring the university and its pedagogy on the ‘attention to the other’, I find it problematic. As I argued in chapter one, without the possibility of separation (i.e. emancipation) from one’s ‘networks’ and ‘obligations’ as they are already defined

¹⁷ Readings, *The University*, p. 151.

¹⁸ Readings, *The University*, p. 152.

¹⁹ Readings, *The University*, p. 154.

²⁰ Readings, *The University*, p. 158.

²¹ Readings, *The University*, p. 162.

and configured by our past and present, one cannot - simply - imagine the ‘radically’ other and constitute a relationship to it/her/him. At this point, Readings again falls with his argumentation back into the line of opposing ‘relationality’ to ‘non-relationality’.

Most importantly, it is this inability to conceive the demand for autonomy and independence and the relation and obligation to the other in terms other than oppositional. This, as I showed in the previous discussion, closes the possibility of imagining political transformation. There is, however, a further aspect of Readings’ approach to the question of accountability and pedagogy which still demands examination.

Why do I consider Readings’ critique of equating accountability with accounting inadequate? It is not that he situates the attempt to resist the Excellence mode in the domain of pedagogy that I find problematic. As I show in the arguments developed in this part of my thesis, there are, indeed, theoretical, political and historical reasons why we should specifically worry over the domain of university pedagogical practices in relation to accountability. Instead, what I find problematic is that Readings grounds his argument on the assumption that pedagogy is incompatible with ‘accountable logic’. This assumption, as I interpret it, is part and parcel of a particular grammar which not only structures Reading’s university discourse but is indicative of the current debate on the university and its futures.

In Readings’ discourse, this ‘grammar’ manifests itself in a way we can summarize as follows: Firstly, despite the initial attempt to envision ‘the general logic of accountability’ as a conflictual process with ambivalent effects, there is no doubt about the value and the status of ‘accounting’ in his discourse. For Readings, ‘accounting’ is clearly a bad procedure and accountability which accentuates

accounting brings only negative and harmful effects for the university. Secondly, as Readings' deliberation on pedagogy reveals, the 'general logic of accountability' is, in his view, immediately positioned as being alien to the university body proper. It is as if the 'accountable logic' was implemented on university activities – to its teaching and research - from the outside, from domains which are not related to academic work. More specifically, in Readings' view, 'accounting' belongs to the world of business which – through the implementation of the general logic of accountability – infects and colonizes the university. Drawing on this assumption, Readings then argues that although it infiltrates and begins to dominate all university activities, the group which belongs to the bearers of this new logic and the representatives of the interests of businesses can be easily identified. It is a group which, as he shows with his reading of Cabal's text, gained unprecedented significance within the current university - administrators. Finally, on his timeline of the university's historical development, Readings situates the moment of the 'contamination' of the university by practices which equate accountability with accounting to the present, to what he calls the 'posthistorical' era. In other words, for Readings, 'equating accounting with accountability' is a new and unprecedented phenomenon. It is as if it was only 'now', when the displacement of the question of value occurs, when the question 'what is the value?' shifts to the interest solely in how the value is measured.

Clearly, contemporary critics of the so-called 'neoliberalization of higher education' do not use Readings' terminology. Today, we do not use terms such as 'the University of Excellence' or 'non-referentiality'. In the current discourse, which seeks to critique the processes of 'neoliberalization' or 'corporatization' of higher education, the university usually passes under the name 'the neoliberal university'.

The structure of the discourses in which this phrase usually figures, is, however, not dissimilar to that identified in Reading's treatment of the 'general logic of accountability'.

The phrase 'the neoliberal university' mostly functions as a shorthand meant to describe all the horrors resulting from so-called 'neoliberalization'. It is meant to signify the 'marketization' of higher education, its privatization, the imposition of austerity and a resulting precariousness. It is also meant to capture the expansion of 'managerialism' and quantitative performance control. The phrase also describes the privileging of applied research over 'basic' theoretical research, natural sciences over the humanities, and the general trend of instrumentalizing knowledge across all disciplines which would make them more easily available for application in industries and policies.

When we say 'the neoliberal university', we also mean to express the changes within the so called 'pedagogic scene'. It indicates the shift when teaching turns into a mere service offered to customers for a fee, with the aim to increase their employability and value on the job market, rather than to make a mark in students' critical and creative approach to the world they live in.

In relation to feminism, as discussed in Part one, feminism's institutionalization in academia is sometimes considered to be a symptom of 'neoliberalization'. According to narratives which, as Robyn Wiegman and others have shown, dominate the debate since the 1990s, institutional recognition and support for feminism is perceived as corrupting a once revolutionary women's movement. Since the early 1990s feminism began to pose 'the academic *against* feminism' and narrate the 'political failure in academic feminism's institutional

success'.²² In this paradigm, which opposes the political against the academic, the academic institutionalization of feminism is always understood as a failure,²³ as something which is 'bringing feminism to an end'.²⁴

The same is true for the concepts employed by feminist scholarship. Although, as Scott argues, 'neither feminism nor gender are homogeneous even at their points of origin (if we can even identify such points)' and 'the forms they take and the meanings given to them are adapted to local circumstances',

[b]oth 'gender' and 'feminism' are usually taken to have Anglo-American origins; indeed, for some critics they are an example of the one-way trajectory of globalization, in the transmission of goods or ideas. Thus feminism has been reviled as one of those commodities "made in the USA" that corrupts the culture of traditional societies and gender (of similar provenance) has been taken to constitute a thread to the natural or "God-given" distinctions between the sexes.²⁵

Similarly, when the demands for 'equality', 'inclusion', 'transparency' or, precisely, 'accountability', are recognized and endorsed on the level of a university policy, these are also, by the critics of the neoliberal university, revealed and criticized as concepts which are being (mis)used to promote rather than question the unequal distribution of power within academic and other global markets.

The phrase 'the neoliberal university' refers to all of that and, as Wendy Brown points out in *Undoing Demos*, the adjective 'neoliberal' refers even to much

²² Wiegman, 'The Possibility', p. 41.

²³ Wiegman, 'Academic Feminim', p. 32.

²⁴ Wiegman, 'Academic Feminim', p. 23.

²⁵ Joan Wallach Scott, 'Feminist Reverberations', in *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 68-90, p. 80.

more.²⁶ However, as it also seems from reading Brown's book, although this adjective seems to say so much, it can end up saying very little. Put rather bluntly, the adjective 'neoliberal' has become an 'empty signifier'. It does not help with critical examination and evaluation of the situation we find ourselves in today.²⁷

In relation to the question of the university specifically, the problem is that the phrase 'the neoliberal university' seems to cover all complexities and contradictions as it in one stroke grooms and neatly aligns everything one would wish to critique to one side of the phrase – the adjective 'neoliberal', while the noun (university) is kept more or less untouched.²⁸ It seems to me that when we speak about 'the neoliberal university', we usually avoid the critique of the university – a critique in a manner of self-critique, an interrogation of what the 'university' and 'we' are and do. In other words, the critique led from this standpoint targets the university only in order to identify what we think are the university's - and our - 'others' against whom we need to defend ourselves.

But, was it not – precisely - 'the other' in whose name we wanted to critique the so called neoliberal university in the first place? Was it not for 'the attention to the other' that Readings wanted to re-define pedagogy as the question of justice and

²⁶ Wendy Brown, *Undoing Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MS and London, England: The MIT Press, 2015). As we can read in *Undoing Demos*, neoliberalism, as governing reason or rationality, is a logic which 'economizes' everything. Thus, among many other things, 'neoliberalism' is responsible – apart from profoundly damaging democracy - also for climate change, crippling of welfare state, or online dating.

²⁷ What makes the adjective 'neoliberal' useless does not, however, derive from the language in which this word is formed and conveyed. As Berger, following Scott explains in relation to the terms used by critical analyses, their 'usefulness' rather depend 'on specific or "idiolectic" uses and contextual redeployments and displacements'. As she argues, when the term is treated as an 'open question about how those meanings are established, what they signify, and in what contexts, then it remains a useful – because critical – category of analysis'. Anne E. Berger, 'Gender Springtime in Paris: A Twenty-First-Century Tale of Seasons', *differences*, special issue *Transatlantic Gender Crossings*, 27.2 (2016), 1-26, (p. 10).

²⁸ See, for instance, the discussion on the relation between REF and casualization: McRae, Andrew, 'The paradoxes of neo-liberalism in UK higher education, *A Head of Department's Blog* <<https://headofdepartmentblog.wordpress.com/2016/04/26/the-paradoxes-of-neo-liberalism-in-uk-higher-education/>> [accessed 9 February 2017].

professed that, in order to resist the university's Excellence mode, 'we have to listen, without knowing why, before we know what it is that we are to listen to'?

It seems to me that the grammar which defines the critique of the neoliberal university betrays such a mission. It only re-affirms the already agreed verdict that it is the 'neoliberal' - whatever the adjective is meant to refer to ('instrumentalization', 'accountability', 'inclusion' 'academic feminism')- which we don't want to hear. What we end up critiquing is not the university per se but what seem to be encroachments from the outside – 'neoliberal' - world. The perpetrators are identified and kept at a sufficiently safe distance; nothing moves, nothing shifts, nothing trembles.

To be clear, it is not that I want to argue that notions such as 'counting', 'accounting', 'accountability', 'transparency', 'equality', 'emancipation', or, indeed, 'academic feminism' and 'a university', are unequivocal and unproblematic formulations. Rather the opposite – they are complex and intricate and that is why I believe it is worth bothering with them although they may be considered – by the critics of the neoliberal university – to be old and compromised.²⁹ Neither do I wish to deny the devastating impacts of the so called neoliberalization of the university. These effects are, in one way or another, unfortunately, familiar to most of those inhabiting Western universities, and particularly in countries such as the UK.

That we need to resist marketization of the university is thus not what is put into dispute here. What I do suggest is at stake, is, how can we convey this resistance? The question is by what rhetorical, theoretical, political, and institutional

²⁹ Is it not, rather, abandoning concepts such as 'feminism', 'accountability' or 'transparency' what the so called 'neoliberalism' wants us to do?

means and from which positions and with a view to ‘what’, can we enact this resistance.

To attempt to account for such differences is crucial particularly because the effects of the so called ‘neoliberalization’ do not affect all non-applicable knowledges (that is most of the work produced in the humanities), academic disciplines and groups inhabiting universities in a same way. Ironically, the current austerity measures affect most severely those for whom a more traditional - let’s say ‘pre-neoliberal’ - university is not, or not a better, option – people of colour, disabled students, sexual minorities, women, working class people and people from other historically deprived backgrounds. Adrienne Rich’s remark written more than forty years ago in her famous essay ‘Toward a Woman-Centered University’ seems to describe the structuring of the current university strikingly well:

The University is above all a hierarchy. At the top is a small cluster of highly paid and prestigious persons, chiefly men, whose careers entail the services of a very large base of ill-paid or unpaid persons, chiefly women: wives, research assistants, secretaries, teaching assistants, cleaning women, waitresses in the faculty club, lower-echelon administrators, and women students who are used in various ways to gratify the ego.³⁰

Similarly, a conviction common among critics of the neoliberal university that the current ‘austerity measures’ affect all knowledge practices which are not immediately applicable in industry or policy making, or which in the same way do not produce immediate profit, is simply misguided. Austerity measures do not affect all ‘humanist’ knowledge in the same way and intensity but they restrain particularly

³⁰ Rich, ‘Toward a Woman-Centered University’, p. 136.

academic work which strives to be transformative: work which is political and which strikes the androcentric concept of knowledge production and its transmission, the concept of the university and its institutions. In other words, it affects academic practices which, as Tuija Pulkkinen puts it, do not only produce new knowledge but which also seek to *intervene* in how knowledge is produced and transmitted.³¹

Clearly, deciding which work, and under which circumstances, provides rather than closes opportunities for such an intervention is a tremendous task. But since the critique of the neoliberal university secures itself by directing its attention out of itself, and thus obscures university's androcentric historical and structural character, it cannot be considered an effective (self)critique in the name of the openness to the other. If we want to take the call to approach the university and its pedagogy as centred on 'the attention to the other' seriously, if 'the other' is not to become just another 'empty signifier', if we really want to 'listen, without knowing why, before we know what it is we are to listen to' as Readings encourages us, we need to listen even – or perhaps particularly - to that which we might not want to hear. It is on these grounds that I call for tremendous pedagogies. It is in this sense that I argue that we have to make ourselves and the university tremble.

From Disciplinary Power to Textuality

Discontent with the paradigm which addresses the university from the standpoint of the 'critique of the neoliberal university' is not new. In particular, I wish to accentuate argumentation and critique articulated by John Mowitt, as follows.

³¹ Pulkkinen, 'Identity and Intervention', p. 200.

Considered in relation to Mowitt's work, what I have been calling 'the critique of the neoliberal university' can be understood as belonging to the species of approaches Mowitt calls, in his book *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, 'affirmative critique of disciplinary reason'.³² As Mowitt explains, with this expression he means to describe a procedure through which one questions the limits of one's project but only in order to 'protect and further consolidate a disciplinary project by attempting to pass the gesture of self-scrutiny off as an encounter with what outdistances the project as such'. In short, 'affirmative critique' is 'a critique which interrogates foundations in order to fortify them against critical scrutiny from the outside'.³³

This approach, as Mowitt shows in his more recent works, also extends over the current debate on the humanities and its status in the Western university.³⁴ As an example he names particularly the critique of instrumental reason and argues that those following in the steps of Adorno, Horkheimer and particularly Habermas, in order to formulate what is called the 'neoliberalization of knowledge' or the 'corporatization of the university', implement 'the [affirmative] critique of instrumental reason'. Although, as Mowitt continues, such an approach might extend and complicate the debate, its problem is that it does so in 'a polemical, and therefore instrumental, term'.³⁵ As he elaborates on this in the paper 'Left Leaning: Toward a Sinister Humanities':

³² John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 42.

³³ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 43.

³⁴ These include articles and presentations, namely 'The Humanities and the University in Ruin', presented at *Faculty of Arts, University of Western Cape*, 31 May 2011, 'What is Academic Freedom; or, Why Do They Hate Us?', *ADFL Bulletin*, 42.2 (2013), 26-30; 'On the One Hand, and the Other', *College Literature*, 42.2 (2015), 311-336; 'Mediating the Humanities', presented at *The University of Leeds*, 26 February, 2014; 'Left Leaning: Towards a Sinister Humanities'; presented at *FAHACS Research Seminar*, University of Leeds, 12 November, 2014.

³⁵ John Mowitt, 'On the One Hand', p. 311.

The current effort to salvage the humanities by stressing its relation to the anodyne pursuits of personal fulfilment, self-expression and multicultural awareness, while principled in their avoidance of risk, are ... reactive and misguided. As expressions of the decades long search for an effective way to share its message with the public, such formulations are hopeless. Not only do they betray what is actually exciting to humanists about their work, but they avoid addressing neoliberalism where it lives: in risk.³⁶

It is in the contrast to these approaches, which to a large extent define the debate over the humanities, that Mowitt articulates his own project. According to him,

[i]f the field of the humanities is to survive the pandemic of financialization and resultant austerity, it will be because it has engaged financialization on its own terms, and articulated there precisely what its stewards do not wish to hear.³⁷

This is also why, although stressing that we need to contest ‘the metrics used to evaluate the work of the humanities’, Mowitt nevertheless argues for ‘hanging on the concept of value’ in our examination of this work. However, Mowitt does not suggest we accept the concept imposed by the current formations of disciplinary power, and further perpetuated by those who critique it from the standpoint of the critique of instrumental reason. Key to this engagement is the re-elaboration of the concepts of ‘value’, ‘the humanities’ and what is called ‘human’.

In his two works ‘On the One hand, and the Other’ and ‘Left leaning: Toward a Sinister Humanities’, these themes are developed quite literally. Mowitt

³⁶ Mowitt, ‘Left Leaning’. p. 1.

³⁷ Mowitt, ‘Left Leaning’. p. 2.

examines the questions of the humanities through an examination of the importance of ‘hands’ in the texts of Engels, Heidegger and Derrida, and employs language which evokes ‘handling’ and ‘instrumentality’. The ‘instrumental’ connotation is also an important feature of one of his key concepts, the notion of ‘re: working’.³⁸ ‘Re: working’ is a ‘methodological approach’ Mowitt suggests is to be taken in our examinations of the work of the humanities. This term, which is Mowitt’s translation of Bertold Brecht’s concept of *Umfunktionierung*,³⁹ suggests that rather than opposing instruments (or instrumental reason), it presupposes a certain kind of instrumentality: ‘by virtue of the fact that in the Anglophone world what does or does not “work” implies a certain instrumentality’, Mowitt argues, ‘re: working the work of the humanities’ rather than opposing instrumental reason, requires its displacement ‘and those of its qualities that give its critical diagnosis of the humanities what power it has’.⁴⁰

The non-affirmative critique by way of ‘re: working’, and thus also engaging with ‘risks’ which the critiques of instrumental reason avoid, implies significant consequences for the field of the humanities. More specifically, this approach leads Mowitt to argue that we need to re-consider how the humanities constitutes itself and how it relates to other disciplines such as biology, anthropology or climatology. As he argues, we at least have to

³⁸ The term ‘re: working’ first appears in Mowitt’s *Radio: Essays in Bad Reception* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2011).

³⁹ Typically, Brecht’s ‘*Umfunktionierung*’ is translated as ‘re-purposing’. This translation, however, does not evoke another meaning Brecht wished to convey. As Mowitt explains, Brecht ‘is just as often re-purposing purpose as he is, say, theatre’ (Mowitt, ‘On the one hand’, 313).

⁴⁰ Mowitt, ‘On the One Hand’, p. 313.

entertain the possibility that the humanities itself is exhausted, and that in the wake of its re: working something crucial to both it and the qualitative social sciences emerges to play a role in the current debate about the crisis of the university in the West.⁴¹

His analysis thus leads him to argue that ‘the humanities as such seems less crucial’ as it is ‘not unique in its probing of the limits of the human’. In ‘Left Leaning: Toward a Sinister Humanities’, Mowitt proposes what he calls ‘a sinister humanities’. What constitutes ‘the offensive profile, the monstrosity, of a sinister humanities’ is that it

risks offence by “finishing” immanent self-critical tendencies within the field of humanistic inquiry – tendencies typically associated with the theoretical innovations of the last half century- and “finishing” them so as to amplify the implications they have had on the very conception of the human that has long oriented the field of the humanities.⁴²

Despite the impression which his language might invoke (using words such as ‘exhausted’, ‘finishing’, ‘offensive’, ‘monstrosity’, etc.), Mowitt does not profess an end of humanistic inquiry. The ‘re: working of the work of the humanities’ is not another ruined narrative but an attempt to develop a non-defensive humanistic scholarship in institutional, theoretical and political terms.

More specifically, it leads Mowitt to argue for the field’s disciplinary expansion. As he proposes, because the question of ‘human’ is adrift and the humanities has become in this sense “ambient” (surrounding, yet everywhere and nowhere) one might be justified in situating the emergence of sound studies’, a

⁴¹ Mowitt, ‘On the One Hand’, p. 313.

⁴² Mowitt, ‘Left Leaning’. p. 2.

discipline situated ‘within and between the humanities and social sciences’, as that which ‘gestures towards what is emerging as a provocation for thought in the university of austerity’.⁴³ Neither does Mowitt’s proposition of ‘a sinister humanities’, a phrase which although invoking the theme of his analysis on ‘left-handedness’ is undoubtedly also meant as a provocation, imply a break with the tradition of humanistic inquiry. Rather, a sinister humanities implies a *continuation* of a particular tradition of work developed within the humanities, a tradition usually labelled as ‘poststructuralist’. He argues for pursuing specifically one of its features which the theoretical endeavours gathered under this name employ, that is, an ‘immanent self-critique’. Finally, developing the humanist work in this way, or, as Mowitt calls it, ‘finishing’ it, is a way of enabling us to conceive work in the humanities which will not affirm and thus strengthen trends we seek to contest, such as the ‘neoliberalization of knowledge’ and ‘corporatization of the university’. It is meant to give us a hand in resisting those very trends, to enable academics to participate in the current political struggles.

Clearly, my thesis is different from Mowitt’s. There are, however, significant affinities between the two projects; affinities which, I would argue, exceed the mere provocative invocation of a ‘threat’ or a ‘risk’ by using terms like ‘sinister’ or ‘tremendous’.

The affinity starts with the appeal to the ‘poststructuralist’ theoretical tradition. Particularly however, it is the desire to offer what Mowitt calls a ‘non-affirmative critique of disciplinary power’, a desire to theorize how we can, as academics, through our work, participate in the current political struggles.

⁴³ Mowitt, ‘Left Leaning’. p. 2.

Mowitt elaborates this problematic in the already mentioned book *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*. Here he discusses the possibility of ‘non-affirmative critique’ in relation to ‘disciplinarity’ and situates it specifically within Foucault’s understanding of ‘disciplinary power’.⁴⁴ Mowitt argues that Foucault’s examination of disciplinary power shows how the reliance of disciplines (like sociology or psychology) on the reduction of human agency to a repository of potentially objective power presupposes a continuity ‘between the internal organization of knowledge production at the level of academic disciplines and the institutional structure of society’.⁴⁵ According to Mowitt, taking this continuity into account is crucial for how we think and inhabit academic disciplines and their transformations. Particularly, it shows that if we want to resist disciplinary power, ‘it is not enough to attack parochialism of the disciplines, nor is it enough to affirm interdisciplinarity’. What Foucault’s insight allows us to understand is that ‘rearranging disciplinary boundaries means little if this rearrangement is not understood to have consequences for the structure of disciplinary power within society at large’.

Drawing on Foucault, Mowitt therefore insists that ‘interdisciplinary projects (like sociology of literature or women’s studies) [...] continue to confront the task of theorizing and practically addressing the profound consequences of a social divestment of disciplinary power’. He calls this effort ‘antidisciplinary’⁴⁶ and argues that this particular ‘quality’ is a ‘tactical consequence of the irreducible ambivalence

⁴⁴ In *Text* Mowitt introduces a particular interpretation of Foucault’s work. As he argues, although ‘Foucault cannot be read as a straightforward partisan of the text ... this does not prevent his work from being read so as to provide a notion of discipline that illuminates what is at stake in the text’s antidisciplinary status’ (31).

⁴⁵ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ Tuija Pulkkinen discusses a similar issue specifically in relation to gender and women’s studies. She calls the ‘antidisciplinary potential’ ‘intervention’ (Pulkkinen, ‘Identity and Intervention’).

figured in the concept of textuality'.⁴⁷ In other words, Mowitt suggests that in order to convey a non-affirmative critique of disciplinary power, our work must be not only interdisciplinary but also antidisciplinary. Methodologically speaking, this entails engaging disciplinary power through the notion of text.

One advantage of using textuality for such an endeavour is that, unlike Foucault's notion of 'discourse', it does not treat differences as 'differences of degree' which ends up continuing 'to undergird the notion of society as a homogeneous, communicative system'. Textuality, because it is 'fraught with ambivalence and antagonism' opposes such homogenizing tendencies. This quality of irresolvable ambivalence, as already indicated, enables the text to strike disciplinary power in two directions. First, the text 'is simultaneously shared by several disciplines' and 'thus exposes them to the borders they share'. Its ambivalence thus implies that 'text' is 'interdisciplinary'. Its ambivalence, and this is what is at stake, is, however, not limited only to phenomena which already present themselves through the disciplines. 'The text', as Mowitt argues, 'was not produced by any of the disciplines that came to share it as an object'. Instead, it was produced by a 'confluence' which, Mowitt argues using Freud's term, "'overdetermined" it'. This puts the text into a particular spacio-temporal position in relation to disciplines: 'The text is *within* disciplinarity, but in a manner that captures the constitutional instability of disciplinary power – an instability rooted in the alterity that pressures discipline to develop and expand'.⁴⁸ In other words, the text is *within* disciplinarity, but in a manner that captures the constitutional instability and thus also exceeds it.

⁴⁷ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 44.

Because of this ambiguous yet particular position, the text not only exposes what distinguishes one discipline from another but also the limits which *constitute* them as disciplines. In other words, the text allows us to articulate and engage with disciplines' 'enabling others', that is, with that which disciplines separated themselves from in their constitution and which they, as formations already configured by that very separation, themselves cannot comprehend.

The way in which the text allows us to engage with the 'enabling others' does not, however, equate to 'comprehension', for the following two reasons. Firstly, 'texts', 'discourses' or 'disciplines' are not 'objects' to be 'comprehended', i.e. grasped and understood by a subject conceived as an entity separated from the objects it examines. As Foucault has taught us, disciplinary power is not a prohibitive force, but rather a productive one in the sense that modern 'docile bodies' and their 'souls' are not 'oppressed' or 'mystified' by it, but instead constituted. Foucault's insight into how power operates is, thus, crucial for thinking the possibility of resisting disciplinary power. However, this paradigm does not, as Mowitt argues, allow us to articulate the possibility of a human agency which would go beyond 'disciplinary power'.⁴⁹ If, instead, as Mowitt proposes, drawing on scholars such as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva or Jacques Derrida, we interpret the 'subject' (i.e. the 'soul' or the 'psyche'), not as being merely a product of 'disciplinary power' but as a 'text', we can not only challenge the assumption that what is interpreted (object) is separate from that which interprets it (subject), but we can also grasp interpretation as potentially intervening and thus unsettling 'disciplinary power'. In other words, 'textuality' does not only imply that we read

⁴⁹ According to Mowitt, Foucault's repressive hypothesis was not meant to reject the possibility of non-affirmative critique of disciplinary power but only to reject rather a naïve notion that one can resist power from a position which would be outside of it (*Text*, p. 44).

artefacts as ambivalent texts but that also our reading is *textual*, that the interpretation itself is an ambivalent operation. And this is meant not in a sense of ‘anything goes’, as an embrace of relativism, but in an antidisciplinary sense. In other words, ‘textual reading’ opens a possibility of articulating human agency in other than a naïve – let’s say ‘pre-Foucauldian’ - way.

How does antidisciplinarity operate within what Mowitt calls ‘textual reading’? As follows from his work, textual reading is antidisciplinary not so much because it is simply ambivalent, but because its ambivalence invites ‘reflections on its enabling conditions’:

When we approach a particular cultural artefact from the standpoint of text [...] we are trying to comprehend how what eludes us in our interpretation has to do with the limits imposed upon our construction by the field in which it is executed.⁵⁰

The aim, however, and this is the second reason why textual interpretation is not exactly about comprehension, is not to encompass that which eludes us, or that which is ‘not yet integrated’ within the existing realm of (disciplinary) knowledge. Such a procedure would only extend the disciplinary framework and reaffirm its power. ‘Textuality’, therefore, must operate through an economy other than that of ‘appropriation’, ‘assimilation’ or ‘comprehension’. As Mowitt explains, it ‘encounters what contests disciplinary power, but in a manner that refuses to speak for our immediate social context is not yet prepared to integrate while nevertheless refusing to be silent about it’.⁵¹ In other words, it is through the complex strategy of

⁵⁰ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 45-6.

⁵¹ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 111.

‘un-veiling’ (not remaining silent but refusing to speak for ‘it’), that textual reading allows articulation – within one’s academic work and in a particular cultural practice or artefact – of the potential of something other, of the not yet known, of the ‘utopic’, without reducing it to the disciplinary.

For me, the key contribution of Mowitt’s work is in how he treats this ‘not yet known’. As already suggested, Mowitt does not insist on textual ambivalence because he wants to simply argue that meaning is always ambivalent, that it is ‘not one’ but always multiple. He does not simply promote ‘ambivalence’ or ‘multiplicity’ of meaning in contrast to ‘clear’ and ‘unequivocal’ meaning. Let us not forget that, within the landscape of academic disciplines, binary oppositions such as ambiguity/unequivocality, obscurity/clarity, subjective/objective, or – one I will specifically concern myself with in the following chapter – narrating/counting, are commonly used to describe the difference between the humanities and natural sciences or, within the humanities, the study of literature (or art in general) from philosophy.

Mowitt is not interested in this ‘not yet known’ made graspable through textuality in order to understand how literary or artistic ‘texts’ are produced. It is not in order to explain invention of artistic or literary production that Mowitt discusses textuality. Neither does he invoke textual ambivalence in order to promote more ‘poetic’ readings of philosophy, natural sciences or disciplinarity. His motivations for taking up the notion of ‘text’, and Mowitt is explicit about them, are political. He engages with the text in order to develop the implications textuality has for the possibility of articulating political transformation. Text, according to Mowitt, ‘can

be made to respond to the political demands imposed upon us by the framework of disciplinary power'.⁵²

Calling for the 'antidisciplinarity' of textuality is therefore meant not only in the sense that the text has to 'resist' disciplines or disciplinarity in general. Invoking text's 'antidisciplinarity' is meant also, or perhaps foremost, as a suggestion that the 'text' must resist disciplinary formations where it feels 'at home' the most, that is, within the study of literary texts. Thus, although Mowitt does not seek to separate 'text' from literature, he wants to, as he puts it, 'attenuate the "literalization"' of the textual model.⁵³ Only when we do this can we develop its 'antidisciplinary' potential and thus develop academic work which opens possibilities for political transformation:

By insisting upon this antidisciplinary dimension of textuality, one can, in effect, institutionalize – that is, render accessible – the conditions for a nonaffirmative critique of the institution. The political character of cultural interpretation is not then reduced to a dispute over 'readings', nor is it relegated to extracurricular activities like voting, demonstrating, or striking. Through the concept of the text it may become possible to articulate in a fairly direct way the struggle over interpretation with the struggle to change the world of disciplinary power.⁵⁴

To put it differently, conceiving textuality as antidisciplinary is thus a way of theorizing how we can inhabit the university and its disciplines in a way which opens them to 'others'. It leaves space for the not yet known, for the other, to come not in some 'general', 'abstract' or unrepresentable way, but in a relationship to

⁵² Mowitt, *Text*, p. 45.

⁵³ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 47.

⁵⁴ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 46.

current political struggles. It is a way of articulating and negotiating, within one's academic work, a possibility of intervening within the current context of disciplinary powers.

Mowitt summarizes the ethico-political stakes implied by textuality in the conclusion of his book as following:

[textual reading] seeks to assume responsibility for the way it inevitably extends the reach of disciplinary power - Western knowledge really does alter what it knows – while also embracing the possibility that what resists such power, both from within and without, will, if given the room to speak, tell us something “we” are in no position to hear. About this, of course, we can *know* very little. Nevertheless, we must still do everything in our power to listen.⁵⁵

Disciplines and texts of accounting

My proposition is that the notion of *antidisciplinarity* of textual reading provides instruments through which we can begin to articulate how the university and pedagogy as centred on ‘the attention to the other’, as proposed by Readings, can be conceived. Following my interpretation of Readings’s and Mowitt’s work, I propose the following for our accounting for the university: Firstly, I propose we turn from discourses which I call ‘the critique of the neoliberal university’ and instead utilize the word and the concept of accountability. Secondly, I propose that we do not treat ‘accountability’ as disciplinary or instrumental reason but approach accountability as a textual problem. The expectation is that such an approach will not produce what Mowitt calls ‘affirmative critique’ but, grasping the accounting of accountability as a

⁵⁵ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 222.

movement which cannot be enclosed in any taxonomy, we will be able to drive a wedge into the disciplinary character not only of the university, but society at large.

When confronted with such a tremendous proposition, one may, however ask the following questions: Why should our non-affirmative critique of the university proceed through the notion of accountability? Why should one pick this particular word and concept in order to examine and resist the so called neoliberalization of higher education and, specifically, in relation to feminism? What is there to justify this choice? Is it not, after all, as Mowitt also stresses, possible to read anything as a 'text'? Is it not the case that - as Derrida famously argued - '*there is nothing outside of the text*'?

Undoubtedly, the so called 'textual reading' can be implemented on any artefact or practice. Anything can be approached as 'text'. But this is not what is at stake. As Mowitt interprets the famous phrase by Derrida, it is not only because everything ('objects' and 'subjects') has a textual structure why there is nothing outside of the text, but because it is a way of 'naming what a certain model of reading produces when it approaches texts':

nothing is outside the text, because everything about which people might quarrel concerning its 'meaning' can be approached from the standpoint of the text, that is, from a standpoint that insists that one's point of departure intervenes within, and thus unsettles, the meaning he or she assumes such a starting point will enable him or her to discover.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 95.

It seems to me that it is the notion of accountability which, within the current socio-political context, and specifically in relation to the university, provides a particularly advantageous springboard for intervention and unsettling.

The observation that within the last three decades and, particularly in the context of higher education, something has been happening to the word and the concept of ‘accountability’, is not limited only to a few remarks in Readings’ *The University in Ruins* as analysed above. Other scholars have called attention to and critiqued the conflation of the lexicons of politics, ethics and economics.⁵⁷ One of them, Gert Biesta, even argues, that the shifts in the (mis)uses of accountability has in fact been a major area of inquiry in educational policy during the past decades.⁵⁸

Most of the authors agree that it is through the word and the concept of accountability that universities are subjected to the logic of the market and managerialism.⁵⁹ Similarly to Readings, who argues that the university is dominated or ‘infected’ by a ‘general logic of accountability’, these scholars argue that the Western university is dominated by ‘accountability regimes’, ‘culture of accountability’ and ‘responsibilization’.⁶⁰ This trend is further recognized as posing

⁵⁷ These include, among many others: Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, Afshin Mehrpouya and Marie Laure Djelic, ‘Transparency: From Enlightenment to Neoliberalism or When a Norm of Liberation Becomes a Tool of Governing’, *HEC Paris Research Paper No. ACC-2014- 1059*, SSSRN <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers2.cfm?abstract_id=2499402> [accessed 14 February 2017]; Mike Gismondim, Mike Sosteric and Gina Rathovic, ‘The University, Accountability, and Market Discipline in the Late 1990s’, *Electronic Journal of Sociology* (1998), http://www.sociology.org/content/vol003.003/sosteric_d.html [accessed 9 February]; or Gert Biesta, ‘Education, Accountability, and the Ethical Demand: Can the Democratic Potential of Accountability be Regained?’, *Educational Theory* 54.3 (2004), 233-250. Most recently then Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

⁵⁸ Biesta, ‘Education, Accountability’, p. 236.

⁵⁹ Bruce G. Charlton, ‘Audit, Accountability, Quality and All That: The Growth of Managerial Technologies in UK Universities’, in *Education! Education! Education! Managerial Ethics and the Law of Unintended Consequences*, eds. Stephen Prickett and Patricia Erskine-Hill (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2002), pp. 13-32.

⁶⁰ Among scholars who discuss this trend, terminology invoking ‘poison’ or ‘infection’ seems to be common rhetorical device. Apart from already mentioned texts, see for instance Timothy Bahti; ‘The Injured University’, in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, Richard Rand, ed. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 57-76.

a threat to *political* and *ethical* relationships, as an ‘antidemocratic strategy’ which is in contest with ‘democratic accountability’ and the values associated with it, such as ‘equality’, ‘social justice’ and ‘empowerment’.⁶¹

The word and the concept of ‘accountability’ – as the previous sentence suggests – appears, however, also on the other side of the equation. It is argued by theorists that under the current techno-managerial accountability regimes, developing and practicing ‘democratic accountability’, ‘responsibility’, ‘belief’ or ‘trust’ is made impossible.⁶² The call for ‘democratic accountability’ also still figures as one of the key demands of those protesting against the financialization of higher education.⁶³

The two ‘accountabilities’ (the ‘good’, democratic accountability, and the ‘bad’, technological-managerial) are thus understood as being in a direct opposition and, simultaneously, intimately intertwined. Scholars therefore argue that ‘accountability’ is ‘deeply problematic’⁶⁴ and a notion defined by ‘overdetermined crossings’,⁶⁵ and that ‘accountability relations’ are not ‘static but dynamic’ processes which are in ‘contestation and change’.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’; 2007, Marilyn Strathern, ‘The Tyranny of Transparency’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 26.3 (2000), 309-321; Biesta, ‘Education, Accountability’; Brown, *Undoing Demos*; Stewart Smyth, ‘Contesting Public Accountability: A Dialogical Exploration of Accountability and Social Housing’, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 23.3 (2012), 230-243.

⁶² Scholars call for a renewal of ‘democratic accountability’ (Biesta, Smyth), ‘trust’ (Strathern), ‘belief’ (Kamuf) or ‘responsibility’ (John McKertan, ‘Accountability as aporia, testimony, and gift’, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, special issue *Accountability*, 23.3 (2012), 258-278).

⁶³ The petition ‘Support the New University’ in support of students who on 13 February 2014 occupied one of the University of Amsterdam’s buildings in protest to the financialization of academic life and which has been responded to by the university board of directors by initiating a lawsuit against the occupying students seeking a fine of €100,000 per student per day reads: ‘[w]e sympathize with their [students’] demand for greater transparency and accountability for university management, and for the democratization of decision-making process’ (‘Support the New University’, <https://www.change.org/p/university-of-amsterdam-executive-board-support-the-new-university> [accessed 14 February 2017]; Gray, Johnatan, ‘Dutch student protest ignite movement against management of universities’, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/mar/17/dutch-student-protests-ignite-movement-against-management-of-universities> [accessed 14 February 2017].

⁶⁴ Biesta, p. 241.

⁶⁵ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 251.

⁶⁶ Charleton, 17.

James Charleton, one of the scholars working on this issue, argues that ‘accountability’ is a ‘slippery rhetorical term’ and is thus amenable to uses in ‘rhetorically manipulative fashion’. According to Charleton, it is the ‘shifting back and forth’ between various meanings of accountability that makes it so problematic.⁶⁷ Biesta also argues that it is because accountability operates on a basis of a ‘quick switch’ between its various meanings that it is difficult to introduce ‘an adequate analysis’. As he continues, accountability’s unstable and unreliable character also makes it difficult to critique. ‘Because we assume that accountability has to do with responsibility’, Biesta argues, it is difficult ‘to argue *against* accountability, since this may look like an argument for irresponsible action’.⁶⁸ And, even more importantly, accountability’s ‘slippery character’ makes it difficult to imagine the ‘ways to resist and intervene in the current culture of accountability’. It seems, as scholars working on this issue conclude, that ‘accountability is not directly resistible’.⁶⁹

The increasing significance of ‘accounting’ and ‘accountability’ both as an ‘object’ of critical scholarship and as an analytical tool through which we can examine the current changes in the society is testified also by the rise of critical accounting studies.⁷⁰ From the very beginning of the formation of this discipline in the early 1990s, the most influential has been Foucault’s work.⁷¹ The work of this

⁶⁷ Charleton, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Biesta, p. 235.

⁶⁹ Biesta, p. 249; Keith Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea of Accountability: Inscribing People into the Measurement of Object’, in *Accountability, Power, Ethos and the Technologies of Managing*, ed. by R. Munor and J. Mourtsen (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1996), pp. 265-282’, p. 279; Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 253.

⁷⁰ The critical accounting studies is a discipline which emerged as an attempt to counter the global expansion of an ‘American invention’ of business schools in the 1980s. Essential to its emergence was a foundation of a platform for the discussions in critical accounting, the journal *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* established in 1990.

⁷¹ For an overview of Foucault’s influence on the field see Peter Armstrong, ‘The Influence of Michel Foucault on the accounting research’, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 5 (1994), 25-55.

thinker allowed scholars to approach accounting not as a neutral and objective procedure (which is a view which dominates mainstream accounting) but as a particular – modern, that is ‘disciplinary’ - mode of answerability.

One of the scholars who has introduced this paradigm into accounting studies is a historian and theorist Keith Hoskin. As Hoskin argues, although the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives examples of the adjective ‘accountable’ since the sixteenth century, the noun-form ‘accountability’ dates only to 1784 with a rather interesting entry which reads ‘an awful idea of accountability’.⁷² For Hoskin, the recent date of the formation of its noun-form is not accidental but marks the new knowledge-power relations. Hoskin proposes we grasp it as a ‘disciplinary breakthrough, with accounting playing a central and crucial role in its genesis’.⁷³

According to Hoskin, in contrast to pre-modern modes of answerability, accountability is not limited only to the evaluation of past performance or present circumstance, but reaches also into the future: accountability not only *describes* but also *prescribes*. Furthermore, this ‘panoptical’ order-making activity is not understood only as operating on the level of institutions, but also as involving a

⁷² Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, p. 267.

⁷³ Keith Hoskin and Richard Macve, ‘Accounting as Discipline: The Overlooked Supplement’, in *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*, Messer-Davidow, Elle, Shumway, David, R., and Sylvan David, eds. (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp 25-53 (p. 28). In addition to this text and the already mentioned ‘The Awful Idea of Accountability’, I draw from Keith Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity: The Unexpected Reversal’, in *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*, Messer-Davidow, Elle, Shumway, David, R., and Sylvan David, eds. (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 271-304. Hoskin is a leading historian and theorist on accounting and one of the scholars who introduced Foucauldian analysis into the field. Importantly, however, as I will discuss later in detail, Hoskin also goes beyond this particular paradigm. More specifically, he seeks to understand accountability in relation to ‘writing’ and ‘supplementarity’. This thread of Hoskin’s scholarship has, however, not been recognized by scholars in his field (see, for instance Armstrong’s summary; Armstrong, ‘The Influence of Michel Foucault’). Neither is Derrida’s work popular in the fields of critical accounting and critical management studies. This is explained in *Pioneers of Critical Accounting* (2002) as following: ‘Largely due to its complexity and its controversial reception by some quarters of the academic community there have been very few studies in accounting drawing on Derrida’s work’. Michael, J. R. Graffikin, ‘A Brief Historical Appreciation of Accounting Theory? But Who Cares?’, in *Pioneers of Critical Accounting: A Celebration of the Life of Tony Lowe*, ed. by Jim Hasalam, and Prem Sikka (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 143-162 (p. 131).

transformation of the self and the relation to the self. For Hoskin, ‘accountability’ is the first means of ‘human accounting’ which, as he refers to Foucault, seeks to ‘judge individuals “in their truth”’.⁷⁴

Under this regime, an individual not only wants to fulfil their duty, but being exposed to a constant examination and evaluation which creates the need to compete with others, the individual wants also to be ‘number one’. This, however, simultaneously implies the ‘fear of being nothing but a zero’.⁷⁵ The threat of failure is constant and not only for those who do fail the measures but also, or particularly, for those who are successful. This is because, as Hoskin argues, ‘not only new targets but new *kinds* of targets may at any moment get constructed out of the debris of past success and failure’: ‘Hence the emergence of the modern double-bind power of *accountability*’, where you are damned if you do perform and if you don’t.⁷⁶

Following Foucault, Hoskin and other scholars also argue that accountability has a particular relation to visibility: accountability is ‘panoptical’. Although as a modern disciplining power accountability operates ‘invisibly’, in order to examine and evaluate, it does not only account for things that have already been made visible. As Hoskin puts it, ‘the constant mutual implication of standard, actual and forecast measures of performance means that what is currently invisible may subsequently become visible’.⁷⁷ Accountability is thus an order-making activity of modern powers where institutional practices in factories, workhouses, prisons, schools, hospitals, asylums or barracks, whatever their manifest functions, secure and perpetuate social order through superstitious surveillance.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, p. 271.

⁷⁵ Hoskin and Macve, p. 32.

⁷⁶ Hoskin and Macve, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, p. 274.

⁷⁸ It is therefore no coincidence that accountability is closely related to, or sometimes even passes under, another term particular to current managerial lexicon - transparency. As there is no

As follows from this brief summary, grasping accountability as a disciplinary power already complicates what Readings calls ‘the general logic of accountability’. It allows us to understand accountability not merely as a result of technical or economic advancement but as constitutive of the modern Western world. It also shows the ‘accounting of accountability’ not as an oppressive procedure imposed on lecturers and students by management and administrators, but as a mode which constitutes modern subjectivity as such.

Hoskin’s exploration, however, does not stop at this point. He pushes his examination further, asking questions such as ‘Which particular disciplinary formation or cultural practice does accountability come from? How could this evaluative mode, which from the very beginning has been recognized to be an “awful idea”, become so pervasive? What makes this ‘awful idea’ so irresistible?’ and last but not least, ‘How can we resist this irresistible mode?’

In order to engage with these questions, Hoskin employs what I call, following Mowitt, an antidisciplinary reading.⁷⁹ But before I proceed in this direction I will introduce and discuss work by Peggy Kamuf as it is particularly her work which I find useful for grasping accountability as an antidisciplinary object.

accountability without accounting, similarly, there is no accounting without transparency. I will discuss the problem of ‘visibility’ in relation to feminist theory and politics in part III ‘From Accounts to Visions’, particularly the chapter VI.

⁷⁹ As already argued, this part of Hoskin’s scholarship hasn’t been understood within his field. Armstrong, in his otherwise in-depth, rigorous and critical review and analysis of genealogy of Foucault’s influence on the critical accounting studies reads the ‘paradigmatic shift in Hoskin’s work as a retrieve to ‘traditional history’ which relies on ‘biographical links’ (xxx). Armstrong, p. 46.

Chapter IV – Accounting for a University Accountability

Reading Accountability as a Text: Toward antidisciplinarity

In her 2007 article ‘Accountability’, Peggy Kamuf argues that today’s U.S. universities are defined by an ‘accountability movement’ which aims to eliminate risk so as to secure investments by parents, governments or business. For this purpose, the accountability movement attempts to ‘replace thinking by counting, to displace the responsibility of decision and judgment from the “subjective” place of thought to the balance sheet of summary numbers’.¹

Kamuf thus confirms analyses by Readings and other critics of the ‘corporatization’ and the ‘marketization’ of the university. Importantly, however, she does not only enumerate the more or less obvious symptoms of the current culture of audit and accountability regimes, but her reading also provides a number of important theoretico-political manoeuvres which allow teasing out accountability’s antidisciplinary potential.²

One of those moves is Kamuf’s semantic analysis of ‘accountability’. She shows how this word is defined by an inherent tension between various and sometimes even conflicting meanings. More specifically, accountability is overdetermined by crossing ‘between calculation and narration, between count, account, and recount’. This semantic multiplicity, as Kamuf argues, derives from the word’s etymology. Accountability comes from the Latin *computāre* which is also the

¹ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 252.

² Kamuf’s article has been influential also beyond the field of deconstruction or the critique of the university. In 2012, the journal *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* published a special issue which was devoted to Kamuf’s work. McKernan, John and McPhail, Ken, eds., *Accountability*, special issue of *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 23.3 (2012), 177-278.

origin of ‘the French homonyms, both the verbs *compter* [count] and *conter* [tell] and the nouns *compte* [account] and *conte* [tale]’.³ In French, it is the orthographic difference which prevents the two semantic threads - calculation and narration - from becoming entangled. However, nor in English, where there is no such a difference, the two meanings do get in the way of each other. In English, ‘counting’ and ‘narrating’ are kept apart due to the conventional habits of usage or other elements of context such as syntax.

The two meanings, narrativity and computing, are, furthermore, not merely two different meanings of this word. As Kamuf argues, accountability is not only plurivocal but the meanings of computing and narrating are ‘commonly thought to stand in a rough opposition to each other’. Narrative accounting is perceived as ‘occupying a pole in the vicinity of an act of witnessing or testimony, called, very loosely, subjective’. On the other hand, computational accounting, ‘lies at or close to the pole of what counts as objective fact, evidence, or even proof’.⁴ The word and the concept of accountability is thus defined by a binary opposition of computing/narrativity which constitutes a point of a chain of binary oppositions such as objectivity/subjectivity, evidence/witnessing, proof/testimony, etc. The two sides of the opposition, furthermore, do not occupy symmetrical positions towards one another but the sense which pulls accountability towards the ‘objective’ and ‘factual’ pole is evidently privileged. Kamuf lists a number of phrases which bear witness to this bias and which she immediately deconstructs:

‘Numbers do not lie’, ‘Read the numbers, the numbers tell the story’, which is to say, the story of no story to tell; numbers, we believe, do not narrate,

³ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 251.

⁴ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 251-252.

interpret, invent, or make up the figures – unless they do sometimes, which is why one is well-advised to run the numbers again, check and double-check them. Verification is always possible, at least in theory. Another more patently ironic dictum advises: ‘Put your faith in numbers’, in other words, in that which presumably make no claim on faith or belief, except, of course, the belief that numbers, counting, or quantification triumphs over belief.⁵

Certainly, the belief that ‘numbers do not lie’, that is, assuming that there exists a direct reflection of ‘the truth’ in numerical representations, as if numbers were not a representation, as if they had nothing to do with - and thus could do without - language, discourse or narrative, and thus also concepts Kamuf employs in her reading, such as testimony or belief, is not a new phenomenon. Neither is the hardening of the connections to numbers within the semantico-pragmatic range of accountability a recent shift. The tendency to pull the meaning of accountability towards accounting and ‘letting its other more narrative, more “subjective” connections be subsumed and reduced to arithmetic figuration’, has, as Kamuf points out, perhaps always defined accountability. This tendency, furthermore, is not constrained only to the semantic field ascribed to this particular word. Accountability has come to take over the semantic field traditionally ascribed to responsibility. In this way, ‘decision and judgment taken from the “subjective” place of thought’ are being replaced by arithmetic solutions.⁶

Although, as Kamuf argues, the overlay or overlap between accountability and responsibility has always taken place, in one particular ‘public interest domain’, it appears to have sorted itself out clearly in favour of accountability. As follows from Kamuf’s article, within higher education over the last twenty years and

⁵ Kamuf, ‘Accounterability’, p. 252.

⁶ Kamuf, ‘Accounterability’, p. 252.

particularly in the U.S., ‘the notion of accountability has acquired a certain number of specific, defining traits that seem destined to determine its future use’.⁷ According to Kamuf, what we witness today in the university is therefore not only a gradual encroachment of the university’s frontiers by public and private capital (which has always been the case) but a radical re-definition of the very institution and the concept of what we have known as ‘the modern university’. The effects of this transformation are, furthermore, not limited only to educational institutions, but re-define terms which are essential to the modern discourse of liberalism, such as the notion of the accountable subject. In other words, the semantic field of the word and the concept of ‘accountability’, as it is currently being employed to the purview of higher education, has come to constitute a ‘battlefield’ where the questions regarding not only the university and its futures but also those of democracy, are being fought over.

These ‘academic battles’ are clearly not taking place in isolation. Kamuf goes on to show how these questions relate to wider socio-political changes in U.S. society. More specifically, she shows how the seemingly ‘objective’ and ‘non-faith based’ measure of the value added by one’s university education, as offered by accountabilists, relates to another recent shift within the U.S. society which, at first sight, seems to contradict the aims and the character of accountability movement.

As Kamuf explains, the expression ‘faith-based’ has come to have a particular resonance within post-millennial American political discourse. It refers to a program put forward by G.W. Bush’s administration called the ‘Faith-Based Initiative’. The aim of this initiative is, as Kamuf argues, to reduce ‘the size – but not the spending – of government by shifting the responsibility for delivering a host

⁷ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 253.

of services from governmental agencies to faith-based organizations'. The initiative, as Kamuf argues, is clearly an attack on the concept - never very secure in the U.S. - of the separation between the state and religion.⁸

Kamuf provides a careful reading which shows how the two seemingly opposite tendencies - disputing belief by the accountability movement and promoting belief through the 'faith-based initiative' - coincide. 'The accountability movement does not only accommodate and even favour the aims of the so-called faith-based initiative' but the two ideas, as Kamuf states, 'trace their impulse to the same source'.⁹ Accountabilism, although described by its proponents as a non-faith based initiative able to objectively measure value, promotes the ideology and values of a particular group, namely the conservative and right wing politics which aspire to re-organize the U.S. society in a mode reminiscent of 'feudal' rather than 'modern' organization.

Yet, Kamuf's engagement with the accountability movement does not stop there. She does not only provide a semantic analysis of the word accountability and an illustration of how the two seemingly opposing movements coincide. As the 'counter' smuggled into the middle of the word accountability in the title of her essay promises, the point is to intervene. As Kamuf argues, she wants to

find an opening in calculating, accountable logic, to locate a space for other articulations between our accounts and our abilities, the space precisely of a free space or free play that can be taken into account only in the figure of the unknown, the factor of uncertainty a factor of X, or, as it happens, of a certain - er - that, falling at the point of exact bisection of accouterability, sounds a pause, a brief hiatus, a little time to think, to stop calculating and listen at another rhythm for something else, for an incalculability and unforeseeability

⁸ Kamuf, 'Accouterability', p. 257-8.

⁹ Kamuf, 'Accouterability', p. 258.

that cause the accountability programme to stammer or stutter: account, er, ability.¹⁰

‘Accountability’ is not, as Kamuf further explains, about ‘the space of a word or of word play’. Rather, her claim is to articulate ‘premises of a counter-practice to the numeric evaluation that assumes a prevailing place in public discourse’ and thus found ‘a counter-institution of resistance to the irresistible logic of accountability’.¹¹

How can one resist what is irresistible? How can one ‘counter’ something which already contains a ‘counter’, i.e. is defined by contradictory meanings (such as computing and narrativity, objectivity and subjectivity, etc.)? How can one oppose a trend which promotes values opposite to those it pretends to represent, that is, re-religionization of the secular society through a promotion of allegedly ‘objective’, ‘non-faith’ based measures of value?

As Kamuf also suggests, a resistance to the accountability movement cannot proceed in the form of oppositional strategy. It cannot follow the traditional logic of (oppositional) politics but must seek to re-define the political itself. It has to open the space of political imaginary beyond the limits which currently define it. Her proposition can, therefore, sound counterintuitive. Drawing on the insight that the accountability movement comes from and promotes values of the faith-based initiative, Kamuf thus argues, that ‘accountabilism deserves to be countered in the name of the oldest principles of the post-enlightenment, non-faith-based university’.¹² In other words, Kamuf suggests we resist the accountability movement by affirming the principles of the modern university, by developing and cultivating

¹⁰ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 251.

¹¹ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 253.

¹² Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 259.

premises laid down since the Enlightenment and understood ‘as the historical counter-force to “faith-based” social and political institutions’.¹³

Kamuf’s call for enlightenment is, however, not a call for some good old, ‘pre-accountabilist’ university, but an attempt to imagine the university’s futures. This follows from her tremendous proposition:

if Enlightenment, as the historical counter-force to ‘faith-based’ social and political institutions, is in retrenchment, under siege, or simply at a standstill throughout the world, doesn’t this signal that the encounter is still to come?¹⁴

In other words, rather than calling for the resuscitation of some allegedly ‘better past’, Kamuf calls for imagining a ‘better future’, for imagining an ‘enlightened university-to-come’. However, this new encounter, which will provide a counter to ‘faith-based’ social and political institutions, will not denounce that what came to figure as reason’s repressed other within a certain legacy of enlightenment, i.e. ‘belief’. Instead of denouncing belief, this encounter will seek leverage for the post-enlightenment, non-faith-based university from a position which stresses the ‘necessity of belief’. As Kamuf puts it, such an attempt will be grounded on ‘an opening to belief, that is the *thinking* of belief as the ground, the groundless ground of experience of every kind in the world with others’.¹⁵

Such a ‘thinking of belief’ is, however, not similar to that which is behind the belief promoted by Bush’s ‘Faith-based Initiative’. Neither does Kamuf argue for founding a new religious organization. This belief, as she explains, ‘pivots around what situates the experience of belief beyond any institution of ‘faith-based

¹³ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 260.

¹⁴ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 260.

¹⁵ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 260.

organization' yet, is pervasive to our everyday experience. It is as she explains, 'the general space that Derrida sees defined by the performativo-pragmatic imperative "you must believe me" harboured in the problematic of testimony'.¹⁶ It is this kind of work and thinking which, in Kamuf's view, will help us facilitate

A new Enlightenment, a second (or third or fourth or nth) Enlightenment [which] would seek to think this groundless ground of belief as the conditioning limit on every possible encounter with another, every act of testimony given or received.¹⁷

In other words, a new enlightenment-to-come. Through an analysis of the current university as driven by the accountability movement and Derrida's conception of the notion of belief, Kamuf offers a way of resisting the accountability movement. She articulates a vision of a university which, in its affirmation of the legacy of enlightenment, transforms and fulfils this very legacy, and she expresses this potential through the neologism 'accounterability'. As I interpret it, Kamuf's 'accounterability' seeks to enact what Mowitt describes as an 'antidisciplinary potential of textual reading'.

Yet, this proposition requires further accounting. The question which it seems necessary to ask is to what extent is the envisioning of antidisciplinarity (or of deconstruction) as an obstacle to one's abilities, as something which disables rather than enables the possibility of giving an account, an effective way of resisting not only the so-called accountability movement but also its affirmative critiques.¹⁸ Put

¹⁶ Kamuf, 'Accounterability', p. 260.

¹⁷ Kamuf, 'Accounterability', p. 260.

¹⁸ The word 'ability' comes from Latin *habilis*, which means 'handy'. 'Ability', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <<http://0->

simply, is not Kamuf's call for 'an opening in calculation' just another discourse directed against instrumentalization? Does not Kamuf, although providing an elaborate reading of the inherent tensions between various and conflicting meanings of accountability, at the end, simply denounce 'counting' and 'calculation', the 'objective' pole of accountability in the name of this 'more "subjective", 'more narrative-like' pole, and thus repeat the bias Mowitt identified to be the major theoretical obstacle in our accounts of the university? How are we to understand her 'counter'?

Re-counting accouterability

The interpretation that Kamuf's deliberations on accountability might follow patterns Mowitt identifies and critiques in his work seems to be confirmed by arguments and propositions Kamuf develops in her other works where she addresses the problem of the university.

In her book *The Division of Literature Or the University in Deconstruction* from 1997, Kamuf presents an argument that literature and its teaching puts the university into deconstruction. This is due to literature's peculiar character: not only is literature a 'division' in the sense of being a particular 'academic field' with its own department but also in the sense of, unlike historical or scientific disciplines, not having any identity which would be possible to fully comprehend and delimit. 'Literature', as she puts it, is a 'divisionality'. According to Kamuf, the question 'What do we teach as "literature"? [...] seems to go to the very border along which

www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/313?rskey=PTw9JP&result=1#eid [accessed 14 February, 2017].

an institution, here the university, sets itself off from some outside'.¹⁹ This potential, as she further argues, is then preserved in the institution of literature and its teaching.

For Kamuf, it is 'literature' which embodies the potential of 'deconstructive reserve'. In other words, it is particularly the literary text which embodies the characteristics Derrida ascribes to texts or writing:

Literary text holds sense in reserve, does not exhaust the possibility for meaning in an indicative or transitive relation to a referent. Such texts, we can say, are reserved, that is, they hold back from a full and present disclosure of sense, not because they conceal a secret that can eventually be uncovered (although this structure of reserve cannot easily be distinguished from the structure of secrecy in the ordinary sense) but because the reserve shelters that which cannot be simply presented in the present and that which was never presentable in the past. It is the reserve of a time radically other than the present or the past present, the radical other we call, hopefully or in trembling, the future.²⁰

The teaching of literature, which preserves this 'reserve' therefore represents 'an open set, and, thereby, the opening beyond itself, beyond the self'.²¹ Literature and its teaching(s) thus find themselves in a paradoxical position, when, on the one hand, they are experienced as threatening to the identity of educational institutions and, on the other, it is literature and the teaching of literature which, according to Kamuf, represents a chance of the university's transformation. It is therefore literature, she argues, that makes the university 'open to the transformations of a future':

¹⁹ Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution' p. 5.

²⁰ Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution' p. 5-6.

²¹ Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution' p. 7.

with the question of literature's institution, a space may be opened up for the remaking of institutionality in general, a space that is neither inside nor outside some pre-given (instituted) boundaries. This "space" of neither-nor, which is precisely not marked out by spatial or conceptual boundaries, constitutes something like a reserve of possible transformation for the stabilized, but never thoroughly stable institutions that draw on it. It is the reserve, therefore of these institutions' historicality, by which is meant both that they have been bequeathed to us by a specific history and are not naturally occurring phenomena, and that whatever stabilized forms they may assume in the present remain open to the transformations of a future.²²

Kamuf further develops this in an interview with Dawne McCance entitled 'Crossings' from 2009. Here she supports her claim by opposing literary study to science. 'Literature', Kamuf argues

has always had a very uneasy relation to the fundamental mission of the modern scientific university: the search for knowledge, [...] the preservation of and search for new knowledge. Literature is not unrelated to new knowledge, but its modes of discovery and invention are unlike, or work differently from, what apparently goes on in the sciences, through scientific method. Literature cannot be a method. I think every writer, every poet, everyone who experiences the urge, need, or desire to write, knows that; there is no method.

So, what the uneasy incorporation of the study of literature in universities shows up is this other dispensation, this other relation to newness, to invention, to innovation, to the unknown, to an uncertainty that is not simply an extension of the known, not simply the known deploying itself according to its known and tested methods to conquer the unknown, to appropriate and use it.²³

²² Kamuf, 'Introduction/Catachresis and Institution' p. 4.

²³ Peggy Kamuf and Dawne McCance: 'Crossings: An Interview with Peggy Kamuf', *Mosaic* 43.4 (2009), 227-243, p. 229.

As Kamuf continues, this other relation literature has ‘to newness, to invention ... to the unknown’ manifests as a ‘real impossibility’ to say within literary study ‘this is what you will learn, this is what you will discover, this is what you will know by the end of your studies, and this is what you will be certified to do’.²⁴ Kamuf then presents this ‘uncertainty’ around the purpose of such a study as an ‘unease’ which is both its strength and a weakness.²⁵ Currently, under the conditions where universities are increasingly subjected to ‘pre-professional paradigms’, it puts literary study ‘in a very vulnerable position’. Yet, as Kamuf stresses, this has always been the case: ‘literary studies, or the place set aside for reading and writing about, engaging with, the artefacts that are literary texts, ... this place of literature has always been vulnerable’. Furthermore, ‘literature does not depend on the university’ but ‘lives’ also outside educational institutions. In order to stress this particular quality of ‘excessiveness’ or ‘independence’ with regards to education, Kamuf opposes the study ‘literature’ to the study of ‘accounting’:

It [literature] is not like the study of accounting, let's say, which teaches specific techniques, rules, and practices, which purveys a pre-professional training, something in which one has to be schooled. No, we know that literature, as an experience, a fact, and a possibility in our world does not depend on a school, on schooling, and thus on the university. And maybe we know as well that it is not going to be there much longer.²⁶

²⁴ Kamuf and McCance, ‘Crossings’, p. 229.

²⁵ Interestingly, in the case of other disciplines, an ‘impossibility’ to provide ‘definition’ earns inverse evaluation from Kamuf. For more on this, see Kamuf’s critique of cultural studies. Peggy Kamuf, ‘The University in the World it is Attempting to Think’, *Cultural Machine*, 6 (2004)

<<<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/3/2>> [accessed 8 February 2017]

²⁶ Peggy Kamuf and McCance, ‘Crossings’, p. 229.

I do agree with Kamuf that ‘literature’ is not ‘accounting’ and that the methods employed in the humanities and literary study are not identical with those in scientific disciplines. Yet, the relationship between them (literature and accounting as well as between the humanities and science) seems to be – and as her essay ‘Accountability’ also helps us to understand - much more complex than as she seems to be suggesting in the passages quoted above.²⁷

Kamuf’s wrestling with theoretization of the disciplinarity of literature and its teaching can be read as following a similar path as other disciplinary self-reflections. These reflections seem to, particularly since the 1990s, proliferate also in other disciplines such as women’s studies, the humanities or the university as a whole. As I interpret it, what seems also to be at stake for Kamuf is an attempt to conceptualize her discipline as a singular and unique formation which is both ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’, has both its place in the university but is, simultaneously ‘out of place’, that is, as a ‘tremendous discipline’.

The problem I see with Kamuf’s theorizations of the deconstructive and disciplinary potential of literature and its teachings, is, however, that her argument utilizes strategies which eventually prove to be counterproductive not only for our understanding of the current landscape of academic disciplines, but particularly for the fields in whose name such argumentation is implemented.

²⁷ Comments which Kamuf makes in the introduction to *Without Alibi* which gathers Derrida’s essays, among others also his ‘University without Condition’, seems to derive from similar assumptions. Here Kamuf argues that Derrida’s call for professors being allowed to produce *oeuvres* ‘does not appear particularly new, at least not in the U.S., where long before anyone pronounced the name “deconstruction,” poets and writers were working at universities, that is they were professors of “creative writing,” as it came to be called. And there have long been university departments of music, studio art, architecture, drama, and more recently, cinema, television, media production, and now even departments of performance art’. Peggy Kamuf, ‘Introduction: Event of Resistance’, in *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-27 (p. 18).

Kamuf, however, is not the only scholar working within literature and deconstruction who follows this particular path. Similar conceptualizations also characterize Weber's work or that of Graham Allen.²⁸ I will briefly outline the argumentation of Weber.

In his essay 'The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge', Weber suggests that rather than treating the university as a solid and self-contained body with a clear and definite function, we should conceive of the university as an inherently ambiguous place defined by an 'irresolvable' tension between its closing and opening.

As Weber describes it, this tension manifests itself on various levels. Firstly, this tension manifests on the level of the diversity of universities with distinct cultural, geographical and national contexts and the 'universality' of knowledge those diverse institutions teach and research. Secondly, it also manifests itself as a tension between the university as 'relatively self-contained and autonomous' institution which, at the same time, is defined as transitional and thus 'determined by factors from outside'. Finally, this tension can be found also within the university's 'fundamental task', 'the acquisition of knowledge' which involves 'two divergent and yet interdependent tendencies' - 'an openness to the unknown, in order to move beyond a given state of knowledge' and a 'closure', the 'reduction or assimilation of knowledge to what is familiar' which makes the knowledge recognizable, i.e. 'distinguishes it from error or illusion'.²⁹

²⁸ See Samuel Weber, 'The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge', in *Institution and Interpretation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 220-235; Samuel Weber, 'The Future of the Humanities: Experimenting', *The University Cultural Machine 2* (2000) <<https://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/311/296>> [accessed 8 February 2017]; Graham Allen, 'Transparency, incalculability, Mythologies today', *Nottingham French Studies*, 47.2 (2008), 71-82; Graham Allen, 'Transparent Universities, Foreign Bodies', *Oxford Literary Review*, 28 (2008), 5-17; Graham Allen, 'Transparency and Teaching', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23.2-3 (2006), 568-570.

²⁹ Weber, 'The Future Campus', p. 153.

This tension, as Weber further argues, which has been inherent to the university ever since, has nonetheless reached an unprecedented intensity in recent decades. This is due to worldwide trends such as the ‘globalization’ of the economy, which ‘designates the progressive intrusion of the economic rationality of profit-driven systems into areas that had hitherto not been entirely subordinated to such constraints’, and the “‘virtualization’ of reality’ which is bound to development of electronic media and has ‘delocalizing effects’.³⁰

Weber’s argument is that in order to ‘enable the university to have a future’, we should not seek to oppose those ‘delocalizing effects’ but that the university itself should take part in them and, by doing so, modify them. Weber proposes that such an intervention could be achieved through ‘experimentation’. The kind of experimentation Weber has in mind is not, however, scientific. For Weber, scientific experimentation lets itself be immediately subordinated to the ‘teleology of a concept of knowledge bent on assimilating the other to the same, the strange to the familiar’ which makes it, according to Weber, an ally of the neoliberal trends we seek to resist. In other words, because, as Weber argues, the aim of scientific experimentation is ‘to make the future calculable, controllable, falsifiable’, scientific experimentation ‘seems to be largely consonant’ with the ‘realization of capital as profit’.³¹

In contrast to scientific experimentation Weber thus suggests we envision experimenting differently. He argues for experimenting which would not ‘follow the scientific assimilation of the unknowable to the known’ and thus would ‘not stand in the Cartesian tradition of searching to establish absolute certitude through universal

³⁰ Weber, ‘The Future Campus’, p. 155.

³¹ Weber, ‘The Future Campus’, p. 161

doubt'.³² In order to theorize on this 'new' kind of 'experimenting', Weber turns to Kierkegaard's text 'Repetition'. As Weber argues, in this text, experimentation is defined as both 'theatrical and virtual' through a Danish word *posse* which Weber translates into English as *farce*.³³ Weber then suggests that the question 'that has begun to emerge' in the current writings on the university, the question of whether 'infinite attention to the other' can be imagined as the core of an alternative university, should be approached through this notion of Kierkegaard's, the notion of *posse*.

It is in this notion that Weber sees the possibility (*posse* in Latin means possibility) of how academics can intervene in the tension within the university's closing and opening further accelerated by 'globalization' and 'virtualization'. As he summarizes the project of the 'future' humanities,

a task for the humanities would be to rethink not just the human but everything connected with it *not*, as hitherto, strictly from the perspective of the universal, the concept, but from that of the exception: which is to say, from the perspective of what refuses to fit in, what resists assimilation, but what, in so doing, reveals the enabling limits of all system, synthesis, and self-containment.³⁴

As the above quotation testifies, Weber's envisioning of the 'future humanities' follows paths which are quite similar to Mowitt's proposal for a 'sinister humanities' discussed in third chapter. What, however, makes Weber's and, as already argued, Kamuf's accounts of literary studies, the humanities and the university, problematic, is the bias against and an exclusion of a particular field - disciplines such as

³² Weber, 'The Future Campus', p. 161

³³ Weber, 'The Future Campus', p. 162.

³⁴ Weber, 'The Future Campus', p. 162.

‘accounting’ or, more generally, ‘science’. To be clear, I do not want to deny disciplines which focus on literature’s potential to, as Kamuf articulates it, put institutions or institutionality ‘in deconstruction’. It is not my aim to diminish the ‘tremendous’ potential of this particular discipline or claim that ‘literature’ is identical to ‘accounting’. Rather, what I argue is that the way we theorize what literary study and deconstruction are and do with the university must proceed in a different way it does under the guidance of passages from Kamuf’s and Weber’s work quoted above.

The argument I propose instead is that, in the development of a non-affirmative critique of the accountability movement, it is crucial not to read Kamuf’s counterability as opposing our ‘abilities’ to account, particularly our abilities to ‘count’ and ‘calculate’. As I read it, rather than denouncing counting or accounting, counterability *resists effects* produced by their usage. More specifically, Kamuf’s (ac)countering helps accountability resist its ‘travelling’ without ‘translation’, or in other words, its implementation as a ‘general logic’ which crosses boundaries of different contexts and reduces difference to sameness. The ‘errrr’ smuggled into the middle of ‘accountability’, as Anne Berger would put it, provides accountability with ‘the resistance of translation’ and thus makes it a useful term for our theoretical and political interventions.³⁵ Interpreting Kamuf’s counterability in this way nonetheless obliges us to further examine the value of ‘counting’ and ‘calculation’ in relation to the work of the humanities and the university.

³⁵ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 8.

Numbers and Other Instruments: ‘Counting as a bad procedure’ and its supplementary discomfort in the humanities

In her article ‘Accountability’, Kamuf’s deconstruction of the common belief that there exists a direct reflection of ‘the truth’ in numerical representation, as if numbers were not a representation, as if they had nothing to do with – and thus could do without – language, discourse or narrative, is crucial. She shows that ‘numbers’, ‘calculation’, ‘computing’ or ‘objectivity’ are not ‘objective’ in the sense of being a-historical and neutral givens or truths. In relation to Kamuf’s thesis, this gesture allows her to recognize and critique the institutional and political character of what she calls the accountability movement, and to show how it functions in the wider socio-political context of U.S. society. More specifically, it allows her to uncover how this seemingly neutral, non-faith-based procedure which now dominates higher education in fact supports and sustains aims of conservative political representation, not only in its economic but also its ideological struggles.

What her analysis *does not* imply, however, is that ‘numbers’ or ‘counting’ are somehow essentially ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’. Rather, with her deconstruction, Kamuf opens ‘numbers’, ‘counting’ and ‘accounting’ to reading, to reading them as ‘signs’, to reading them as a ‘text’. This implies that the value of ‘numbers’ or of ‘counting’, just like the value of any other textual element, is not inherent to them, but depends on the context and on the ways in which they are used, i.e. how they are *written* and how they *read*.

Thus, on the one hand, Kamuf is correct to point out that the two meanings of ‘accountability’, namely ‘computing’ and ‘narrating’ are ‘commonly thought to stand in a rough opposition to each other’. She is also right to argue that ‘the so called “objective” or “factual” pole is often privileged over the “subjective” one. She

further points out that ‘counting, or quantification triumphs over belief’, or in other words, that the tendency towards ‘letting accountability’s other more narrative, more “subjective” connections be subsumed and reduced to arithmetic figuration’ is a bias which to a certain extent defines our society.³⁶ There is no doubt that the ‘objective’, ‘numeric’ representation is considered - and particularly by cultures (like ours), which stress effectiveness - to be ‘truth’ as phrases such as ‘numbers do not lie’, suggest.

On the other hand, however, the scene which involves ‘numbers’ and ‘counting’ is not always configured in this way. There is a particular socio-political and institutional site where ‘numbers’ and ‘counting’ obtain a different value - the scene of the humanist critique.

In the humanities, the common bias of privileging numbers which characterizes the ‘general’ common sense seems to be further traversed by another bias. Put rather bluntly, here it is not a commonplace to agree that ‘numbers do not lie’, rather the opposite: the language of ‘numbers’ and ‘counting’ is avoided. It is decided beforehand that ‘numbers’, ‘counting’ or ‘science’ are the ‘others’ against which we have to defend ourselves and ‘our’ humanistic endeavours.

This is also what Mowitt shows with his work as outlined previously. To recall his argument, it is the bias against ‘instruments’ and what is perceived as encroachments from other, more ‘scientific’ disciplines like biology, anthropology or palaeontology, which dominates and is the major theoretical obstacle in the current debate over the humanities and their position within the university.

What I want to stress at this point, however, is that the belief that ‘*numbers do lie*’ does not seem to be a phenomenon which has appeared within the humanist

³⁶ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, p. 252.

work only recently. Nor does it seem to be a ‘modern invention’ as Hoskin would put it following Foucault’s work on disciplinary power. Rather, ‘counting’, as it seems, has been considered to be ‘a bad procedure’ from the very beginning of Western theoretical endeavour. More specifically, denouncing numbers and counting and excluding them from theoretical work proper seems to be one of the foundational gestures of metaphysical philosophy.

This is, at least, what follows from Derrida’s discussion of ‘numbers’, ‘mathematics’ and ‘counting’ in his work *Dissemination*.³⁷ It is perhaps in ‘Outwork’, and in the text which follows this ‘preface’, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, that Derrida most rigorously traces how Western philosophical tradition condemns ‘counting’ as a mere formalism without ‘content’ and thus expels it from its project. In these two texts, rather than denouncing numbers, Derrida identifies the procedure of excluding counting to be one of the foundational exclusions which enabled the project of Western (metaphysical) theory as such.³⁸

As I share and endorse Kamuf’s countering of the accountability movement, I argue that in our elaboration on how ‘accounterability’ can be developed, it is

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (London: The Athlone Press, 1981).

³⁸ As Celine Surprenant argues with her reading of *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* [*Donner le temps*], where Derrida elaborates on gift as ‘what interrupts economy’ (Derrida, 1992, 7; 18), as pointing towards an ‘unheard-of kind of accounting’, ‘[i]f we isolate these statements from the rest of the book and from other ones which are found in Derrida’s *oeuvre*, it looks as though Derrida shares the trans-historical and consensual suspicion towards calculation’. The rejection of rational calculation is, however, as she rightly points out, only one side of the story. Celine Surprenant, “‘Counting is a bad procedure’: Calculation and Economy in Jacques Derrida’s *Donner le temps*”, *Derrida Today*, 4.1 (2011), 21-43, p. 24. A similar reading of Derrida’s grasp on ‘calculability’ and ‘incalculability’ in relation to the question of justice is provided by Scott Cutler Shershow, “‘A Triangle Open on its Fourth Side’: On the Strategy, Protocol, and “Justice” of Deconstruction”, *Derrida Today*, 4.1 (2011), 59-85, p. 61. It is, however, not only ‘later Derrida’ after what is called ‘ethical turn’, that he develops premises articulated in his earlier work in this direction as Surprenant and Shershow suggest. The necessity to calculate (with the incalculable), of a strategic calculation, is pivotal also to his writings on the university. This is apparent from the already discussed essay ‘Vacant Chair’ where, in the conclusion Derrida says: ‘... there is never any lifting of censorship, only a strategic calculation: censorship against censorship, Is this strategy an art?’ (63). The essay which I interpret in Part III, ‘Mochlos; or The Conflict of The Faculties’ also thematises the problem of instrumentality (*mochlos* is a Greek word for lever) in relation to deconstruction and the university.

crucial we explore the notions of ‘counting’ and ‘accounting’ from this angle. Not that I suggest we accept the notion of counting imposed on us by the general common sense and the accountabilists, and as it seems to me, to a certain extent further perpetuated also by Kamuf. Rather, I suggest, following *Dissemination*, that we treat counting and counting with numbers differently, that we count otherwise.

Working with numbers differently

Dissemination, and particularly its ‘preface’, ‘Outwork’, and the first chapter, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, are among the most read texts ever written by Derrida. In these two texts, Derrida lays down premises of deconstruction and discusses notions fundamental to his project such as ‘dissemination’, ‘writing’ or ‘supplement’. The way in which Derrida does this is also particular to his writing and to deconstruction. Through writing a ‘preface’, he deconstructs the way in which ‘prefaces’ and other ‘others’, other ‘supplements’ (such as ‘writing’ to ‘speech’, ‘form’ to ‘content’, ‘feminine’ to ‘masculine’, etc.) have been marked as secondary and thus considered as less important or even harmful by the phallogocentric tradition of metaphysical philosophy.

What does not receive much attention by the readers of *Dissemination*, and what is nonetheless important in relation to issues discussed here, is that Derrida - apart from the terms enumerated above (such as ‘writing’ or ‘supplement’) - addresses also ‘mathematics’ and ‘counting’. In ‘Outwork’ this is exemplified by discussion of Hegel. Derrida compares Hegel’s approach to ‘mathematism’ to the latter’s treatment of prefaces. For Hegel, Derrida argues, both mathematics and prefaces are ‘external to the concept and to the thing itself’. As he argues, ‘as a machine devoid of meaning or life, as an *anatomical* structure, the preface always

has some affinity with the procedure of mathematics'.³⁹ 'Formalism, mathematism and scientism' are errors of a philosopher, just like the other extreme – 'empiricism, intuitionism, prophetism'. They impose 'upon the presentation of truth a set of epigraphs that are either intolerable to truth or that truth should produce on its own'.⁴⁰

What follows from Derrida's reading is that, for Hegel, 'mathematics' is not on the side of 'truth' and philosophy. On the contrary, 'counting' is considered to be a mere 'taxonomical inscription'. For Hegel, mathematics is a 'science of death' and a 'dead science'.⁴¹ By opposing it to mathematics, Hegel thereby defines his philosophical project. Unlike mathematics, the speculative dialectic is a science which favours the living and thus cannot be reduced to the former. Its 'triplicity', Hegel argues,

remains beyond the grasp of any arithmetic or of any numerology [...] The numerical form of expression is too thin and inadequate to present true concrete unity. The Spirit is certainly a trinity, but it cannot be added up or counted. Counting is a bad procedure.⁴²

As this quotation testifies, instituting one's theoretical project by opposing it to 'counting' is therefore not a new procedure in 'the humanities'. It is not only the aforementioned critics of instrumental reason or the critiques of the neoliberal university who employ this particular strategy. Neither is it, however, only Hegel who, in the history of Western theoretical endeavours, denounce numbers. Derrida identifies a similar treatment of 'numbers' and 'counting' also in Plato, which is

³⁹ Derrida, 'Outwork', p. 13.

⁴⁰ Derrida, 'Outwork', p. 16.

⁴¹ Derrida, 'Outwork', p. 23-4.

⁴² Hegel in Derrida, 'Outwork', p. 24.

why, when he articulates how *dissemination* operates, he describes it as a kind of ‘pharmacy’ which works with *numbers* differently. It counts in a way different not only from ‘mathematics’ but also, importantly, from that of Hegel and other metaphysical philosophers. As he argues, *dissemination*

can no longer be dissociated from a restaging of arithmos and of ‘counting’ as a ‘bad procedure’. Nor from a rereading of the rythmos of Democritus, which stands as a kind of writing that philosophy has never been able to reckon with, since it is rather out of the prior existence and restless exteriority of that writing that philosophy is able to arise and account for itself: it forms a written preface, in a sense, and one which discourse as such can no longer envelop in its circulation, in that circle where the speculative impossibility and the speculative necessity of the prolegomenon meet.⁴³

For Derrida then, ‘counting’ is not merely ‘a bad procedure’. It is rather the denunciation of ‘counting’ as a foundational gesture of metaphysical philosophy that deconstruction is after. This can be deduced also from his famous discussion of writing in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’.

Theuth, the god of writing whom Plato famously recalls in the *Phaedrus*, did not invent only writing, draughts and dice, but also ‘numbers and calculation, geometry and astronomy’.⁴⁴ Theuth, Derrida argues, occupies a similar place to his counterpart in Egyptian mythology, Thoth, who is a ‘secretary of the god Ra’,⁴⁵ ‘the scribe and bookkeeper of Osiris’. ‘As “Master of the books,” Thoth becomes, by dint of consigning them, registering them, keeping account of them, and guarding their stock, the “master of divine words”’. In the underworld,

⁴³ Derrida, ‘Outwork’, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 75.

⁴⁵ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 91.

Thoth records the weight of the heart-souls of the dead, he first counts out the days of life, *enumerates* history. His arithmetic thus covers the events of divine biography. He is “the one who measures the length of the lives of gods and men.”⁴⁶

The Egyptian god Thoth also has a ‘female counterpart’. As Derrida argues in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’,

her name, Seshat, doubtless means *she-who-writes*. “Mistress of libraries,” she records the exploits of the kings. [She is the] first goddess versed in the art of engraving, she marks the names of the kings on a tree in the temple of Heliopolis, while Thoth keeps account of the years on a notched pole.⁴⁷

The god and the goddess, the master and the mistress of writing are thus, first of all, bookkeepers and accountants. They administer, count and enumerate, they keep the records ‘in order’. Indeed, the god of writing, Theuth, as Derrida recalls, is in the *Phaedrus* presented as a ‘technocrat without power of decision, an engineer, a clever, ingenious servant’.⁴⁸ Yet, despite the first appearance one might obtain from Theuth, things are not that much ‘in order’ with him but his every act is marked by ‘unstable ambivalence’:

this god of calculation, arithmetic and rational science also presides over the occult sciences, astrology and alchemy. He is the god of magic formulas that calm the sea, of secret accounts, of hidden texts [...].⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 95.

⁴⁷ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 95.

⁴⁸ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 93.

Today, we would perhaps say that Theuth is a truly ‘interdisciplinary’ or ‘transdisciplinary’ scholar as he covers disciplines from ‘science’, such as calculation and arithmetic, to ‘magic’ and ‘secret accounts’. He is ‘a renaissance man’, who, as Derrida argues, is also in charge of ‘the passage between life and death’; his privileged domain being medicine.⁵⁰

Theuth’s ‘prescriptions’, as Derrida further points out, are meant to be beneficial. That is also why *pharmakon*, which means both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison’, two things at one time, is mostly translated by the word ‘remedy’. Surely, such a translation is not inaccurate. Nor is Theuth’s representation of his *pharmakon* (i.e. writing) to the king as a beneficial drug which ‘repairs and produces, accumulates and remedies, increases knowledge and reduces forgetfulness’ a misrepresentation. As Derrida’s reading of *pharmakon* shows, however, although these translations are not wrong, they nonetheless erase the other pole reserved in the word *pharmakon* and thus cancel its ambiguity. Theuth’s presentation and

all translations into languages that are the heirs and depositaries of Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an effect of analysis that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple elements by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in the light of the ulterior developments it itself has made possible.⁵¹

Translations which privilege one meaning over another, as Derrida further argues, are nonetheless not protected from their counterparts; the effectiveness of the

⁵⁰ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 94.

⁵¹ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 99.

pharmakon can be easily reversed. ‘*Pharmakon*’, as Derrida argues, can worsen the ill instead of remedy it’.⁵²

‘Counting’, as a part of Theuth’s pharmaceutical repertoire, cannot escape this ambivalence and its effects. Although numerical representation is often considered to be faithful to that for which it accounts, it can never be simply beneficial. As an operation which comes ‘after’, as a device designed for use after the event, as a representation of the thing and not the thing itself, ‘counting’ is always at a distance from the present. Because of this ‘distance’, its value and its effects can be never guaranteed. This distance, as Derrida puts it in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, ‘opens meaning up to all forms of adulteration which immediacy would have prevented’.⁵³

Discussing ‘accounting’ in relation to Derrida’s reading of *pharmakon* therefore explains why, as Kamuf shows with her reading, ‘counting’ is able to produce appearances which enable it to pass for truth. It can, however, simultaneously, be considered by philosophers such as Plato, Hegel, or the current critiques of the neoliberal university, to be ‘a bad procedure’. In other words, this is why, the ‘accounting of accountability’ can function as a device which promotes the aims of the current ‘technocratic-managerialism’ within higher education and thus significantly constrain political and ethical dimensions of democracy, and yet, simultaneously, functions as democracy’s condition and key instrument.

Counting and accounting of accountability can be - alternately or simultaneously – considered maleficent or beneficent. ‘Numbers’, ‘counting’ and ‘accounting’, because they belong to the weave of ‘writing’ or ‘texts’, will always be

⁵² Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 97.

⁵³ Barbara Johnson, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Dissemination* (London: The Althone Press, 1981), pp. vii-xxxiii (p. ix).

both, an addition and a substitute, both superfluous and necessary, dangerous and redemptive. We will thus never be able to master or get over ‘the supplementary discomfort inherent in the indecidability between the two’.⁵⁴

But what does revealing the ‘*pharmakon*-like’ character of ‘counting’ add to the analysis and the attempt to intervene within an accountability regime which dominates current higher education? Does not pointing out that the value and the effects of ‘numbers’ and ‘counting’ are invincibly ambivalent blunt our critique of the accountability movement? Does not *pharmakon*, and the ‘supplementary logic’ it reveals, compromise the efforts to resist the so called ‘accountability movement’? Does it not open a path to endless ‘countering’ of any evaluation or judgment and thus lead inevitably to relativism, or preclude the possibility of making any decisions and carrying actions which would be effective for countering the disciplinary powers which define our current society and its university?

As follows from the supplementary logic revealed by Derrida’s reading of the *Phaedrus*, ‘countering’ and ‘counting’ are, indeed, processes without a closure. It seems to me that it is those who think that they can arrest this movement, that they can stop the counting and calculations, who are the most likely to fail in their critiques and interventions. What Derrida’s reading of *pharmakon* implies is that the strategies which offer the biggest chances of making any difference are the ones which – rather than arresting this movement – seek to manipulate and thus distort it.

In the conclusion of this section I will develop on three particular ways in which Derrida’s work on *pharmakon* can help us with such distortions. Namely, I will discuss its implications for questions related to: (1) politics, (2) ethics, and (3) understanding the relationship between accountability and pedagogy.

⁵⁴ Derrida, ‘The Rhetoric of Drugs’, p. 235

1. As follows from my discussion of counting in relation to *pharmakon*, the reason why the accountability movement produces negative effects is not only because counting is privileged over narrativity as Kamuf seems to propose. As I interpreted above, it is not the ‘numbers’ themselves which are ‘harmful’, neither is it ‘counting’ which, as Hegel puts it, is inherently a ‘bad procedure’. Rather, what makes ‘numbers’ and ‘counting’ ‘harmful’ is the ‘*pharmakon*-like’ effects further enhanced by the ways in which numbers are used. I therefore propose that Kamuf’s propositions in ‘Accountability’ are not to be read simply as suggesting that we should employ ‘subjective points of view’ instead of ‘objective measures’. As I see it, demanding a replacement of ‘numbers’ with ‘words’ in evaluation feedback forms supported with an argument that our academic work or that of our students is irreducible to metrics is not enough. I would even argue that only resisting the ‘accountability movement’ by countering quantification, by privileging ‘narrating’ over ‘counting’, is, in the end, counterproductive.

In other words, the discussion of accountability in relation to *pharmakon* implies that resistance against the so called accountability movement cannot proceed without counting. We need not only to show that ‘numbers’ belong to language (as Kamuf shows in her text) but also use them as such: We need to use our ability to ‘counter’, that is, to take our ‘ac – count-er – ability’ also by using numbers; we have to count, we have to count with numbers, and count with them differently.

At this point I am therefore in agreement with, and wish to further develop insights already articulated by Mowitt in his envisioning of a ‘sinister humanities’ and his call for engaging with financialization on its own terms so as to ‘articulate there precisely what its stewards do not wish to hear’. This endeavour does not only involve engaging with the questions of ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘financialization’ but it

also implies ““finishing” immanent self-critical tendencies within the field of humanistic inquiry’,⁵⁵ that is, re-thinking the disciplinary character of the humanities, how it constitutes itself and how it relates to other disciplines traditionally considered as its ‘others’.

2. *Pharmakon*’s ambivalence, its double and interchangeable character, whose value and effect can never be guaranteed and protected from its counterparts has significant consequences for the problem of ‘teaching’ as a problem of legacy and the possibility of one’s fidelity to it. One of the key questions Derrida’s discussion of the *Phaedrus* raises is, therefore: How can we - if “good” repetition (faithfulness) always brings with itself “bad” repetition (unfaithfulness) - conceptualize a possibility of an ethical relationship?

This is precisely one of the key issues which scholars working on the question of accountability regimes dominating the current universities particularly in the U.S. and the UK wrestle with. As discussed above, it is most commonly the language of ethics (namely words such as ‘trust’, ‘responsibility’, ‘democratic accountability’ or ‘belief’) which is invoked by the critics of accountabilism to name that which has been destroyed by the techno-managerial regimes of accountability and which, therefore, need to be re-cultivated. With the exception of Biesta, Kamuf and Readings, however, most of the scholars do not seem to pay enough attention to the ‘remedies’ they propose. In their analyses, those notions invoking ethics which are suggested as strategies and practices capable of resisting or escaping the ‘disciplining’ accountability regime are left unexamined and unproblematized as particular socio-cultural constructs with related histories and memories.⁵⁶ I will

⁵⁵ Mowitt, ‘Left Leaning’, p. 2.

⁵⁶ In case of scholars working on the question see Strathern, ‘The Tyranny of Transparency’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 26.3 (2000), 309-321. This is also one of the problems of Thomas

develop this problematic in detail in chapter V. More specifically, I will propose a conceptualization of ethical relationships which would enable us to take responsibility and ‘grapple with otherness’, which will enable us to inhabit the current feminist ‘politics but will also speak to the political desire for social change and futurity that we imbue with this name’.⁵⁷

3. At this point, however, I wish to develop another issue. The discussion of accountability in relation to *pharmakon* also challenges one of the key assumptions made by Bill Readings and the critics of the neoliberal university, namely the assumption that the ‘accounting of accountability’ and ‘audit culture’ has been added to the university and its activities, that is teaching and research, ‘ex post’, and that accountability’s accounting is irreconcilable with ‘pedagogy’.

Generally speaking, Derrida’s discussion of *pharmakon* implies that there is never simply an uncontaminated origin. In other words, the starting point is not some originary ideal presence but the ‘lack of presence’. In the passages I interpreted in the opening of this section, Derrida shows how counting has been treated by metaphysical philosophy. What he shows is that it is not the ‘adding’ of the ‘mathematical method’ onto originally ‘non-mathematical’ philosophy which is the ‘error’ of a philosopher, as Hegel reproaches his colleagues. Rather, the *exclusion* of numbers and counting is what has enabled the institution of the philosophical project as such. ‘Quantification’, rather than being imposed on theoretical endeavours and their institutions ‘ex post’, has been always already at work in its supposedly ‘non-infected’ interiority. ‘Mathematics’ or ‘counting’ is philosophy’s ‘enabling other’, something philosophy separated itself from in its very

Docherty’s work (Thomas Docherty, *The Universities at War* Thomas Docherty, *Universities at War* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015).

⁵⁷ Wiegman, ‘On Being in Time’, p. 164.

constitution. From this perspective, it therefore seems that ‘accounting’ and ‘counting’ have been, like writing, ‘at the heart of the heart’ of the university and its pedagogy.

Accountability: An educational story

‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ could be indeed read as a treatise of and on *pedagogy*.⁵⁸ As we read in *Phaedrus*, the leaves of writing lead Socrates, ‘the lover of learning’, out of the city, which, for Socrates, is the space of learning and teaching.⁵⁹ As Socrates argues, ‘landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me, only people in the city can do that’. Phaedrus, however, as Socrates continues, managed to ‘found a potion to charm me into leaving’: like ‘a hungry animal [...] driven by dangling a carrot or a bit of greenstuff in front of it’, Phaedrus leads Socrates ‘out of the city simply by waving in front of him leaves of a book containing a speech’.⁶⁰

Although Socrates claims that landscapes, trees and their leaves, unlike people in the city, can teach him nothing, it is the ‘leaves’ (the leaves of a book, like the records engraved by Seshat, the goddess of writing, into the bark of the trees) which *lead* him out to the city. It is as if Socrates was led despite or against himself and to places and sources where one would not expect to learn anything.

As Derrida describes the scene, the ‘leaves of the book’, i.e. the *pharmakon*, intervenes in what has been prescribed to us. They take us from our ‘proper place’,

⁵⁸ As outlined in the introduction, the suffix ‘-agogy’, which comes from Greek *agōgos* is a reduplication of *ago* meaning to ‘lead’, ‘drive’, ‘bring’ or ‘carry’. ‘Pedagogue’ then is literally a person who ‘leads the child’. Additionally, the suffix ‘agogoue’ is also used in medical lexicon, where it indicates the substance that stimulates the flow of secretion.

⁵⁹ The French word for ‘leaves’, *feuilles*, is used in the original.

⁶⁰ Plato, in Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, p. 71.

off our 'customary track'.⁶¹ This complex and paradoxical ability to 'lead', as he further argues, is thus also a kind of 'misleading' and is a quality which is particular to '*pharmakons*', to texts:

Only the words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and under the cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk, only hidden letters can make [...] Socrates moving. If a speech could be purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier foreign to it ... it would not seduce anyone. It would not draw Socrates, as if under the effects of a *pharmakon*, out of his way ...: writing, the *pharmakon*, the going or leading astray.⁶²

The way writing or texts lead, the way teaching works, is then, by leading astray, by misleading. According to this description, Derrida's pedagogy, or any pedagogy, is not a 'leading' which takes one through a secure and straightforward path but a journey full of simulacra and deception. It is a tremendous path which makes us both wonder and tremble.⁶³

Furthermore, as we can read further in the passage quoted above, the way such teaching (mis)leads has a particular form the *Pharmakon's* ambivalence, as Derrida suggests, implies 'charm'. It has 'spellbinding virtue', a 'power of

⁶¹ Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', p. 70.

⁶² Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', p. 71.

⁶³ If we followed the reading of 'Plato's Pharmacy' as pedagogical text and developed it further particularly in relation to deconstruction, it would lead us to re-consider and re-interpret Foucault's comment which appears in the appendix to the republication of *Madness and Civilization* entitled 'My body, this paper, this fire' where Foucault infamously argues that 'the system of reading [...] of which Derrida is today the most decisive representative' is nothing more than a 'little pedagogy'. My body, this paper, this fire', *Oxford Literary Review*, 4.1 (2012), 9-28 (p. 11).

fascination', it 'attracts'. The way writing and texts lead us astray from our general, natural or habitual paths and laws is, as Derrida argues, through seduction.⁶⁴

If we look at the etymology of 'seduction', it explains why this word appears in a close vicinity of the questions of education. The word 'to seduce' comes from the Medieval Latin word *sēdūcere* which is composed of a prefix *sē* meaning 'apart', 'astray' or 'without' and the word *dūcō* meaning to 'lead'. 'To seduce' thus literally means to 'lead astray'. Yet, as the prefix 'se-' suggests, seduction not only misleads. It does not only 'take astray', but also 'takes apart'. The philosopher, in this case Socrates, is not only led out of the city into the countryside, from his proper place and off his customary track, but this 'trip' also 'takes him apart'. Socrates is 'taken by desire'. It is desire which gets him moving. And, as Derrida argues, to make themselves desirable is something only 'words' which are 'deferred' and 'enveloped' can do.

What are the implications for our understanding of accountability if we read it as a textual problem and particularly in relation to the conceptualization of textuality proposed by Derrida's 'Plato's Pharmacy'? Firstly, it helps us answer one of the key questions scholars examining and critiquing accountability movements ask, namely 'How did "accountability", despite it being from the very beginning an "awful idea" become so compelling and irresistible? How could the culture of accountability have become so prominent and pervasive? And why do we actively invest in it even though we are aware of its psychological dangers?'

⁶⁴ In Latin, the word for 'to lead' is, *dūcere*. It is, furthermore, of the same family as *docere* meaning 'to teach' or 'instruct'. *Dūcere* is also the origin of the words such as 'doctrine', 'doctor' or, indeed, 'education'. 'Educate, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* < <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/59580#eid5743294> > [Accessed 28 March 2017].

Addressing these questions in relation to Derrida's deconstruction of the *Phaedrus* would imply that the modes of socio-psychological control exercised by 'accountability regimes' are not only 'disciplinary' but that they also operate in the realm of desire. In other words, it is not only that we are 'self-disciplined' by accountability regimes, it is not only subjugation (constitution and disciplining) by power-knowledge as, for instance, Hoskin described the process. It is not only 'disciplining' power which operates through institutional apparatuses and techniques, but also powers which are seductive. We could therefore argue that the reason why 'accountability regimes' are so irresistible and why people invest in them even when they are aware of their negative effects, is because of the mechanisms of seduction in place.⁶⁵

Secondly, according to Derrida, what makes us desire 'texts', the reason why they can seduce, is that they are 'concealed', 'veiled' and 'hidden', or in other words, not fully present. This suggestion implies a re-consideration of how accountability regimes relate to visibility. More specifically, according to this proposition, 'accountability' would not operate as a 'panoptical' power of all-seeing surveillance. 'Accountability' would not operate as a modern power-knowledge, 'invisibly' while, simultaneously, seeking to make 'everything visible' in order to enable 'counting' (as argued by scholars following Foucault).⁶⁶ Reading 'accountability' through 'Plato's Pharmacy' would imply another distribution of the visible and the invisible. Rather than being invisible 'power' which seeks to make

⁶⁵ The argument that it is not only 'panopticism' which keeps the social order and control but also seduction, has been elaborated by other scholars, for instance Zygmunt Bauman, 'On postmodern uses of sex', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 15.3 (1998), 19-33. See also Bauman's conversation with David Lyon: Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance* (Cambridge & Malden: Polity, 2013).

⁶⁶ This proposition is not, however, particular only to scholars following from Foucault. Graham Allen, who follows from Derrida's work makes similar proposition. See Graham Allen, 'Transparency, incalculability, Mythologies today', *Nottingham French Studies*, 47.2 (2008), 71-82.

everything visible, this paradigm suggests a more complex play of differences, a more ‘virtual’ or ‘theatrical’ modality where the spatio-temporal properties as well as the particular ‘material’, the manner in which the given ‘text’ is woven, must be taken into account.⁶⁷

To summarize then, reading Derrida’s ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ adds further complications to the examination of how accountability regimes operate in higher education: it shows that the ‘accounting of accountability’ is not extrinsic to pedagogy, that ‘accountability’ not only ‘disciplines’ but ‘seduces’ and that its relationship to visibility presupposes a more complex interweaving of visibility and its correlate, invisibility.

It is, however, not only in this general sense that I propose to situate accounting in the ‘heart of the heart’ of education. The story of accountability, as it seems, is an educational story.⁶⁸

This at least is what follows from Hoskin’s work on the modern history of accountability and accounting. Unlike most of the scholars researching this field, Hoskin does not believe that the concept of ‘accountability’ first appeared in its modern, ‘disciplinary’ form in the world of business. Although, undoubtedly, it is in the context of management accounting in private business in the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century that accounting in its modern disciplinary forms first

⁶⁷ Derrida’s critique of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* follows similar direction. Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, ‘Choosing One’s Heritage’, in *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19 (p. 12). The problem of ‘visibility’ and its theorizations particularly in relation to the university and feminist theory and politics is developed in the last chapter ‘Re-inventing Feminist Resistance for a University-to-come’.

⁶⁸ In his paper ‘Education and Genesis of Disciplinarity’, Hoskin examines the problem from the perspective of disciplines and proposes a ‘reversal’ to Foucault’s genealogy of disciplinarity. Specifically, Hoskin argues that ‘the whole field of disciplinarity’, in the double Foucauldian sense, ‘has an educational genesis’. Thus, only by understanding ‘education and *its* power can one understand the genesis of disciplinarity and the subsequent apparently inexorable growth of disciplinarity’s power’. Hoskin thus reverses the Foucauldian premise that ‘examination’ as a ‘modern form of ‘power-knowledge’ originates in psychiatry and then moves into the field of pedagogy. Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 272.

flourished, according to Hoskin, the world of business is not the disciplinary site where accountability originates.

Hoskin disapproves particularly of explanations which argue that the rise of accounting in modernity is a response to some ‘ex-post imputed “need”’, such as the need for more efficient organization of labour raised by technological progress, the demands of the Industrial Revolution, for example.⁶⁹ He argues that the ‘emergence of the modern business enterprise cannot simply be read as the triumph of economic or technical innovation’, as a ‘secondary response to external economic, organizational and governmental change’. Instead, he suggests that its ‘genesis’ should be read as a *disciplinary* breakthrough with ‘accounting’ and elite higher education in Europe playing central and crucial roles in it.⁷⁰

Hoskin supports this argument by recalling findings of archival research he and his colleague Macve did on early modern U.S. businesses, namely the Springfield Armory and Western Railroad. As the two historians argue, they found a particular ‘educational connection’, a link which connects ‘accountability regimes’ to the institutional ‘disciplinary’ domain of higher education. More specifically, that research showed that the shift toward new regimes of answerability was not engineered by businessmen. These were, as Hoskin puts it, ‘too busy defending short-term profits and keeping costs low’. It was not the entrepreneurs who began to implement new measures but the ‘salaried employees with little or no financial interest in the companies they served’, that is, the companies’ accountants and bookkeepers.

⁶⁹ Hoskin’s work challenges one of the key and dominant narratives about the origin of businesses and the management structures of modern corporations, the seminal work by Alfred D. Chandler *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* published in 1977.

⁷⁰ Hoskin, ‘Accounting as Discipline’, p. 28.

Unlike the businesses in Europe, the U.S. businesses found themselves in a fortunate position during that period. They ‘were given the direct and extensive financial and institutional support by the State in implementing their disciplinary innovations’. Such a support was absent anywhere else in the world at that time.⁷¹ Hoskin however argues that the financial support which allowed the growth of administrative and managerial apparatus was not the only factor which influenced this development. According to him, another significant factor refers to education: the men in charge of ‘book-keeping’, before starting their jobs, all went through ‘the *same* specialized training’. They were ex-cadets of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.⁷² Following this link, Hoskin’s further research showed that this institution, in 1817 and just shortly before these men joined it, underwent radical organizational changes. West Point, following the example of the educational institutions in Europe, began to employ a new scientific curriculum and disciplinary pedagogy and was thus transformed into a modern disciplinary educational institution.

Drawing on this insight, Hoskin argues that the breakthrough of modern managerialism which now ‘dominates the global oligopolistic economy’ one of the forms of which are the ‘accountability regimes’,⁷³ is related to the ‘pedagogic revolution’ which took place in the elite educational institutions in Europe around 1800.⁷⁴ This ‘revolution’, as he argues, happened ‘fairly abruptly, and without any apparent direct cross-fertilization’ across ‘different European countries’. In Germany, Great Britain and France, students were put under a new pedagogic regime based on the constant deployment of three practices which include:

⁷¹ Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 276-277.

⁷² Hoskin and Macve, p. 31.

⁷³ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, 277.

⁷⁴ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, 266.

'examination, as the formal testing of human activity, quantification, the putting of numbers on the activity tested, and writing, in the sense of producing an archive of activities, tests, results, and judgments'.⁷⁵

Undoubtedly, and as Hoskin also notes, examination, writing and numerical grading were present in education long before the eighteenth century and appeared in various forms in different societies all over the world. Hoskin's argument is that what distinguishes these 'pre-modern' practices from their 'modern' form is that these practices were not brought together and applied in a systemic manner, and neither were they accompanied by the re-definition the rational self.⁷⁶ In other words, the shift towards the new regime of answerability and the 'invention' of 'human accounting' arose from a 'conjunction of certain already existing practices which had never been systematically conjoined before' in combination with the 'redefinition of the rational self' as a '*self*-examining' subject in the context of elite education.⁷⁷

At the practical level, the shift was 'simple and humble'.⁷⁸ Before the 1800, university exams remained predominantly oral and students 'were evaluated on a qualitative not a quantitative basis'. This is what Hoskin illustrates with one of his 'case studies', the examinations at Cambridge and then at Oxford Universities between 1760 and 1810. Before 1792, the more 'fluid' structure of semi-oral examination, when individual examiners set questions and answers were evaluated in qualitative terms, was in place. As a consequence 'of the induced failure of the

⁷⁵ Hoskin, 'An Awful Idea', p. 269.

⁷⁶ Hoskin and Macve, p. 31.

⁷⁷ Hoskin, 'Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity', p. 273.

⁷⁸ Hoskin, 'Education and Genesis of Disciplinarity', p. 272.

measure to be a good measure’, one examiner, in 1792, proposed that all questions ‘shall henceforward be marked numerically’.⁷⁹

Yet, as Hoskin shows, these simple changes in the procedures of examination had profound consequences transforming not only the organizational structure of education but also the ways in which students learned. It did not transform only how learning was organized but it also had a ‘psycho-pedagogic’ effect. Under this new regime, the students began, as Hoskin calls it, ‘learning to learn’. They began to ‘learn under constant examination and for grades, knowing that they were to be examined and graded on what and how they wrote’.⁸⁰ As discussed previously, this regime ‘imposed a new “disciplinary” power over learners by imposing a constant surveillance and a calculating judgment over each examined performance, and then more generally over the individual self’.⁸¹ It set up the new world where learners ‘become self-disciplining, self-actualizing, failure-fearing, prize-chasing seekers after truth: the contradictory yet recognizable people who are our selves’.⁸²

Hoskin stresses that particularly the power of the numerical ‘mark’ or ‘grade’ played an important role. As he points out,

the mark is quite different from earlier numerical approaches to evaluation such as the ordinal system of ranking (much used by the Jesuits). Ranking compares you with others, it promotes *emulation* where you wish to outdo your peers. But marks promote, instead of emulation, *competition*. People compete, not just with each other, but for a *currency* that denotes self-worth. Marks put an objective value on performance: they quantify both the

⁷⁹ Hoskin, ‘The awful Idea’, p. 273.

⁸⁰ Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 273.

⁸¹ Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 273.

⁸² Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 274.

perfection of the “10 out of 10,” and the absolute failure of the total zero.

They also make it possible to put numerical value on the self [...].⁸³

Hoskin illustrates the ‘awfulness’ of this new situation, the impact of accountability as a regime which does not only imply ‘the glory of success but [also, or most importantly] the fear of failure’ with several examples. He cites a number of instances of prominent and high-achieving Oxford students confessing their fear of exam failure (one even including attempted suicide from the 1830s). In these cases, according to Hoskin, ‘the behaviour cannot be explained instrumentally, by a need to succeed in external social or economic terms, for this was still an elite world of young men predestined to succeed in those terms’. The pressures, as he continues,

were intra-familial and psychological: the numbers were a measure-target that could no longer be ignored. Identity, honour and self-esteem were at stake, and there is no ultimate touchstone of success that is impregnable. We enter a world where even external success can be seen as failure internally.⁸⁴

This dynamic, which is ‘now treated as virtually endemic’, is something which was, according to Hoskin, absent before the ‘pedagogic revolution’. And it was only after the idea of ‘learning to learn’ for the purpose of constant marked examination of

⁸³ Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 273. Yet, as Hoskin stresses, the effects of accountability are various. That members of elites began to put themselves under ‘self-disciplinary’ pressures is not the only effect of ‘the power of the arithmetical mark’ and the ‘awful idea of accountability’. Hoskin warns against romanticization of the ‘pre-modern’ society and its educational institutions. The ‘learning to learn under written, graded examination’ and the competition not just with each other but for a ‘currency’ which puts ‘an objective value on performance’ had also effect on the society and radical changes within it. For instance, the possibility of ‘objective measurement of academic performance’ helped women, as Hoskin puts it, ‘to prove that they have “brains”’. It helped to show that women have ‘legitimate intellectual power’ and begin to challenge the ‘ancient historical presupposition’ that ‘females were only *exceptionally* educable’. Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 298.

⁸⁴ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea of Accountability’, p. 274.

written work was internalized by the elites in the seclusion of higher education, that ‘accountability’ spread to other sites of modern social life.

According to Hoskin, the place of its ‘origin’ also explains why this new idea, the ‘awful idea of accountability’, could suddenly emerge as a self-evident ‘necessity’ and why it so smoothly came to proliferate in other aspects of social life. For Hoskin, the explanation for why the change was almost unnoticed is because this new regime of accountability was translated and implemented by those in privileged positions, by the intellectual (and political) elites. In this way, ‘these pedagogic practices had become taken for granted as fundamentals of our everyday reality’ and began ‘to restructure a whole range of social settings into the disciplinary image’.⁸⁵ In various contexts, these practices were taken up in different specific ways. In the U.S., the ‘human accounting’ invented in the elite higher education was transformed into an effective new economic form, managerialism, and its associated accountability in the workplace of business enterprises. This is precisely what, as Hoskin concludes, made the success of the U.S. business in the first half of the nineteenth century:

the significant difference in the US context, something that marks it off from all prior approaches to handling workforces and work, is the continued absence elsewhere of an effective technology of human accounting. It is this that marks, in the economic world, the transition from responsibility to accountability.⁸⁶

Hoskin’s proposition that the modern regime of answerability, accountability, originates in the elite educational institutions of Europe at the end of the eighteenth

⁸⁵ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, p. 269.

⁸⁶ Hoskin, ‘Education and the Genesis of Disciplinarity’, p. 275.

century brings significant implications for our understanding of the problem of accountability and the university.

As regards the foundations of the modern university, Hoskin's research supports and further develops Derrida's reading of Kant's university discourse offered in his already discussed essay 'Vacant Chair', where Derrida reads it as a 'response' to cultural, intellectual and political shifts. Reading Kant's university discourse in relation to Hoskin's work would imply that the Faculty of Philosophy, theorized by Kant as a place which has no power, was not only a response to wider socio-political changes, the reinforcement of the State's censorship after the death of Frederick William II's in 1786. We could read Kant's theorizing also in the context of the 'pedagogic revolution' Hoskin describes in his work. More specifically, Kant's paradoxical university schema where the Faculty of Philosophy is withdrawn from forces which operate in the legal and public register, such as state censorship, but still exercises power, can be read also as a response to the forces which operate 'within', that is, the new modes of answerability which, as Hoskin shows, had just began to emerge within universities at that time.

Importantly, in relation to my discussion in this part of my thesis, Hoskin's work also significantly unsettles accounts which dominate the debate over the current university and its relationship to its 'marketization' and 'corporatization'. Not only in that it challenges the assumption that the 'general logic of accountability', as Readings believed, is alien to the university and its pedagogy, but, for example, it may help us understand why the universities, when they today face the expansion of this so called 'accountable logic' modified by its implementation in the world of private businesses, are so amenable it.

Part III – Narratives of Feminist Studies (From Accounts to Visions)

Chapter V - Taking Tremendous Responsibilities

Narratives of Western Feminist Theory and the Problem of Amenability

In *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* Clare Hemmings examines accounts produced by Western feminist theory about feminism's past and present with the aim of intervening 'in these stories, to realign their political grammar and to allow a different vision of a feminist past, present, and future'.¹

Similarly to the work of Robyn Wiegman discussed in part one, Hemmings's explorations proceed through a close examination of the texts produced by feminist theorists. As the title of her book suggests, Hemmings addresses this problem by tackling the questions of language and linguistic practices. She examines narrative forms of feminist discourses and the textual and grammatical mechanisms which underwrite them, such as the formation of binary pairs, exclusions, embedded temporality and a hierarchy of meaning and, particularly importantly for Hemmings' project, techniques of citation and textual affect.²

In her analysis Hemmings focuses on a particular set of feminist theoretical productions. She examines texts which are published in English and in feminist journals such as *Signs*, *Feminist Theory* or *Nora*. Additionally, she does not examine

¹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 1.

² Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 17.

only how feminist discourses account for feminism's entanglement with the university, but also how feminists more broadly account for feminism's past and present. She focuses particularly on how these narratives relate or, as Hemmings puts it, 'intersect' with broader 'institutionalizations of gendered meaning'.³

According to Hemmings, 'despite the complexity of the last few decades of feminist theory – its dizzying array of authors, objects, disciplines, and practices – the story of its past is consistently told as a series of interlocking narratives [...] that oversimplifies this complex history'.⁴ The three feminist narrative forms Hemmings identifies through her analyses as those which simplify the complex history of Western feminist theory, and which currently dominate its storytelling, are the narratives of progress, loss and return. As Hemmings describes it, the first of these narrative forms, 'narratives of progress', is an approach which welcomes the challenging of categories such as 'woman', 'feminism' or 'gender'. It understands itself as bringing 'diversification' into the unified, unifying and essentialist categories, attributed by this approach to feminism.⁵ Hemmings' second form, 'narratives of loss', describes the history of feminist theory in a way similar to 'narratives of progress'. However, instead of celebrating it as progressive development, it denounces it. Within this approach, what is called 'postmodern' or 'poststructuralist' feminism is seen as a position which has led to the depoliticization of feminism and to the rise of 'postfeminism' as well as a larger shift from feminisms' alliance with anti-capitalism towards its becoming an ally with capitalism.⁶ Hemmings calls the third position 'narratives of return'. This is a kind of account which, on the one hand, claims that "postmodern feminism" has proven

³ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 1.

⁴ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 3.

⁵ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 3-4; 31-58.

⁶ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 4; 59-94.

ineffective because it leads to relativism and political incapacity', yet, on the other, seeks to move beyond what is perceived as 'the current theoretical and political impasse' by combining 'the lessons of postmodern feminism with the materiality of embodiment and structural inequalities'.⁷

One of the key arguments of Hemmings' book is that despite the proclaimed differences, conflicts and antagonisms among these various narrative forms, the accounts which dominate the space of Western feminist theory share common 'grammatical' traits. The first common feature is that they all 'divide the recent past into clear decades to provide a narrative of progress or loss, proliferation or homogenization'. As Hemmings develops on this, 'whether positively or negatively inflected, the chronology remains the same, the decades overburdened yet curiously flattered despite each story's unique truth claims'.⁸ The second grammatical feature these three feminist narratives share is that they 'position their teller as a heroine of the past, present, and future of Western feminist theory'. These stories, thus, 'are not neutral and do not ask us to remain neutral'. In this respect,

what has happened in feminist theory are also claims about individual status. One's own intellectual and political commitments are always at stake in these stories, as one sees oneself by turn marginalized by the passage of time, or at the cutting edge of contemporary thought and practices.⁹

For Hemmings, these structural devices are highly problematic. They produce accounts of feminism's past and present as a linear and teleological narrative and rely on the presence of a feminist subject as a means of telling 'the difference

⁷ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 4-5; 95-127.

⁸ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 5.

⁹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p 5-6.

between good and bad “gender agendas” with the effective impact described in the above quotation.¹⁰ Hemmings’ assessment of the effects produced by these narrative techniques correlates with Wiegman’s interpretation of Wendy Brown’s essay ‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’ and of those Brown seeks to oppose. More specifically, although the difference between the three accounting forms Hemmings distinguishes is ‘partly a question of the affective quality of its passing’, in each of these strands, ‘feminism is always surpassed’. These seemingly antagonistic stories which dominate Western feminist theory all end up positioning ‘feminism itself as over, or as anachronistic’.¹¹

However, in Hemmings account, the positioning of feminism into the past within Western feminist theory does not necessarily imply detachment from feminist politics, theory or its institutional locations. It does not simply inaugurate ‘post-feminism’ or ‘anti-feminism’. As Hemmings shows with her readings, the attachment to feminism’s demise appears, paradoxically, ‘to be a precondition for the take-up of feminist subject status in the present’.¹² In other words, the demise functions as an enabling factor of feminism’s reoccurrence in present, as a vehicle through which subjects claim their feminist position within the current world and (feminist) theory which is perceived as ‘not enough’ or ‘non-’ or ‘post-’ feminist.

As already suggested, Hemmings does not examine only the stories produced by Western feminist theory, but focuses on how these intersect with wider discourses on feminism, gender and sexuality. She points out that ‘it is not only feminists who tell us (feminist) politics has been lost’. Rather, this rhetorical trope resonates with the more general and broader storytelling of social and cultural

¹⁰ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 139.

¹¹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 136.

¹² Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 137.

theory. Social and cultural theory also mourns its ‘lost politics’ and is governed by similar narrative forms which ‘champion, lament, or advocate revisiting a unified past vision of social change’. Within these broader social and cultural narratives, feminism, as Hemmings further argues, also occupies an unstable position: it is ‘both located as part of what has been surpassed, but also as part of what contributed to the fragmentation of the Left in its downward narrative trajectory’. Yet, again, despite this variation, feminism is, in both cases, understood as ‘anachronistic, and the desire to hold onto it – and its objects and methods too – misguided’.¹³

According to Hemmings, the idea that feminism is ‘over’ is, however, most directly and rigorously promoted by the Western media and popular culture. In these contexts, and unlike within Western feminist theory, invoking feminism’s demise does not function as a precondition of positioning oneself as a feminist subject in the present. Here, whether inflected as success or failure, invocation of feminism’s demise functions as precondition for rather different kinds of stories. Hemmings calls these accounts ‘postfeminist’ and argues that they consistently render feminism as ‘old-fashioned’ and stereotype it ‘as unnecessarily aggressive or misguided’ in order to promote anti-feminist and sexist agenda.¹⁴ Within these discourses, it is argued that feminism ‘has achieved its primary goals of equality in the West’. This success is then ‘enacted through assertions of young women’s and girl’s independence and freedom from feminism’ which, however, is not ““any old freedom” but the freedom to be feminine, to be sexually attractive-and available-to men’.¹⁵

¹³ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 7.

¹⁴ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 137-138.

The narratives about feminism's anachronistic character and the sexually saturated gender equality are also mobilized within the power struggles on the global scale. According to Hemmings, feminism is placed in the past and proclaimed to be irrelevant not only to contemporary Western societies but also non-Western ones. What is 'exported' from the West and 'implemented' in non-Western countries are therefore not 'feminism' but 'gender equality' and 'sexual freedom' discourses which have a 'nonfeminist subject and expert'. Hemmings describes its premises as following:

Freed from the burdens of (historically understandable, but no longer necessary) bias, gender equality can finally be achieved impartially. Learning the lessons of Western democracies, we can skip that unpleasant bit in the middle and propel the culture-bound and unliberated directly to the emancipation part, directly to the freedom to participate in global markets part, which is to say without upsetting families, or challenging a democratic imaginary.¹⁶

The 'export' of 'gender equality' and 'sexual rights' agendas separated from feminism bears geo-political implications which strengthen rather than challenge the current unjust distribution of powers and resources. According to Hemmings, 'the fantasy of Western gender equality as already achieved is essential for the linked fantasy that a particular model of economic development will give rise to the universal good life, including women's empowerment and opportunity'.¹⁷ As she describes it,

¹⁶ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 138.

the use of gender equality as a marker of an economic and regulatory modernity marks the subject of gender equality as Western, capitalist, and democratic, and the West, capitalism, and democracy themselves as sites that create the possibility of, and reproduce, rather than hinder, gender equality.¹⁸

This ‘fantasy’, which is also supported by the ‘grammars’ shared by narratives which dominate Western feminist theory thus forwards the premise that ‘non-Western cultures’ are ‘backwards’ (i.e. premodern) and ‘in need of help of Western philanthropists and experts (as postmodern)’.¹⁹

Another context which plays a key role in the formation and reproduction of the narratives which situate feminism into the past is Western higher education. This is not only because the universities are the ‘place’ where the feminist theory finds its institutional footing but because the story about feminism’s ‘over-ness’ also strongly resonates within the political and economic interest of this educational institution. In other words, also within higher education, feminism’s success (both as a social movement and a knowledge project) makes its current intellectual and political importance redundant. According to Hemmings, practically, gender equality (which is presented as being already achieved) or, conversely, feminism’s failure to attract young women, are alternatively or jointly cited as a justification for non-investment in feminist knowledge projects, and closures of feminist study programmes and women’s studies departments.

However, as Hemmings’ continues, in cases where the institutional formation researching gender and sex reinforces the idea of feminism’s over-ness, it does receive institutional validation. Renaming departments of ‘women’s studies’ to

¹⁸ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 9.

‘gender studies’, when this shift is understood as supportive of the transition from what is perceived as biased and radical feminism to a more objective and neutral gender equality discourse, is an example of such an alternation. Furthermore, the narrative of feminism’s successful yet finished mission incarnated in gender equality discourses also plays a crucial role in the current academic global politics and international market of Western higher education. Particularly where research on sexuality and gender supports the split between the West and the rest of the world, where the seemingly neutralized gender expertise is utilized for pursuing economic and political interests of the ‘West’ in ‘non-Western’ contexts, research on gender and sexuality gains validation and support in the Western university.²⁰

Drawing on her analysis of the aforementioned narratives and the examination of how they become entangled with broader institutionalizations of gendered meaning, Hemmings calls for a transformation of how feminist theorists produce accounts about feminism’s past and present. As she argues, ‘instead of lamenting what is most often perceived as the co-optation of feminism’, feminist ‘storytelling’ must take another route. Specifically, it has to focus on the exploration of ‘the links between postfeminism’s heterosexualizing imperatives, a free market’s violent passing as women’s liberator, and Western feminist narratives that underscore a similar linearity, even – or perhaps particularly – where these shifts are lamented’.²¹ Similarly, instead of making the presence of the feminist subject (which we identify with) the indicator of the right and true feminism, and thus condemning other positions as ‘not feminist enough’, we ‘need to pay attention to the *amenability* of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of

²⁰ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 10; 152-154.

²¹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 12.

gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from [...]'.²² By doing so, we will be able to introduce 'a reflexive Western feminist accountability that shuttles back and forth between past and present in order to imagine a future that is not already known'.²³

With this proposition, Hemmings, however, does not call for telling 'different' or necessarily inventing 'new' feminist stories. As she explains, her aim is not to 'put together an alternative historiography that can tell a better story, one with fewer, or less harmful, exclusions'.²⁴ Rather, she seeks to 'intervene by experimenting with how we might tell stories differently rather than telling different stories'.²⁵

The interventions Hemmings proposes and develops particularly in the last two chapters of her book proceed by utilizing two techniques through which the narratives she examines operate and make themselves 'believable' - the 'citation tactics' and 'textual affect'.²⁶ As Hemmings describes it, her 'recitation and affective mobilization' start from what is absent both textually and politically in the stories we already participate in. By 'folding' these absences 'back into narrative' she seeks to reconfigure 'the political grammars of Western feminism'.²⁷

It is, however, not these experimental practices Hemmings proposes which I find most compelling about her work. Even less so is it the typology of the dominant narratives of the current Western feminist theory Hemmings proposes.²⁸ The aspect

²² Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

²³ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 3.

²⁴ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 12.

²⁵ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 16.

²⁶ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 3; 161-226.

²⁷ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 27.

²⁸ As Hemmings herself recalls, there is a danger in 'focusing on repeated rather than anomalous stories' which may bolster 'the monotony of the progress, loss, and return narratives she identifies as so problematic' (20). However, for my part, it is not her 'interest in the rehearsed rather than the creative' which I find problematic about her topology of narratives which dominate Western feminist theory, but the way in which her examination proceeds. In other words, I suggest that Hemmings'

of Hemmings' analysis which I find most moving, particularly in relation to my questions of the university and the trends which dominate it, as discussed particularly in part two, is how Hemmings conceptualizes the intersection of Western feminist accounts with the wider discourses on feminism, gender and sexuality.

In this chapter, I will develop Hemmings' work in relation to ethics. I support her proposition that Western feminist theories must account for feminism's past and present differently so as to make those stories more 'ethically accountable and potentially more politically transformative'.²⁹ However, I argue that in order to do so, we must also pay attention to and re-conceptualize what we assume by 'ethical accountability'. Through a close reading of the opening passage of Derrida's essay 'Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties', I will trace 'a university responsibility' which does not lead to a subject conceived as self-identical. I will propose a conceptualization of responsibility which will make us, feminism and the university tremble. I argue that envisioning responsibility as *tremendous* will allow us to conceive of feminism as non-identical to itself and beyond the prerequisite of the sovereign (feminist) subject. 'Tremendous responsibilities' will thus, as Hemmings proposes, help us create feminist narratives which will be, as Kamuf would put it, more ethically *accounterable*, and thus also potentially more politically transformative.

argument that we need to 'tell [feminist] stories differently' must be extended also on how we 'tell' the stories about feminist stories, the meta-level of the analysis.

²⁹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

Tremendous Amenability

As it is apparent from the brief outline of *Why Stories Matter* presented above, similarly to Wiegman, Hemmings understands feminist theory and its institutionalized forms as inherently paradoxical and as bringing ambivalent and sometimes even conflicted effects. She conceives of feminist theory as ‘non-identical’ formation which has an ambiguous relationship not only with discourses which share its political agenda, but also with those which promote contradictory ones.

For Hemmings, Western feminist theory is therefore ‘both caught and freeing’. It is, as she argues, ‘certainly bound up in global power relations’. This is shown particularly on how ‘a presumed opposition between Western gender equality and non-western patriarchal cultures is mobilized in temporal and spatial modes’. Yet, simultaneously, it ‘also occupies a position of reflexive non-innocence that can break open those relations’.³⁰ In Hemmings’ account, the paradoxical character of Western feminist theory and the recognition that it produces ambivalent effects therefore is not perceived as paralysing. Similarly to Wiegman, Hemmings wishes to offer a future for feminist theorizing and identifies herself with what she calls the ‘utopianism’ of feminist theory. Thus, although being critical of narrative forms and tropes which seem to dominate it, Hemmings wishes to make a ‘claim for the continued radical potential of feminist theory and for the importance of telling stories differently’.³¹

As I interpret it, the tremendousness of Hemmings’ account does not, however, consist only in her self-critical and self-reflexive mode and her professed

³⁰ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

³¹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

utopianism. It is tremendous also because of the task Hemmings sets for herself and strives to achieve in her book. More specifically, Hemmings declares that she does not believe that ‘an absolute distinction between feminist and nonfeminist mobilizations of gender discourses can or should be sustained’.³² Yet, despite the professed impossibility of such a demarcation or, rather, because of it, she strives to conceptualize a possibility of making it.

According to Hemmings, in our attempt to mark the difference ‘between good and bad “gender agendas”’, we cannot rely on ‘the presence or absence of a feminist subject respectively’. This is because, as she argues, ‘the narrative connections between feminist and other stories about gender politics are too consistent and too embedded for a feminist subject alone to carry the burden of responsibility for political alignment’.³³ Indeed, according to Hemmings, insisting that the difference between feminist and non-feminist narratives can be marked by the ‘presence of a feminist subject who remains critical is to miss the relationship between the *structure and techniques* of Western feminist stories and their broader institutional life’. Such an approach creates effects from which we would prefer to dissociate ourselves. More specifically, it not only protects ‘feminism and feminist subject from scrutiny’ but also encourages ‘blanket judgments’ about what is understood as ‘non-feminist’. Following this approach, projects such as gender mainstreaming would be readily described as either ‘devoid of feminism’ or ‘as wholly pragmatic and thus beyond critical judgment about epistemological impact’. Such an understanding would, by return, determine how feminist theory is perceived and positioned. Feminist theory would end up being portrayed as ‘a kind of luxury’,

³² Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 139.

³³ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 137.

as ‘a prior engagement to be abandoned in the face of necessity, rather than an ongoing project of understanding the world with transformation in mind’.³⁴

In her account of the overlap between feminist and nonfeminist discourses Hemmings seeks to avoid such pitfalls. Simultaneously, however, she also wants to avoid relativizations which would portray ‘feminism’ and ‘sexism’ as two contradictory, but nonetheless otherwise equally valuable, perspectives. Hemmings seeks to achieve this tremendous task by conceptualizing the intersection between feminist and nonfeminist discourses via use of the term ‘amenability’. She describes the conceptual advantages of this notion by comparing it to another term widely used by feminist theorists, and, in Hemmings view, harmful to their narratives, the term ‘co-optation’.

According to Hemmings, by grasping the intersection between the ‘stories’ feminist theory tells with other or even conflictual stories as ‘co-optation’, both ‘the innocence of “feminist theory”’ as well as the hegemony of those discourses with which it intersects, are preserved. In contrast, the notion of amenability allows to work ‘through their mutual implication in space and time’ and to think ‘carefully about what an accountable feminist theory might foreground in that relation and who its contradictory subjects might be’.³⁵

The term ‘amenability’ therefore does important methodological work for Hemmings. It introduces a certain ambivalence and complexity and disturbs the hardening of differences into binary oppositions endorsed by the term ‘co-optation’. Hemmings uses the notion of amenability in passages where she wants, in a concise way, to define the *raison d’être* of her project. Thus, in the opening of the book, she

³⁴ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 140.

³⁵ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 12.

declares that ‘feminist theorists need to pay attention to the *amenability* of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to disentangle from if history is not simply to repeat itself’. She further develops on this by suggesting that we should ‘interrupt the amenability of the narratives that make up dominant Western feminist stories and tell stories differently’.³⁶ And, as she expresses elsewhere in the book, the different storytelling will help make ‘feminist theory [...] less amenable to co-optation’.³⁷

But what is it Hemmings suggests we pay attention to within our own stories and narrative accounts? What does she suggest we interrupt and inhibit in narratives produced by Western feminist theory? And what are the complications which the term ‘amenability’ brings to the analysis of the narratives told by Western feminist theory?

The adjective ‘amenable’ is of Latin origin and came to English through the Old French word *amener* which means to ‘lead up’. *Amener* comes from words *mināre* which means ‘to drive’, and *minārī* meaning ‘to threaten’. For example, the word ‘menace’ or, as the OED also lists, expressions such as ‘to drive cattle with minatory shouts’ come from this origin. To be ‘amenable’ thus indicates someone who is ready or willing to answer, someone who is open to accept suggestions and influences; someone who is responsive and thus likely to listen and cooperate. It describes something or someone who is tractable, receptive and compliant, someone or something which is liable to submit to authority, willing or disposed to comply. It designates someone who is willing to be led and susceptible to discipline, thus, also, perhaps to education. It indicates an openness or susceptibility to testing, criticism

³⁶ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

³⁷ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 26.

and someone else's judgment, a willingness to account and answer for one's behaviour.³⁸

Drawing on this brief excursion into dictionaries we can speculate that with her suggestion to interrupt or inhibit amenability of narrative forms in Western feminist theory, Hemmings proposes we cultivate feminist storytelling which would not cooperate and would not submit or surrender. She proposes we develop feminist narratives unwilling to 'learn its lesson', narrative forms which would not conform but would, instead, make Western feminist theory resistant, disobedient and unanswerable.

Hemmings' call to interrupt amenability of Western feminist storytelling is, however, not an isolationist gesture, an attempt to cut feminist theory off from any relations with what it is not. Neither does she suggest we abandon ethics. With her proposition to interrupt amenability, Hemmings does not promote irresponsibility. Rather the opposite. As it follows from her text, the attention to how narratives told by Western feminist theory intersect with other discourses is proposed in order to 'increase accountability for these resonances'.³⁹ Or, as she declares elsewhere in the book, the proposition to interrupt amenability is led by the desire to 'make the stories we tell both more ethically accountable and potentially more politically transformative'.⁴⁰

As I interpret it, Hemmings therefore proposes we proceed in a way which is intrinsically paradoxical. She suggests we take responsibility for the amenability of our narratives and we interrupt that amenability in order to make feminist

³⁸ 'Amenability', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* < <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/6292?redirectedFrom=amenability#eid> > [accessed 22 February 2017].

³⁹ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 139.

⁴⁰ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

storytelling more accountable which would, consequently, increase chances of Western feminist theory bringing about political transformation. As I read it, these propositions bring a useful complication of the relationship between the narratives produced by Western feminist theory and the trends which, as identified and discussed in the previous part, dominate current universities. As I understand it, what Hemmings tries to formulate and develop in her work is not dissimilar from Kamuf's 'accounterability'.⁴¹ Or, to recall Drucilla Cornell, Hemmings attempts to elaborate narrative forms which would not confine feminism's 'dream to what common sense takes to be realistic expectations for our future'. Her work can thus be interpreted as invoking an 'ethical aspiration to live beyond accommodation' which, as Cornell would argue, 'begins with the refusal of that confinement' and which seeks to 'configure an ethics of social engagement that would significantly be more just than the one we have now'.⁴²

In the following sections of this chapter I will develop Hemmings' work in this direction. In line with Hemmings' argument, I propose that if we want to tell stories about feminism's entanglement with the university in a more ethically accountable and potentially more politically transformative way, we need to oppose the reduction of feminism into linearly progressive narratives pivoting around an individual feminist subject. However, I also argue that we need to further examine what it means to be 'ethically accountable'. In other words, feminist responses to the current situation in higher education cannot consist, as Hemmings also points out, merely in attempts to restore some 'truthful' and radical feminism or a (feminist) 'subject' which has been lost in the so-called 'postfeminist' era in which we –

⁴¹ Kamuf, 'Accounterability', 251-266.

⁴² Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, p. xii.

allegedly – live. Nor should we, as follows from the previous discussions of this thesis, attempt to reclaim or rely on some seemingly ‘proper’ or ‘original’ meanings of words such as ‘accountability’. I argue that, instead, we need to think through how we might reconceive ethical relationships which would be in contestation not only with the amenability of narrative forms which define the dominant ‘stories’ of Western feminist theory, but also with the so called ‘accountability movement’ which dominates current universities.

Practising a University Responsibility

As a way to conceive of such an ethical relationship, I suggest we take responsibilities which are tremendous. I employ this phrase –*tremendous responsibilities* – to argue that the way we think and practice relations to ourselves and to others, the way we respond and take responsibility, must be, as the etymology of the word ‘tremendous’ suggests, not only enormous, extraordinary, impressive, moving, exciting or even fantastic, but also dreadful and frightening. It must make us, feminism and the university, tremble.⁴³

However, despite the ‘playful’ impression the phrase ‘tremendous responsibility’ might make, developing the ethical aspect of the relationship to the university in this direction is a pragmatic choice. As already discussed in part two, the market-driven audit culture which dominates current universities does not proceed only through the implementation and the reinforcement of the language and logic of commerce. It is not only through ‘rebranding’ students to customers by

⁴³ A modified version of my reading of Derrida’s text ‘Mochlos’ was published as Lenka Vráblíková, ‘From Performativity to Aporia: Taking ‘tremendous responsibility’ towards feminism and the university’, *Gender and Education*, 28.3 (2016), 359-371.

which the so called ‘marketization’ of the universities and the ‘corporatization’ of knowledge proceed, but also through the utilization of words, concepts and arguments traditionally connected with modern emancipatory discourses.

One of the words and concepts which seems to play a particularly significant role in this context is, as discussed previously, the word and the concept of ‘accountability’. As Readings, Kamuf and others have argued, current universities are dominated by a ‘generalized logic of accounting’ which also redefines wider usage of terms essential to modern liberal and democratic discourses, such as the notion of the ‘accountable subject’.⁴⁴ However, these shifts are not easy to resist, and not only because, as I showed with my reading of Derrida’s ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, the ‘*pharmakon*-like’ effects produced by accountability, but also due to the historical affinity this particular mode of answerability shares with the modern university and its pedagogical practices.⁴⁵

In my examination of the questions of how we can re-conceptualize ethical relationships, I turn again to Derrida’s work. I will examine a text where Derrida addresses the question of responsibility specifically in relation to the university, the essay ‘Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties’.⁴⁶ As I will show with my close examination of the opening of this essay, although not conceiving responsibility as a fixed and stable ‘property’ of the subject, Derrida still manages to perform what he calls ‘a university responsibility’. Drawing on his other work *The Gift of Death*,⁴⁷ I then interpret this ‘performance’ of responsibility not as an example of a ‘performative speech act’ but rather as an ‘aporia’, that is, as an insolubly

⁴⁴ Readings, *The University in Ruins*; Kamuf, ‘Accountability’.

⁴⁵ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, ‘Mochlos: or, the conflict of the faculties’, in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, ed. by Richard Rand (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 1-34.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

paradoxical event. As I interpret it, conceiving responsibility as aporetic does not only make the sovereign 'I' tremble, but also permits the articulation, in theoretical terms, of the possibility of political transformation. In turn, this may therefore potentially support interventions in how Western feminist theory produces its own accounts of itself as well as the current debates around feminism's entanglement with the university.

As the title of Derrida's essay, 'Mochlos, or, The Conflict of the Faculties', suggests, the essay draws on Immanuel Kant's book *The Conflict of the Faculties*. 'Mochlos' was originally delivered by Derrida as a lecture at Columbia University on the occasion of the celebration of the centennial of Columbia's Graduate School in 1980. Derrida takes Kant's book as a point of departure, as a 'lever' or a 'wedge' (*mochlos* is the Greek word for 'lever') in order to conceptualise 'a foundation of a new university law'. By envisioning 'a university responsibility' which negotiates what we cannot know, the 'monstrous future', Derrida wants to help the university to have a future.⁴⁸

What is the 'university' for Derrida? What does he mean by 'responsibility'? And how does he conceptualise 'future'? Those are precisely the key questions Derrida engages with, or, rather, 'leverages', in 'Mochlos'. Categories such as the 'university' or 'responsibility' are not taken for granted. They are not approached as given realities or unquestioned and unquestionable axioms. Nor does Derrida provide definitions which would clearly outline those terms. In fact, arriving at such definitions is not even the aim of his endeavour. Rather, he approaches these terms as questions which are yet to be answered or, even, as questions which are not to be answered and must remain suspended. For Derrida, conceiving of categories as

⁴⁸ Derrida, 'Mochlos' p. 30-31.

uncertain spaces which can be taken into account only as ‘open-ended’, as not fully knowable or graspable, is not a deficiency, a lack of rigorousness or a sign of insufficient and poor scholarship. On the contrary, as the opening of the essay testifies, it is a deliberate decision:

If we could say we (but have I not already said it?), we might perhaps ask ourselves: who are we? And who are we in the university where apparently we are? What do we represent? Whom do we represent? Are we responsible? For what and to whom? If there is a university responsibility, it at least begins with the moment when a need to hear these questions, to take them upon oneself and respond, is imposed.⁴⁹

As this quotation shows, Derrida clearly refrains from assigning a single and definite meaning to the terms he uses. He behaves as if he did not know what the university – or ‘we’ – means. There is not one stable footing in this passage to which Derrida, or I (or indeed ‘we’) could cling. Particularly, the uncertainty around the category ‘we’ introduces difficulties for a term that is essential for the discussion of the university in this essay, the notion of responsibility which is invoked in the second half of the quotation. Not knowing whether we could say ‘we’, or not knowing who ‘we’ are, radically undermines the classical notion of subjectivity traditionally understood as sovereign. In other words, according to traditional accounts, in order for there to be a sovereign subject, one must know – or at least claim or pretend to know – who one is. Only this fully conscious, sovereign ‘I’ is considered capable to take responsibility upon itself and can thus be held accountable for its actions and

⁴⁹ Derrida, ‘Mochlos’, p. 3.

decisions. Without a sovereign subject, in classical theoretical accounts at least, no responsibility is possible.

Yet, the uncertainty and lack of stable foundations does not preclude inquiry within the realm of ethics and higher education. Derrida still manages to speak about 'a' university and a collective 'we'. Similarly, even though he explicitly challenges the notion of a sovereign subject, he does manage to invoke responsibility. When Derrida says 'if we could say we' and, building on this hypothetical 'we' asks 'are we responsible?', he does not promote relativism or nihilism against a 'positive' or affirmative discourses. Nor does he give up on ethics or politics in general. For Derrida, to show how unstable those concepts are does not necessarily mean to dismiss the possibility of a theoretical understanding, or the efforts of collective action. He does not promote irresponsibility.

What Derrida performs here is what I call 'tremendous practice'. Although his questioning makes the traditional notion of a responsible subject 'tremble', it does not cause disruptions which are paralysing or petrifying. Rather, it functions as a pressure point or a wedge, as something that introduces and causes division or disruption, something that forces an opening or a beginning. For as we read at the end of the quotation, the so called 'not knowing', the uncertainty performed by Derrida at the very beginning, is, simultaneously, the very prerequisite of his responsibility.

The effect of this move is that it reverses the idea that the subject is the source of responsibility and suggests, instead, that the collective 'we' is produced, or as Derrida would put it, invented, through a practice of responsibility. In other words, subjectivity does not precede the invocation of responsibility, but is its very effect. The performative mode thus allows Derrida to engage in the complex scene

of responsibility he has staged. It allows him to declare openly and take, or to begin to take, upon himself, a university responsibility as soon as he begins writing. What Derrida offers in his essay is, therefore, not so much an ontological mode of questioning, or a theoretical contemplation on the topic or the meaning of the university, subjectivity or responsibility. Rather, it is a discourse on responsibility; Derrida's writing is a discourse *of* responsibility.

We should not, however, settle for this interpretation. On the contrary, we should become particularly unsettled or trembled at this point for at least two reasons. The first applies to any project that seeks to transform the current order and strive for a more just future (such as feminism or anti-racism). For, have we not already experienced that the more we attempt to 'perform' the changes we want to introduce in the university or elsewhere, the more the status quo appropriates and colonises our modes of performance and promotes its own agenda with even greater efficiency? Are not our attempts to transform existing power relations often assimilated and thus end up reinforcing that which we originally wanted to oppose? If 'performativity' is the way structures such as neoliberalism, phallocentrism, heteronormativity, or, precisely, 'accountability movement' sustain and reproduce themselves, then reading the introduction of 'Mochlos' as a 'performance' of a performative speech act can help us understand the mode of their functioning. Such an insight is a necessary prerequisite for choosing the best modes of resistance, the best lever - the best *mochlos*. This reading, however, as I will further argue below, does not, in itself, allow us to imagine a means of resistance against those dominant modes.

The second reason for troubling the notion of 'the performative' relates specifically to feminist theory and politics. As Hemmings argues, feminist 'political

grammar [...] is highly mobile and does not belong only to feminists'.⁵⁰ Its 'grammar' travels across various geopolitical, institutional and linguistic contexts which can – or not – be feminist.⁵¹ The notion of 'performativity' is, undoubtedly, one of these highly 'mobile' elements of the so-called feminist political grammar. 'Performativity' has gained this privilege particularly thanks to the work of Judith Butler who most famously described 'gender' as 'performative'. Butler, however, is not the only feminist to have theorized gender as performative or as a performance.⁵² Similarly, whether 'performative gender' or 'gender as performance' is or is not attached to feminist theory or to Butler's name, it travels across various feminist and non-feminist narratives.⁵³

Troubling and further complicating the notion of the 'performative' therefore seems to me to be particularly important in relation to both feminist thinking and the current university. In the following section, I will develop on this problem by distinguishing Derrida's university responsibility from a performance of a subject which produces that of which it speaks, that is, from a notion of a performative speech act introduced by Austin.⁵⁴ I argue that this move will enable us to imagine a

⁵⁰ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 2.

⁵¹ As already argued, in order to account for this 'travelling' Hemmings uses word 'amenability'. In *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, Scott attempts to address this issue by using a term 'reverberations' or with a help of the phrase 'fantasy-echo' (2011). In *The Queer Turn in Feminism* Berger addresses the issue of this 'travelling' or, as she calls it in the abstract to 'Gender Springtime in Paris', 'crossing(s)' through the notion of 'translation'. I will develop Hemming's texts in the direction of Berger's work in the following chapter.

⁵² Anne Berger, 'Queens and Queers: The Theater of Gender in "America"', in *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 11-82.

⁵³ For more on the question of the implications of 'gender' for feminist scholarship see Joan Scott, 'Gender: A useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91.5 (1986), 1053-1075; Teresa De Lauretis, 'The Technology of Gender', in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1-30. Joan, Scott, 'Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?', *Diogenes*, 225.7 (2010), 7-14; or Ranjana Khanna, 'On the Name, Ideation, and Sexual Difference', *differences* 27.2 (2016), 62-78.

⁵⁴ John, L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 6-7.

university responsibility other than as a product of a subjectivity which, although being ‘performative’, is still sovereign.

Beyond Performativity towards an Aporia of Responsibility

Although Derrida relies on Austin’s distinction between constative and performative utterances, and especially Austin’s ‘discovery’ of the performative, his notion of a university responsibility is not reducible to it. Rather, it fundamentally complicates the constative/ performative distinction and designates the instant of its failure and reaches, through a leap which institutes an irreducible rupture, beyond it. I will elucidate this complex movement and simultaneously will outline another way to conceive of responsibility – a responsibility as an ‘aporetic’ response.

‘It is too often said that the performative produces the event of which it speaks’ Derrida notes in ‘The Future of the Profession or University without Condition’, an essay which develops issues outlined in ‘Mochlos’. In the same essay he warns against interpretations which believe that ‘performativity’, whatever the word is supposed to mean, subverts the *status quo* and leads towards its transformation.⁵⁵ In contrast to such accounts, for Derrida, ‘performativity’ does not only stand for an ability to execute a power to do things but also the very interweaving of knowledge with structures of power:

In speaking of performativity, I think as much of the performativity, or output, of a technical system, a place where knowledge and power are no longer distinguished, as of the Austinian notion of a language act not confined to stating, describing, or saying that which is, but capable of producing or

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Future of the Profession or University without Condition (Thanks to the ‘Humanities,’ What *Could Take Place* Tomorrow)’, in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities*, ed. by Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24-57. (p. 54).

transforming, into itself alone, under certain conditions, the situation of which it speaks.⁵⁶

Thus, as Derrida argues elsewhere, ‘the performative is a power’; and, it ‘is not only a power, but also a legitimizing and legitimized power’.⁵⁷ In other words, the power of performatives stems from their context, which is a context of power. In order to be able to have the right and the power to produce the performative, one must be situated within a context of authority and legitimacy. Simultaneously, however, although legitimacy and authority are conditions which make performative speech acts ‘powerful’, they also regulate and command them. By doing so, they limit the possibility to imagine futures which would be more than just an extension of the present; futures, which would be radically different from those which are already known. For this very reason, Derrida claims that performatives are ‘still found, like the power of language in general, on the side of the sovereignty [...]’.⁵⁸ They do not allow imagining other subjectivities than those which already ‘speak’ and are recognised as such. In this context, although ‘performative’, the subject is still sovereign, a fully conscious and autonomous ‘I’ mastering its own actions, decisions and responsibilities. The sovereignty of the subject is left unquestioned by performative speech acts.

What does Derrida’s insight about performatives imply for feminist narratives and their relationship with the current university? What does it imply for those who attempt to imagine subjectivities and their relations to others which yet do not exist and who have only limited access to the sources of legitimacy and

⁵⁶ Derrida, ‘Mochlos’, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, ‘Performativity Powerlessness – A response to Simon Critchley’, *Constellations*, 7 (2000), pp. 466-468 (p. 467).

⁵⁸ Derrida, ‘The University without Condition’, in *Without Alibi*, edited by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 202-237 (p. 301).

authority, such as history, common sense or current empirical reality? Can they even hope to make the so-called ‘other world’ they imagine become manifest?

In accordance with Cornell,⁵⁹ and following Derrida’s discussion of performative speech acts, it seems to me very difficult to imagine the arrival of a future which would be more than an extension of the present through the ‘performative’ lens. By the same token, as the established order is systematically biased in privileging those within power, reversing the existing modes which govern our society and their latest innovations and mutations such as the accountability movement seems almost impossible.

Is there a possibility to read ‘a university responsibility’ practiced by Derrida in a way which could provide those without power with more advantage? Could a reading ‘beyond the performative’ provide us with instruments which may help us imagine a future beyond what is currently imaginable?

To be sure, we cannot just simply remove the accountability movement, let alone neoliberalism or phallocentrism. We are deeply entangled in them. A reading of this passage (and of deconstruction) thus can provide a lever, but this is not an adequate tool in the traditional sense. It does not simply transform weakness to strength. This device has no fixed hinge; its beam has nothing stable and rigid to rely on. More specifically, these tools do not pivot around a power that stems from a context of legitimacy and authority tied to a sovereign subject. They suggest we both develop and come to rely upon another type of power, a kind of ‘powerless power’, a power without stable and fixed grounding. The pull beyond the performative is, therefore, not to be read only as an attempt to enable the ‘weak’ so they can

⁵⁹ While to some extent endorsing Judith Butler's position that gender is performance that can style new configurations, Cornell argues that the notion of performance fails to recognize adequately that gender is a social system with forceful tendencies to rather reproduce than undermine itself. Drucilla, Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, pp. 198.

‘leverage’ those in power. This leverage is not political in the traditional sense, but disrupts the very notion of politics.

A responsibility beyond the realm of politics and sovereign subjectivity is also central to Derrida’s book *The Gift of Death*.⁶⁰ In this text, Derrida performs a manoeuvre similar to the one described above. He moves responsibility beyond the constraints of legitimate and authoritative power and enhances the ‘new’ and ‘powerless’ responsibility. In order to perform this leap, Derrida draws on one of the ‘Heretical Essays’ by the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka where the latter introduces a genealogy of responsibility as related to the mystery of the sacred.⁶¹

According to Patočka, the modern ‘European’ responsible subject is constituted by the *mysterium tremendum*, an encounter with the Christian God to whose call one responds. Envisioning a responsibility as a response implies that a responsibility does not simply originate in the one who says ‘I’ but comes to him or her from outside, as a gift from God. According to this account, not only is subjectivity described as an effect and an invocation of responsibility, and thus grounded in ‘personal’ experience and conditioned by a specific historical context, but also as exceeding the subject itself. In other words, ‘responsibility’ is conceived as a kind of ‘responding’.

In addition, this ‘mystical’ communication is endowed by an extraordinary character. On one end, there is God who, as Derrida explains, ‘sees me without my seeing, holds me in his hands while remaining inaccessible’.⁶² God thus escapes the subject’s vision and understanding. He is absolutely transcendental and remains

⁶⁰ Derrida, Jacques, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁶¹ Jan, Patočka, ‘Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?’, in *Heretical Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1996), pp. 95-118.

⁶² Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 40.

secret. On the other end of this extraordinary and asymmetrical exchange is the ‘not-yet-I’ which, without seeing or knowing anything, responds and thus constitutes itself. In this instance, the subject’s singularity, as Derrida explains in *The Gift of Death*, is absolute. Its uniqueness is implied by the finitude of human beings, for in death no substitution is possible. In this sense, one cannot die for someone else (‘no one can die in the place of the other’).⁶³ The *mysterium tremendum* thus not only constitutes a responsibility which exceeds the subject’s sovereignty, but also binds what is usually considered incompatible: the subject’s relationship to its absolute singularity and, simultaneously, the radical alterity represented by the inaccessible God.

The reading of the *mysterium tremendum* initiates what Derrida calls an aporia of responsibility which he develops through another Biblical event, the sacrifice of Isaac. In this scenario, Abraham, who follows God’s command to offer his son as a sacrifice, also receives no explanation from the ‘fearful’ God. The fearfulness of Abraham’s situation, however, exceeds this particular point as Abraham not only follows God’s order without knowing or seeing anything, but also does not give any account to anyone else. Abraham experiences his responsibility in secret – in absolute solitude and silence. Simultaneously, this ‘secret’ responsibility makes him utterly irresponsible in front of his family and the human community. In his response to God, Abraham transgresses the human Law and thus betrays his community and ethics. The sacrifice of Isaac is, therefore, as Derrida argues, ‘a scandal and paradox’.⁶⁴ On the one hand, the ethical law mandates Abraham to speak, to account for himself in front of others and thus dissolve his singularity and

⁶³ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 42.

⁶⁴ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 60.

the secret. On the other hand, however, Abraham is bound to the ‘absolute’ responsibility to God which implies singularity, silence and secrecy.⁶⁵

The scene is thus defined by an insoluble contradiction, an aporia. Yet, Derrida pushes his reading further, altering and enhancing the trembling effects of this particular scene. Firstly, he argues that this unique and dreadful event is not specific only to Abraham but defines ‘the most common and everyday experience of responsibility’.⁶⁶ In other words, every decision, every act of responsibility has a structure of an aporia. Secondly, Derrida replaces the figure of God with any other mortal being. This substitution binds the singular subject to another finite being which is also absolutely singular yet still radically transcendent. Derrida expresses this paradox, ‘the most irreducible heterology’, through an idiomatic formula, *tout autre est tout autre* which David Wills translates as ‘an every other [one] is every [bit] other’.⁶⁷ I will briefly outline some of its key attributes.

Firstly, according to this account of responsibility, responsibility always takes place before and beyond any theoretical determination and its deployment, beyond politics and ethics, and its ‘subject’, the sovereign ‘I’. We can indeed imagine it, as in ‘Mochlos’, as a leap; as a dreadful and frightening moment of losing one’s footing; a leap towards radical alterity which is originally non-present to one’s ego. Such a concept of responsibility thus not only lacks coherence and continuity but in fact does not possess any identity. Instead, it is defined as irreducible rupture, a ‘paralysis’ which causes disruption and thus forces an opening towards something radically other.

⁶⁵ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 61.

⁶⁶ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 67.

⁶⁷ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 82-83.

A responsibility as an aporia is therefore a terrific event, an experience of absolute risk and danger. Yet, this risk of stepping beyond what is familiar and known to us, the common sense or officially and publicly stated and accepted doctrine, represents the only moment when a responsible decision can be made. To return to the opening passage of 'Mochlos', this is the reason why performative speech acts, which are still found on the side of sovereignty, prevent the 'real' responsibility to come. And this is also why Derrida urges for a leap beyond the performative. Responsibility, he claims, 'must not only surprise the constative and propositional mode of the language of knowledge (S is P), but also no longer even let itself be commanded by the performative speech act of a subject'.⁶⁸

Secondly, an aporia implies that responsibility is never guaranteed. It is not only because 'one always risks not managing to accede to responsibility in the process of forming it'.⁶⁹ Its 'monstrosity' is even more fundamental than that. As soon as one enters into a relation with the other as other, that is, radically other and absolutely singular, in that very instance, irresponsibility insinuates itself. For as Derrida explains, one 'cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others'.⁷⁰ This implies that one is always guilty of responding to the one and not the other. 'Full' responsibility, a sovereign responsible decision, is therefore impossible. Responsibility always entails sacrifice, guilt and irresponsibility.

Envisioning responsibility as an aporia thus leads to unexpected territories. It leads us beyond the imagination of the so-called common sense, traditional philosophical discourses and modern politics. It goes against the widely shared

⁶⁸ Derrida, 'The Future of the Profession', p. 53.

⁶⁹ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 68.

understanding of responsibility as tied only to one's community, the public sphere, the possibility and necessity of accounting for oneself in front of others and the Law. It leads towards places which had been previously unforeseen in relation to responsibility or, alternatively, considered to represent a threat to responsible decision-making. It shows responsibility as containing mystery or a secret; it leads to the realms of dissidence, silence, solitude, absolute singularity, sacrifice, guilt and even to irresponsibility.

If, as Derrida argues in *The Gift of Death*, responsibility and every decision has the structure of an aporia, such a 'tremendous' discourse apparently bears fundamental consequences for how we think about and practice ethics and politics in general. An aporia of responsibility seems particularly intriguing for the understanding and evaluation of the so-called 'public institutions', like the university, and especially for the trends which currently dominates it, such as the accountability movement. Reading the accountability movement through an aporia of responsibility would offer a peculiar insight into the display of a 'good conscience' of this seemingly pure and fully transparent and objective development. In contrast to what its proponents profess, it would disclose its 'hidden' agenda, that is, that the accountability movement promotes political and economic interests of particular groups. More importantly, however, it would also reveal that the accountability movement is grounded and thrives on denying the insoluble aporia, the tremendous character of responsibility. I, therefore, propose that in the context where responsibility and decision-making are being reduced to a technical deployment of accountability, taking tremendous responsibilities may function as an act of resistance against this otherwise irresistible trend.

Taking Tremendous Responsibilities

By way of conclusion to this chapter, I will return to the opening passage of ‘Mochlos’ in order to demonstrate how an aporia of responsibility might function here, and will outline the potential of taking tremendous responsibilities in relation to the interventions proposed by Hemmings within storytelling of Western feminists theory. For this purpose, let me quote the opening lines of ‘Mochlos’ again:

If we could say we (but have I not already said it?), we might perhaps ask ourselves: who are we? And who are we in the university where apparently we are? What do we represent? Whom do we represent? Are we responsible? For what and to whom? If there is a university responsibility, it at least begins with the moment when a need to hear these questions, to take them upon oneself and respond, is imposed.⁷¹

This opening scene is situated in the realm of ‘as if’. It is a hypothetical, fictional and fantastic scene, a fabulation. In a highly dramatic manner and with the help of ‘ifs’, question marks and performative utterances, Derrida manages to set up a university scene which is, from the very beginning, distorted and dislocated. It is marked by uncertainty and openness. It is a fantastic but also frightening scene in which Derrida and his reader are immediately caught up as we begin to write and read. Unlike traditional performative speech acts, where it is the subject who produces that of which it speaks, in this passage, it is actually not easy to identify from where responsibility comes. It certainly does not come only from an act of a speaker. As the second half of the quotation testifies, the subject does not only speak but also hears: he or she hears the questions, takes them upon himself or herself and

⁷¹ Derrida, ‘Mochlos’, p. 3.

responds. The speaker thus seems to have no choice; responsibility is, as if involuntarily, imposed upon herself or himself. Without giving reason or justifications, a responsibility comes as a command to the one who must take it upon herself or himself alone. The scene thus neither states nor describes anything but engages by responding to the other as the other. This is the moment where – if there is any – a university responsibility begins.

As I interpret it, we cannot decide whether there is or is not responsibility in Derrida's text. In this respect, the opening of Derrida's essay is not what one would call a responsible scene. Yet, it does work as a lever or a wedge, as an opening for a new university responsibility to come. And, as Derrida explains at the end of his essay, choosing the best lever is in fact the key task necessary for making the 'right' decisions. As he argues,

[t]he difficulty will consist, as always, in determining the best lever, what the Greeks would call the best *mochlos* [...] When one asks how to be oriented in history, morality or politics, the most serious discords and decisions have to do less often with ends, it seems to me, than with levers.⁷²

The potential of deconstruction as a tool for thinking through issues of ethics is, therefore, different from that of an apt and sufficient tool in a traditional sense. An aporetic responsibility will not 'protect' feminist theorists and other academics from making bad decisions or from behaving irresponsibly. Although it appeals to fidelity to traditions, this responsibility does not adhere to any accepted and established doctrines and in fact counts on infidelity as a way of imagining worlds which are currently unimaginable. Taking aporetic responsibility will thus not provide any

⁷² Derrida, 'Mochlos', p. 19.

guarantees but will, instead, make us, the stories Western feminist theory tells, and the university, tremble.

This, however, as it seems to me, is not bad news for feminist theorists and academics. As I have shown, the alternative to the university dominated by the ‘accountability movement’ is not an irresponsible university. Nor do feminists who refuse to ground their narratives on a feminist subject as a guarantee of differentiating between good and bad uses of concepts such as ‘gender’, ‘sex’ and ‘feminism’ have to give up on ethicality. They cannot, however, claim as their own the classical notion of responsibility defined as a ‘property’ of a subject which – whether understood as fixed or performative – is still sovereign.

Telling stories of Western feminist theory differently so as to envision feminist past, present and future, therefore does not entail only ‘realigning political grammars’ as Hemmings identifies, but also demands re-conceptualization of the notion of accountability. *Tremendous responsibilities* is a conceptualization of ethicality which would be adequate to the character and aims of feminist interventions which feminist theorists such as Hemmings seek to implement while, simultaneously, be in contestation to the accountability movement which currently dominates the context of Western academy.

Chapter VI – Re-inventing Feminist Resistance for a University-to-come

Dramatizing Stories that Matter

In the previous chapter I proposed a conceptualization of ethicality which would be adequate to the character and aims of feminist interventions which feminist theorists such as Hemmings seek to implement – *tremendous responsibilities*. As I further proposed, the conceptualization of responsibilities as *tremendous* would also be in contestation to the accountability movement which currently dominates the context of Western academy. However, this proposition, as well as the grammatical realignments suggested by Hemmings do not, however, tackle an issue which, as I understand it, is no less important for the project of telling *feminist* stories differently – the articulation of the uses of political grammars which would be ‘idiolectic’ to the storytelling of feminist theory.⁷³

In other words, it is not only feminist theory but any field of study, any discipline or political group, may follow and implement grammatical realignments proposed by Hemmings. Her proposition to tell stories which would not form linearly progressive narratives pivoting around an individual subject is not limited only to storytelling of Western feminist theory, but can be generalized to any ‘storytelling’ whether fictional or non-fictional. Similarly, the tremendous responsibilities I proposed in this chapter are to be taken by anyone inside or outside the universities, by any individual or collective which seek, or presents themselves as seeking, to resist against that which is perceived as the current *status quo*.

⁷³ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 10.

The two interventions thus do not tell us much about what is peculiar to the stories told by Western feminist theory. Yet, for me, the questions arising from reading Hemmings' work are also those concerning the singularity of Western feminist theory: Are there any 'grammatical' features which would be unique to the stories told by Western feminist theorists? And should we even seek to articulate such specificity? Would not such an endeavour necessarily equate to the search for 'proper objects and subjects'? That is, is not the kind of endeavour which Hemmings, following her interpretation of Butler's work, considers to be a misguided effort and thus one to be resolutely refused?⁷⁴ Is 'singularity', as Hemmings seems to be arguing in an essay from 2016, to be understood to be an obstacle to pluralization and multiplication which seek to challenge conservative invocations of 'fixed gender and sexuality as part of nationalist projects'?⁷⁵ Or, rather, is 'singularity', no matter how paradoxical, contingent and unstable, a necessary condition if there is to be anything like 'feminism'? Additionally, is not welcoming and promoting singularity an indispensable task for a feminist project whose very *raison d'être*, as Berger puts it, has been and continues to be not only 'promotion of plurality' but also 'the excavation of unrecognized or unwanted differences'?⁷⁶

In the following chapter, which is the final chapter of the thesis, I will contest the gesture of posing singularity against plurality and multiplicity present not only in Hemmings' work but in much wider current within feminist theory.⁷⁷ I will propose a way of theorizing in which the singularity of feminist political and theoretical

⁷⁴ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 157.

⁷⁵ Hemmings, 'Is Gender Studies Singular', p. 81.

⁷⁶ Berger, abstract to 'Gender Springtime in Paris'.

⁷⁷ For instance, this approach also defines the work of other feminist scholars examined in this thesis, namely Brown and Wiegman.

endeavours - that is, not only its irreducible specificity, but also its exceptional and extraordinary character beyond the usual and ordinary - can be articulated.⁷⁸

Following work of Anne Berger, I will identify an 'idiomatic feature' of the political grammars employed by Western feminist theory. This feature, as I will also demonstrate, has a particular connection to the regimes which dominate current universities. The following discussion will not, however, only shed further light on how the political grammar of narratives told by Western feminist theory entangle with the trends which dominate current universities. Following Berger's work, my intention is also to theorize how, as Hemming's may put it, we can tell feminist stories differently particularly in order to envision another university.

In order to provide further insight into how Western feminist narratives entangle with the trends which dominates universities and in order to envision these educational institutions beyond their current predicament, I propose we further *dramatize* Hemming's work. This dramatization consists of two moves: Firstly, I propose we amplify and further exploit the conceptual possibilities offered by the analytics of linguistics and textuality. The second move in the dramatization of Hemming's approach entails adapting the problem of visibility, and visibilization of and in the current university, as a *theatrical* problem. This, as I will show, has a particular connection to the grammars of Western feminist theory.

1. The amplification of the conceptual possibilities offered by the analytics of linguistics and textuality consists in utilizing the concept of 'translation'.⁷⁹ This

⁷⁸ 'Singular', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, < <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/180174>> [accessed 8 March 2017].

⁷⁹ My discussion of translation follow from Derrida's understandings of translation (see the 'Roundtable on on Translation' which I discussed in the second chapter) and from Berger's utilization and development it (see her already mentioned essay the introduction to the special issue of *differences* entitled *Transatlantic Gender Crossings*). For related but other use of 'translation' in feminist theorizing see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Politics of Translation', in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 179-200.

concept of translation is, however, a particular one. It not only tackles the crossings between two languages, but also operates within what seems to be a single language or lexicon, as well as between and within non-linguistic practices. Furthermore, it is not grounded in the belief that ‘meanings’ or ‘ideas’ can cross borders without any significant changes. Rather the opposite: the possibility of crossing from one language to another is grounded in the recognition that the gap of difference between various lexicons and their grammars is, to a certain extent, unbridgeable.

It is in this sense that translation, as Derrida famously argued, is impossible yet necessary. As discussed in chapter two (entitled ‘Out of Place’), according to him, translation is an ‘agreement’ which implies ‘the difference of languages rather than transparent translatability’. This, however, does not imply that one should not translate. Although translation is a paradoxical operation, which within itself contains resistance to translatability, it also operates as a ‘promise’. It thus ‘never succeeds in the pure and absolute sense of the term’ but ‘succeeds in success, in promising reconciliation’.⁸⁰ ‘Good translation’, Derrida argues, ‘is one that enacts that performative called a promise with the result that through the translation one sees the coming shape of a possible reconciliation among languages’.⁸¹ This ‘promise’, as I take it, not only implies reconciliation among the already existing languages, but also embodies a chance of inaugurating that which is unimaginable in the languages with which we have told our stories thus far.

In relation to the dramatization of Hemmings’ work, this concept of translation implies the following: It allows us to grasp the grammar of Western feminist theory as a conceptually heterogeneous and semantically unstable field.

⁸⁰ Derrida, ‘Roundtable’, p. 123.

⁸¹ Derrida, ‘Roundtable’, p. 123.

Simultaneously, however, it also allows us to grasp an articulation of what is peculiar to these stories. This is an aspect that Hemmings and other scholars who examine narratives of feminist theory, such as Robyn Wiegman, seem to be avoiding.

More specifically, when Hemmings seeks to differentiate between feminist and nonfeminist narratives, or, when Wiegman theorizes the disciplinary possibility of academic feminism, they avoid differentiating feminist projects from other endeavours which are – intellectually, politically or institutionally - akin to it. Both scholars, following their readings of Butler, argue that an effort to articulate the specificities of feminist theory and politics is a stumbling block for feminist endeavours, and therefore condemn such efforts.⁸² Thus, in *Why Stories Matter*, Hemmings argues resolutely:

‘[c]ertainly, ongoing argument over the proper subject and object of feminism *as distinct from* other modes of gender discourse seems misplaced at best, and unlikely to disrupt the narrative amenability I have been discussing.

Assumptions about what singular genre of feminist theory, method, and practice can renew lost feminist capacities fall into two related traps, in my analysis. They consolidate understandings of feminism as anachronism, on the one hand, and propose one response as most significant, which is in fact to say one feminist subject, on the other.⁸³

Hemmings wrestles with the question of what would distinguish feminism from other modes of gender discourse - the problem of singularity and plurality - also in a 2016 essay entitled ‘Is Gender Studies Singular? Stories of Queer/Feminist

⁸² In order to support this argument, Hemmings refers specifically to Butler’s *Gender Trouble* from 1990 and the essay ‘Against proper objects’ (Judith Butler, ‘Against Proper Objects’, *differences*, 6.2-3 (1994), 1-26.

⁸³ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 157.

Difference and Displacement'.⁸⁴ There, it is discussed particularly in relation to feminist and queer intellectual and political endeavours and the conceptualization of gender.

In this essay, Hemmings contests that there could be a single feminist theory of gender and seeks to 'orient us toward multiplicity and away from singularity'.⁸⁵ She also welcomes 'pluralizations' created by 'multiplying the terms themselves rather than the theory', for such an effort also 'makes plain the limits to singular thinking and orientations and the dangers of exclusion that attend the singularity of both object and politics'.⁸⁶ Thus, according to Hemmings, pluralizations of terms and theories would imply positive effects not only in relation to scholarship, but also politics. As she argues, it will make

feminism less easy to co-opt as a political and institutional project and [will] mark it as always already running counter to the adoption of *gender equality* by neoliberal and neoconservative states and actors. Where "gender" belongs to "feminism" then, it must be plural in order not to be "singular" [...].⁸⁷

For Hemmings, therefore, pluralization and multiplication of feminist theories and concepts are also a strategy of resisting co-option by neoliberal, neoconservative and nationalist discourses (which, assumedly, promote singularity). However, further reading of her essay reveals that the relation between 'singularity' and 'pluralization', and their political implications, are not as simple as it might seem from the passage quoted above. Hemmings further argues in her essay:

⁸⁴ Clare Hemmings, 'Is Gender Studies Singular? Stories of Queer/Feminist Difference and Displacement', *differences*, 27 (2016), 79-102.

⁸⁵ Hemmings, 'Is Gender Studies Singular?', p. 81.

⁸⁶ Hemmings, 'Is Gender Studies Singular?', p. 82.

⁸⁷ Hemmings, 'Is Gender Studies Singular?', p. 82.

We also need to tune our ears to the alarm bells whose tones echo through the history of this politicized field. I want to suggest, in fact, that in moving too quickly to pluralization, we risk ceding the terrain of “gender,” preferring to participate in a fantasy of escape that cleanses us of the amenability of this concept to the violence of nationalist projects rather than to explore the complex terrain of gender that we inhabit. [...] I propose rethinking gender as a scene of multiplicity, a more accountable institutional and political mode.⁸⁸

As this quotation indicates, Hemmings recognizes that the effects of ‘pluralization’ (understood as the opposite and the replacement of singularity) are not only positive. If we ‘move too quickly to pluralization’, we may buy into a false belief that separating concepts and theories from their complex histories and problematic affiliations is possible.

That an erasure can be, indeed, a result of feminist projects motivated by a desire to promote plurality can be demonstrated by Wendy Brown’s essay ‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’. As the interpretation of this text in part one showed, pluralization, (when understood as the opposite of singularity, which is perceived as exclusionary and therefore as that which has to be exceeded), leads Brown away not only from particular concepts (e.g. ‘woman’ or ‘gender’), but also away from feminism and disciplinary locations where feminist work could take place.⁸⁹

Similarly, neither does the relationship between singularity/plurality and neoliberalism and global capitalism seem as unambiguous as Hemmings’ seems to suggest in her essay. Rather, it is not so much the ‘singularity’ as it is the so called

⁸⁸ Hemmings, ‘Is Gender Studies Singular?’, p. 83.

⁸⁹ Brown, ‘The Impossibility’. For the close reading of her essay see chapter one.

‘moving too quickly to pluralization’ which seems to go hand in hand with the modes in which global capitalism operates. More specifically, ‘moving too quickly to pluralization’ seems to coincide with rather than resist one of the key premises and driving forces of capitalism, the search for the newest (and thus most irresistible) offers of the (feminist and postfeminist intellectual and political) global market. The drive towards pluralization at the expense of singularity may thus be seen, rather than a radical break, as that which perpetuates the ongoing crisis of the alliance between feminism and anti-capitalism.

The proposition which I wish to argue for is that our feminist theorizations must stop avoiding the question of the singular and stop branding singularity as always and necessarily ‘exclusionary’. I do agree with Hemmings that ‘an absolute distinction between feminist and non-feminist mobilizations of gender discourses can or should be sustained’, and that we should not seek to identify ‘proper objects and subjects’ of feminist theory and politics.⁹⁰ I also support how she embraces pluralization and multiplicity of concepts, theories as well as the politics of feminism or feminisms. Yet, I also argue that we still need to venture to articulate their specificity. For me, if there is to be anything like feminist thinking and politics, it is indispensable we continue the endless (and thus in its finality impossible) work of negotiating and distinguishing particular strands of feminist intellectual and political endeavours from that which they are not.

As a starting point of such an endeavour I propose we cease perceiving singularity as being associated only with ‘the dangers of exclusion’ and rethink the relationship between singularity and plurality as other than oppositional.⁹¹ An

⁹⁰ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 175.

⁹¹ Hemmings, ‘Is Gender Studies Singular?’, p. 82.

articulation of the singularity of feminist political and theoretical endeavours, of that which is unique and extraordinary about them, does not have to be in contradiction with understanding feminism as a formation which is defined by ‘constitutive otherness’ and which is thus ‘non-identical to itself’, as proposed by Wiegman and other feminist thinkers invoked earlier. In other words, singularity does not have to be in contradiction with irreducible heterogeneity characteristic of variegated theories, concepts and epistemological approaches of feminist scholarship, as well as feminism’s political and institutional forms and modalities. Neither does embracing singularity have to contradict the desire for sharing and openness to otherness. Rather, insisting on singularity, on irreducible and irreplaceable uniqueness, is the condition of conceiving the heterogeneity and plurality which, however, would not inevitably imply displacement and/or an erasure of such efforts.

The conceptualization of translation presented above, as it seems to me, represents a tool which allows for such an articulation in a particularly advantageous way. Firstly, and as already argued, this concept of translation binds what is usually considered incompatible or even standing in a direct opposition, singularity and plurality. Berger, drawing on Derrida and Scott, describes it as following:

Translation, conceived [...] above all as an active task of detection as well as reception of “particular meanings,” is thus paradoxically an act of resistance to translatability. And when particular meanings are teased out and stressed over the general use and the unity of meaning such use presumes, the work of (un)translation also becomes inseparable from one of pluralization.⁹²

⁹² Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 10-11.

Secondly, it allows to conceive of the specificity of feminist endeavours as not deriving from the identities of its actors (feminist subjects) or as being intrinsic to its objects, conceptualizations rightly condemned by Hemmings. Here, specificity does not derive from the language in which stories are formed and conveyed so much as, as Berger puts it, from the ‘specific or “idiolectic” uses and contextual redeployments and displacements’.⁹³ In other words, it derives from how language is used, that is, how it is spoken and written.

Translation, as Berger puts it, is an ‘active task’.⁹⁴ This concept of translation therefore also allows for theorization of agency and, consequently, that of transformation.⁹⁵ As Berger further develops in her essay,

something happens in and thanks to translation that may open paths and change hearts as well as landscapes, because, as a task taken on deliberately, it involves the act of reading and the active work of reception. Whether it is an individual endeavor or a collective one or both, translation is a responsive act in the most literal sense, an answer to the call of the other that mobilizes subjectivity as responsibility.⁹⁶

To put this in relation to Hemmings’ *Why Stories Matter*, this concept of translation allows for developing, in theoretical terms, the key proposition of Hemmings’ work that feminist theorists should ‘tell stories differently’.⁹⁷

⁹³ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Spivak stresses a similar point in her deliberation on translation: ‘[...]I want to consider the role played by language for the *agent*, the person who acts, even though intention is not fully present to itself. The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gender agency. The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writing of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of the British woman/citizen within the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain’s imperial past, its often racist present, as well as its “made in Britain” history of male domination’. Spivak, ‘The Politics of Translation’, p. 201.

⁹⁶ Berger, 19-20.

⁹⁷ Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 16.

Finally, investing in the theorization of the singular might help develop premises under which an effective resistance to the homogenizing pull of generalization as it has been escalated in global techno-capitalism, could be conveyed. As Berger explains in *The Queer Turn in Feminism*,

territorial unity and internal coherence are undermined by the way a number of contemporary cultural phenomena and discourses travel across space and especially virtual space, bypassing borders, material and immaterial. The display and circulation of “information” on the Web has thus contributed to inflecting the meaning of the word “culture.” Notions of “culture” and “cultural space” or “areas” are traditionally tied to a notion of “location” as a bounded and “oriented” space. Virtual space does something more and something other than simply putting different geographical, linguistic and political spaces in permanent communication with one another: it *dislocates* and *disorients* location(s). It therefore modifies the task of translation.⁹⁸

On the Web, she continues elsewhere in the book, ‘the instantaneous circulation of “information” short-circuits the traditional process of diffusion and reception of a given cultural “trend” by ignoring frontiers and differences’. This means that ‘the *work of translation* – which implies that there is something in need of translation, thus some difference – can be supplanted by the *play of citation*, which stipulates that everything is imitable’.⁹⁹

In ‘Gender Springtime in Paris: A Twenty-First-Century Tale of Seasons’ from 2016, Berger embraces the problem of translation in order to enable a

⁹⁸ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 110-111.

⁹⁹ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 82. As I interpret it, the changes implied by globalization and virtualization also account for the reason why Berger, rather than focusing on the notion of ‘iterability’ or ‘performativity’ or ‘citationality’, prefers the notion of translation which, rather than repetition, imitation, mimicry or copying, stresses irreplaceable singularity. For more on the relation between performativity and translation see Sandra Bermann, ‘21: Performing Translation’, in *A companion to Translation Studies*, ed. by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (Chichester: John Wiley & sons, Ltd., 2014), pp. 285-297.

discussion of internalization and institutionalization of feminist scholarship which will allow different ways of conceiving of ‘connections’ and ‘sharing’ as other than the ‘circulation of imitable information’ described above. In the section entitled ‘The Resistance of Translation’, she speculates whether this conceptualization of translation could help us theorize how

decentering moves, allowing different ways of conceiving the connection(s) between the local and the global, the center and the periphery, or, even better, between various forms of “locatedness” may emerge in ways which would be different from that of ‘a hegemonic and/ or neo-colonial pattern of extension.’¹⁰⁰

Berger thus invites us to consider the question whether ‘translation’, understood as ‘a neohumanist practice of transnational exchange premised on the irreducibility of idioms and the hospitality to difference, can withstand the homogenizing pull of globalization’.¹⁰¹ Drawing from her reading of Scott’s deliberations in ‘Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?’,¹⁰² Berger declares:

It is not enough to be a native or neonative speaker of a given language [...]; it is not enough, indeed, to be a reliable lexicographer. Only a “translator,” that is, somebody who asks her- or himself how meanings are established and what they signify in the particular context or text she or he is dealing with, might be able to trace and convey these meanings.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ Berger, abstract to ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’.

¹⁰² Scott, ‘Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?’, p. 14.

¹⁰³ Berger, ‘Gender Springtime in Paris’, p. 10; As follows from Spivak’s text ‘The Politics of Translation’, the work of translation, is also work of love: ‘The task of the translator is to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay’. Spivak, ‘The Politics of Translation’, p. 181.

Following Berger, we can perhaps propose that the task twenty-first-century feminist scholars face is that of translation.

2. As already indicated, the second move in the dramatization of Hemming's approach entails adapting the problem of visibility and visibilization of and in the current university as a *theatrical* problem which has a particular connection to the grammars of Western feminist theory. In the sections that follow, I will develop Hemming's efforts presented in *Why Stories Matter* in relation to trends which have dominated Western universities (i.e. the regimes of audit and accountability) by taking up the problems of 'vision' and 'visibility'. I will introduce works by scholars who, in their attempt to envision the future of the university, seek to conceptualize the university's relationship to visibility and visibilization as other than that of the panoptical all-seeing surveillance. I will then introduce an argument presented in Berger's *The Queer Turn in Feminism* that certain feminist and queer identity politics today are driven by a 'visibility demand'. This discussion will provide further insight into how the grammar of Western feminist theoretical narratives entangle with the trends which dominate universities. Importantly, however, it will also, as I will outline in the final section, help us theorize how feminist theorists can, as Hemmings would put it, tell their stories differently so as to envision another university.

From Panoptical University to Academic Farce

In economic, ethical and political lexicons, accountability is understood as overlaying or being intimately bound with notions such as 'performance control', 'publicity', 'visibility', 'open access', 'transparency', 'right to information' and

‘accessibility’. The techniques of assessing, auditing and evaluating (i.e. accountability regimes) both rely and are defended on the grounds of ‘transparency’ and other visibility and visibilization regimes. In other words, ‘seeing through’ and ‘making what is invisible visible’ are understood as the conditions as well as the outcomes of ‘accounting’ and ‘audit’.

Similarly to accountability, however, also notions such as ‘transparency’ have been shown to produce ambiguous effects in relation to politics, institutions and disciplinarity. ‘Transparency’ is therefore understood by scholars researching this phenomenon as both - a tool of ‘democratic pressure exerted by citizens on the states and governments’, as well as ‘a condition for counting’ in managerial and economic sense and thus techniques of conducting surveillance.¹⁰⁴

According to some of these scholars, nowadays, it is particularly in higher education that the desire for visibility often presents itself in terms of an economic, political and ethical imperative with unprecedented strength and significance.¹⁰⁵ This could be, as for instance Marilyn Strathern speculates, because the university is an arena where ‘the notion of surveillance would seem to have made [itself] familiar, where visibility as a conduit of knowledge is elided with visibility as an instrument for control’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For further discussion of this complicated relationship see for instance Graham Allen, ‘Transparency, incalculability, Mythologies today’, *Nottingham French Studies*, 47.2 (2008), 71-82; Marilyn, Strathern, ‘The Tyranny of Transparency’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 26.3 (2000), 309-321; Maria Do Mar Pereira, ‘Struggling with and beyond the Performative University: Articulating activism and work in an “academia without walls”’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 54 (2016), 100-110;

¹⁰⁵ Bruce G. Charleton: ‘Audit, Accountability, Quality and All That: The Growth of Managerial Technologies in UK Universities’, in *Education! Education! Education! Managerial Ethics and the Law of Unintended Consequences*, eds. Stephen Prickett and Patricia Erskine-Hill (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2002), pp. 13-32.

¹⁰⁶ Marilyn, Strathern, ‘The Tyranny of Transparency’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 26.3 (2000), 309-321 (p. 309).

The desire to ‘see through’ and ‘make things visible’ is, however, clearly not a recent phenomenon and is not tied only to the context of education. This is what Afshin Mehrpouya and Marie Laure Djelic show with their genealogy of the convoluted history of the notion of ‘transparency’. As the two authors argue, the conceptual origins of this term can be traced back at least to the political, intellectual and economic revolutions of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁰⁷ Yet, it was particularly in the 1970s when transparency obtained semantic meanings we associate with this notion today. Additionally, the notion has been undergoing significant shifts in its semantic field and scope which are not dissimilar to those described by Readings, Kamuf and others in relation to the word and the concept of accountability. The notion of transparency has also proliferated through and attempted to rule every activity while its semantic field shifts from that of referring to a potent mechanism of liberation to a ‘norm that enables governing and domination’ of ‘market-based and calculative visibility regimes’.¹⁰⁸

Yet, significantly, and as argued previously, we do not have to read the university and the trends which dominate it only as ‘disciplining’ but also as more complex formations which imply ambiguous effects. More specifically, while recognizing the ‘disciplining’ character of these trends, we do not need to read the current university as a panoptical institution of all-seeing surveillance. Instead, drawing on the methodological shift from disciplinary power to textual reading proposed previously, I argue that we should not grasp the relationship between the current university and its ‘visions’ as merely a ‘disciplinary’ and ‘disciplining’

¹⁰⁷ Afshin, Mehrpouya and Djelic, Marie Laure, ‘Transparency: From Enlightenment to Neoliberalism or When a Norm of Liberation Becomes a Tool of Governing’, *HEC Paris Research Paper No. ACC-2014- 1059*, SSSRN <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers2.cfm?abstract_id=2499402> [accessed 14 February 2017].

¹⁰⁸ Mehrpouya and Djelic, ‘Transparency’, p. 5, p. 44.

problem.¹⁰⁹ More specifically, I suggest that instead of grasping the university as a ‘panoptical’ institution, we conceive of it as a *scene* where visibility is not simply opposed to invisibility but the two are interwoven by range of more complex differences and diverse distributions of the visible, and its correlate, the invisible.¹¹⁰ I suggest we conceptualize the university’s relationship to visibility, the relation between the visible and the invisible, and the process of ‘uncovering’ as a complex phenomenon which carries ambiguous effects and thus opens a possibility of reading the university beyond its phallogocentric and neoliberal predicament.

One such reading is provided by the previously mentioned Marilyn Strathern, a feminist anthropologist who shows with her examination of audit practices, quality assurance and accountability in British higher education, how the demand for visibility in service of performance control undermines itself. In academia, Strathern argues, ‘everyone knows’ that what is being tested by various audit exercises is not the ‘real’ performance and productivity but ‘how amenable to auditing their activities are or how performance matches up to performance indicators’.¹¹¹

Academics, according to Strathern, play ‘both sides’:

[they] both deploy, and are sceptical about deploying, visibility as a conduit for knowledge. Higher education professionals at once accede to the idea of accountability and regard performance indicators as highly constructed and artificial means of measuring real output. As the term accountability implies, people want to know how to trust one another, to make their trust visible, while (knowing that) the very desire to do so points to the absence of trust.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ For more on the proposed shift from ‘disciplinarity’ to ‘textuality’ see chapter III, ‘From Disciplinary Power to Textuality’, where I rely on work of John Mowitt.

¹¹⁰ For more on the shift in methodological approach I propose here see Derrida’s critique of Foucault’s treatment of the problem of in/visibility in *Discipline and Punish* (Jacques Derrida and Roudinesco, Elisabeth, ‘Choosing One’s Heritage’, in *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19 (p. 12).

¹¹¹ Strathern, ‘The Tyranny’, p. 309-310.

¹¹² Strathern, ‘The Tyranny’, p. 310.

As Strathern argues, the demand for visibility therefore ‘no longer seems securely attached to knowledge and control’ and the question ‘What does visibility conceal?’ arises. The proposal to see ‘audit as an obvious instrument of surveillance’ is thus ‘thrown into doubt’.¹¹³

For Strathern such an insight does not, however, imply that academics should give up on the demand for ‘transparency’. As she argues, it is the ‘job’ of a scholar and a pedagogue to try to bring things to the surface, to make - through investigative processes and pedagogy - as much as possible visible. Giving value to openness and transparency, and withdrawing and thus resisting the pressure for exposure for the purposes of audit, is, therefore, not in contradiction. By taking into account and exploiting the paradoxical character of the process of acquiring and transmitting knowledge, (that is, by postponing, showing transiently, going back and forth, or translating from one discourse, paradigm or language to another), we will be able to counterbalance the timeless proposition promoted by the audit cultures that things can be made transparently ‘clear’ and thus ‘understandable’ and ‘reproducible’.¹¹⁴

Although focusing on the political rather than intellectual aspects, John Francis McKernan, who draws on Kamuf’s article ‘Accountability’, proceeds in a similar direction. McKernan acknowledges ‘the “emancipatory” power and potential of an increased accountability achieved through an expansion of rights to information’. He argues that ‘the power to require that information be made public’ is ‘central to the process and conception of accountability’. Simultaneously, however, he stresses that ‘transparency can produce a kind of tyranny and have

¹¹³ Strathern, ‘The Tyranny’, p. 310.

¹¹⁴ Strathern, ‘The Tyranny’, p. 320.

dysfunctional effects'. Following in steps not dissimilar to the arguments I presented in the previous chapter 'Tremendous Responsibilities', McKernan argues that 'moral responsibility and decision-making relies, in its singularity, on a certain secrecy that can be incompatible with the answerability and visibility demanded by accountability'.¹¹⁵

A similar suggestion can be found also in an interview with Samuel Weber entitled 'Secrecy and Transparency' from 2011. Apart from suggesting that the two, transparency and secrecy, are not in an opposition but in a supplementary structural relationship (Weber reminds us of Lacan's observation that 'the best way to hide something is to display it ostentatiously'), Weber highlights what is politically at stake.¹¹⁶ After arguing that we have to learn to be 'more at home with the secret', he makes clear that this suggestion is not a call for abandoning transparency:

The demand for transparency is one that can be very important in defending and possibly expanding genuinely democratic government: how can people make reasonable decisions if it is totally misinformed about important events and processes? [...] I wouldn't want our conversation about the relative limitations of the notion of transparency and the need to live with the secret to become a justification of the exploitation of fear and insecurity as a way of ever more reducing the possibilities of democratic political processes – processes that are based on relatively extensive information that can serve as a basis for critical political decisions.¹¹⁷

Although 'we have to learn to live in a world where events can and will occur unpredictably, where surprise cannot and should not be eliminated or reduced to

¹¹⁵ John Francis McKernan, 'Accountability as aporia, testimony, and gift', *Accountability*, special issue of *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 23.3 (2012), 258-278 (p. 261).

¹¹⁶ Samuel Weber and John W. P. Phillips, 'Secrecy and Transparency: An Interview with Samuel Weber', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28.7-8 (2011), 158-172 (p. 161).

¹¹⁷ Weber and Phillips, 'Secrecy and Transparency', p. 168.

calculable “risks”, it is important, Weber argues, not simply ‘to discredit or disqualify the demand for “transparency”’. Instead, we should focus on the aspect which Weber considers to be the biggest danger of this demand for transparency: ‘those who make the demand are increasingly unable to put their own demands and responses into question’. In other words, the demand for transparency ‘hypostasizes the position from which and to which the demand is made’.¹¹⁸

Evidently, Weber is not the only scholar who relates putting oneself into question to academic work which strives to be politically transformative. Similar propositions have been made by many scholars, including those whose work I have discussed throughout the thesis. What I find interesting about Weber’s invocation of this recurrent and, as it seems to me, defining trait of both feminist and deconstructive scholarships, is that Weber relates the understanding of self-scrutiny as possibly politically transformative academic work to the notion of theatricality.

Weber invokes theatricality in order to counter Readings claim in *The University in Ruins* that ‘academics must work without alibis’ which is meant to support Readings’ vision of the university as ‘non-referential’.¹¹⁹ In contrast to Readings, Weber argues that the university ‘perhaps today more than ever, has to be in more places than one’: As always, academic work ‘confirms the existing order by reproducing exploitable knowledge’, yet, at the same time it ‘must also strive to open to the unknowable as the enabling limit of what can be known’.¹²⁰

As already outlined in chapter four, taking into account this ‘double demand’, Weber then speculates on ‘whether the kind of infinite attention to the other that Readings imagines as the core of an alternative academic community [...]

¹¹⁸ Weber and Phillips, ‘Secrecy and Transparency’, p. 168-9.

¹¹⁹ Readings, *The University in Ruins*, p. 68.

¹²⁰ Samuel Weber ‘The Future Campus: Destiny in a virtual world’, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21 (1999), 151-164 (p. 163-4).

might not better be served by recalling a structure proposed by Kierkegaard in his text *Repetition*. The ‘structure’ invoked by Kierkegaard is, as Weber continues, ‘akin to a theatrical spectacle’ which is ‘neither tragic, nor even comic, but instead more akin to a farce’. In German and in Danish the word for ‘farce’, as Weber further adds, is *posse* and the word *posse* is, as Kierkegaard reminds us, ‘also the Latin word for possibility’.¹²¹

The notion of *posse* (a ‘farce’ and a ‘possibility’), as Weber explains, is close to Derrida’s notion of ‘iterability’ or Deleuze’s work on difference and repetition. It is thus meant to stress that ‘nothing can be recognized as being identical with itself’. It ‘tends to inaugurate, or reassert, a movement of substitution, exchange and above all, of repetition and recurrence that renders all synthesis, all unification, all determination problematic, if ineluctable’. The *posse*, ‘the genre of popular, farcical theatre’, Weber argues,

is not primarily representational or bound to a narrative story. It diverges radically from the mainstream of respectable Western theatre, which, ever since Aristotle, is defined in ‘mythological’ terms, which is to say, in terms of story and plot. For the *Posse*, on the contrary, theatrical ‘action’ is not primarily a subject of depiction or of contemplation, it is performative, taking place on the stage. It is, therefore, on the one hand far more immediate and actual than traditionally representational theatre, in which whatever happens on the stage is taken or viewed as designating something whose meaning is generally understood to derive from its non-theatrical narrative structure and properties. The *posse*, by contrast, is all performance.¹²²

¹²¹ Weber, ‘The Future Campus’, p. 163.

¹²² Samuel Weber, ‘The Future of the Humanities: Experimenting’.

As Weber proposes, it is thus the performative ‘farcical’ structure which will do the theoretical work necessary for us to imagine the public institution, the university, ‘in a world of virtualization and globalization’ and which, at the same time, will strive to be ‘centred on the attention to the other’. In other words, the *posse*, an alternative theatre which is ‘all performance’, will help us rethink the constitution of institutions and of knowledge production as ‘a separation which displaces its ultimate goal of “securing the Self”’ and thus ‘would reduce distance, difference and alterity to functions of an identical and constitutive subject’. For as Weber also suggests, this procedure ‘reveals the enabling limits of all system, synthesis and self-containment’ and is thus also a ‘movement of resistance’ which opens a possibility for institutional, theoretical and political transformation.¹²³

Weber’s deliberations on constitutive ‘separation’, which will not secure the Self but will open it to the other through the concept of theatre, seems to me to be a useful way of theorising the ‘public institution’, like universities, as other than ‘panoptical’. Yet, his deliberations also show that not believing in the demand for transparency, and promoting procedures which would ‘reveal the enabling limits of all system’, does not guarantee that ‘the position from which and to which’ one speaks would not get hypostasized.

As discussed previously, one of the problems with Weber’s theorizing of the university is that he defines the non-self-identical separation as ‘experimenting’

¹²³ An understanding of the university’s relationship to visibility through ‘theatrical structures’ does not, however, characterize only Weber’s work. Similar directions can be found in Kamuf’s chapter ‘The University in Deconstruction’ where she complicates the notion of publicity (Peggy Kamuf, ‘The University in Deconstruction’, in *The Division/of Literature or the University in Deconstruction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 133-161; The theatrical aspect also appears in Mowitt’s conceptualization of ‘re:working’ which is a translation of Bertold Brecht’s concept of *Umfunktionierung*. Typically, this notion is translated to English as ‘re-purposing’. According to Mowitt, however, this translation does not evoke another meaning Brecht wished to convey. As Mowitt explains, Brecht ‘is just as often re-purposing purpose as he is, say, theatre’ (John Mowitt, ‘On the One Hand, and the Other’, *College Literature*, 42.2 (2015), 311-336 (p. 313)).

which he opposes to ‘the experimental method [...] according to which the future might be progressively mastered and its uncertainties gradually reduced, if not eliminated’, and which he identifies as being ‘scientific’. In other words, for Weber, the desire to ‘control the future’, to ‘assimilate the unknown to the known’, is a defining feature of experimentation conveyed by scientific disciplines. This makes ‘science’, as he further develops, an ally of the dominant trends we witness in the university, such as marketization and corporatization, and which we seek to contest.¹²⁴

With this proposition Weber thus maintains the bias, the exclusion of ‘numbers’ and ‘their’ discipline, ‘science’, constitutive of the Western metaphysical theoretical endeavours, as discussed in the part two. This approach does not only limit a possibility for self-scrutiny of one’s position, but also restricts academic work which would not only be ‘disciplinary’ but also ‘antidisciplinary’. In other words, it supports rather than resists the trends which such work originally set out to contest, namely the unequal and unjust distribution of ‘disciplinary forces’ which define the current *status quo*.

In the following sections I will introduce another discourse which, like that of Weber, focuses on ‘theatricality’, but which does not repeat the bias characteristic of Weber’s accounts of the university and the humanities: Anne Berger’s *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*. Additionally, as the title of her book suggests, this discussion will situate the problematic of theatre into the ‘subject area’ which is in the focus of feminist theory – questions of gender, sex, sexual difference and sexuality.

¹²⁴ Weber, ‘The Future of the Humanities’.

A View (from) Elsewhere: Feminist and queer identity politics today

As I read it, Berger's work *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender* 'enacts' what Weber describes and argues for in his essay 'The Future Campus: destiny in a virtual world'. In other words, Berger exploits an ability to be 'in more places than one' in order to produce academic work centred on the attention to the other in the context of a globalized and virtualized world.

This ability is perhaps most visibly invoked in the opening of the book where she stages a dialogue with herself. As Berger argues, she is a French scholar who travelled to the U.S. in the mid-1980s, that is, at a time when 'French theory', along with the institutionalization of feminism within American academia, was at its height. Conversely, now, that the U.S. feminist theoretical scene, which has become that of gender and queer theory, seems to be 'for the most part, intro-retrospective', and, simultaneously, 'exported' and 'implemented' in educational institutions, then mainstream media, popular cultures and political and cultural activisms all around the world, Berger finds herself in higher education in France.¹²⁵

The fact that Berger is active in both American and French academic contexts serves as a preamble for the examination of the 'dislocated scene' of gender and queer theory through analytical gestures that would provide novel insights into current feminist and, as Berger calls it, '(post)feminist' and 'postfeminist' debates.¹²⁶ It allows her, as she argues, 'see double'. 'Seeing double', that is, being caught up not only between two languages and geopolitical places but also between

¹²⁵ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 1-4.

¹²⁶ As Berger explains, she distinguishes between two kinds of postfeminism: 'First, a (post)feminism whose "immanent critique" aims less to discredit feminism than to refine its instruments of analysis', which is 'still faithful to the political and philosophical project of feminism' and, second, a postfeminism which, 'even as it assumes its genealogical link with feminism, resolutely regards the latter as inadequate and outdated'. Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 10.

‘there’ and ‘now’, between ‘retrospection and anticipation’, opens a possibility of critical examination of some of the most pressing issues of the current feminist thinking and politics. Berger thus manages to challenge one of the most reductive and pervasive narratives and assumptions that are unfortunately still reiterated in most discourses on ‘gender’, ‘queer’ and ‘feminism’ in the West.¹²⁷

As I interpret it, this endeavour is pursued in a way which Mowitt would describe as ‘non-affirmative critique’, as a work which has an ‘anti-disciplinary’ effects.¹²⁸ In other words, Berger does not deny the existence of the ‘disciplinary’ and ‘disciplining’ trends which dominate current Western societies, their ‘universities’ and ‘feminisms’. On the contrary, these trends, which have multiple origins in particular contexts and which are, however, increasingly obtaining a ‘generalized’ and ‘globalized’ character, are, together with the processes of their generalization and globalization, at the very centre of her focus. Yet, because this focus is ‘dislocated’, Berger’s exploration does not simply affirm and therefore further fuel ‘imperial’ and ‘colonizing’ tendencies of those trends.

As the dialogue staged at the opening of her book suggests, one of the key targets of Berger’s critical examination is the disruption of a tendency towards the deflection from feminism. With her work, Berger seeks to challenge the idea promoted for more than twenty years by the Western mainstream media and, to a certain extent, intellectual and academic cultures as well as certain ‘feminisms’ and ‘postfeminisms’, that feminism is ‘over’.

The strategy of ‘seeing double’, however, defines also the discussion of another issue, which is not, as I will argue, disconnected from the one outlined

¹²⁷ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Mowitt, *Text*, p. 14.

above. According to Berger, current feminist and queer struggles and their analytical appropriations are driven by what she calls a ‘visibility demand’. As she argues,

oppressed groups and diverse minorities seek above all to make themselves “visible,” as if their liberation – or their struggle to achieve it – required catching the light; as if, to advance a cause, one had to get spotlights to shine on it.¹²⁹

To be sure, Berger is not the first feminist scholar who points at the problem of visibility in relation to feminist and queer politics and theory. Her critique treads particularly in the steps of Scott’s article ‘The Evidence of Experience’, where the latter critiques the appeal to revealing hitherto hidden experiences as an alternative to patriarchal politics and their historical explorations.¹³⁰ However, Berger’s exploration of the desire to become visible, seems particularly productive for examining and further complicating the discussion of how feminist theory and politics relate to the trends which dominate today’s universities. This is particularly so for two reasons: Firstly, Berger employs - as her methodology and as an object for her study - the notion of ‘theatre’. Secondly, she then develops ‘theatricality’ towards one of the key strands of feminist critique which, furthermore, has recently re-gained significance: the critique of capitalism.¹³¹ Berger expresses a suspicion that feminist and queer discourses driven by the demand to be visible attest to a certain ‘accommodation’ or ‘complacency’ between ‘(post)feminism’ and ‘the global capitalist social and economic order that “second-wave” feminism put on trial

¹²⁹ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p.27.

¹³⁰ Joan W. Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17.4 (1991), 773-797.

¹³¹ See for instance Nina Power, *One Dimensional Woman* (Winchester and Washington: O Books, 2009).

for a time'.¹³² As I interpret it, the observation that the 'turn toward spotlights' characteristic of certain feminist and queer politics relates to the 'turn' from 'anti-capitalist' feminism to an alliance with capitalism, opens a particularly advantageous perspective for the exploration of how feminist theory and politics relate to the trends which currently dominate Western university.

Clearly, the most obvious point which could be drawn from Berger's work for our understanding of how feminism relates to the university is that gender and queer politics, driven by a desire to 'become visible', sustain and perpetuate the market-driven audit cultures. To position this argument in relation to Hemmings' critique in *Why Stories Matter*, it could be argued that Berger has, in her book, identified yet another feature which defines 'political grammar' of the stories feminists tell about feminism's past and present and which, rather than challenge, support discourses promoting 'non-feminist' or even 'anti-feminist' agendas.

However, as already outlined in the introduction to this chapter, what is also in the 'dislocated' focus of Berger is the theorization of premises on which we could articulate the specificity of feminist endeavours, i.e. their 'idioms'. Such a theorization, as I will argue, not only provides an opportunity for further examination of how the 'grammars' of feminist storytelling entangle with the trends dominating current universities, but also provides an opportunity for theorizing how these trends might be resisted.

¹³² Berger, *The Queer turn*, p.8, p. 130.

The Idioms of Western Feminist Theory

What is so unique about the demand for visibility which, according to Berger, characterises certain activist currents within feminist and queer scenes? Clearly, and as Berger also points out, a demand to be visible could be applied ‘to any form of resistance to oppression and discrimination’.¹³³ Any group that has been discriminated against or oppressed can - and often does - claim cultural or political visibility. The relationship of feminist and queer politics to this demand we witness today is, however, a particular one.

One of the reasons for feminism’s strong connection to the rhetoric of visibility is rooted in Western socio-cultural and conceptual organization put forward particularly during the late 17th and the 18th century, namely the division between public and private spheres. This division, as Berger reminds us, has been ‘organized and conceptualized as a partition between the field of the visible and that of the invisible’ and correlates with the division between ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’.¹³⁴ The reason that discourses on women’s liberation retreat to ‘emancipation’ as ‘vizationalization’ is, thus, not only that women have been made invisible in history, philosophy and politics. It is also due to this peculiar organization which, on the one hand significantly contributes to the actual (that is unequal) position of women in current Western societies, and, on the other, appeals to the rhetoric of ‘vizationalization’ by women’s emancipation movements.

Yet, according to Berger, the topological division of the two spheres (the public, visible and masculine on the one hand, and the private, invisible and feminine on the other) cannot fully account for the visibility demand we witness in

¹³³ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 85.

¹³⁴ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 83.

certain currents of feminist and queer politics today. For it is not only women who demand visibility; it emanates also ‘from social groups whose formation and history is not, like those of women, dependent on that partition, at least not entirely, and not in the same way’.¹³⁵ More specifically, and as already argued, the problematics of visibility and visibilitization also occupy the foreground within ‘a certain contemporary gay and lesbian politics, or in the emergence of a transgender claim’.¹³⁶ Whether the ‘hyperbolic exhibition’ which defines events and initiatives such as ‘Pride parades’ or ‘ACT UP’,

is the hoped-for and anticipated effect of the exit from prolonged obscurity, thus of the end of the “repression” of homosexuality, or whether it stems from a new conception, or cancellation, of the distinction between private and public space, it belongs in any case to the discourse of “visibilization” [...].¹³⁷

Thus, the demand to be visible, which is shared by certain feminist and sexual minority struggles, cannot be accounted for as only an implementation of the Western program of ‘Enlightenment’. Neither can it be, consequently, understood only as an effect of ‘the constitution of contemporary societies as societies defined by technically engineered and generalized exhibition, as well as panoptic modes of surveillance’, which we can, indeed, understand ‘as particular realizations of the Enlightenment project’.¹³⁸ If we are to understand the emergence of the motif of visibility among these particular groups, we have to take into account other specific junctures than that of ‘Enlightenment’ or the ‘panoptical’ character of the current societies. Berger proposes that the demand to be visible characteristic of certain

¹³⁵ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 84.

¹³⁶ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 85.

¹³⁷ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 86.

¹³⁸ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 96.

feminist and queer politics has, at least, two other sources which, rather than in ‘European’ Enlightenment of the 18th century, are situated in the political, cultural and intellectual ‘America’ of the 1950s onwards.¹³⁹

In order to develop on one of these ‘American’ sources, Berger turns to Samuel Delany’s autobiographical text *The Motion of Light in Water* from 1988. More than twenty years prior to Berger, Scott draws on Delany in order to develop her critique of ‘the evidence of experience’ and the desire to ‘become visible’ among feminist and queer historians and activists.¹⁴⁰ In contrast to Scott, however, Berger argues that ‘if the question of visibility as a political issue and the rhetoric of visibility are so central for him [Delany], it is not only because he is gay but also because he is black’. Relying on this reading of Delany’s autobiography, Berger speculates whether

the political and cultural status of the black American community, marked at once by its symbolic invisibility and its “imaginary” hypervisibility, along with the political history of that community (a political history that involves treating the problematic visibility of that minority), served as models for the aspirations of others, for example, the gay minority, and, today, the transgender minority?¹⁴¹

In other words, the ‘call for visibility’ that governs the discourse and the strategy of political struggles in queer and feminist politics, is thus also an effect of the problematization of race by the American civil rights movement. According to Berger, this problematization made a mark on the social movements that arose in its

¹³⁹ For Berger, ‘America’, as she argues, ‘is not always or not merely a territorial entity with precise boundaries. It is also a cultural zone whose contours do not simply coincide with the geo-political entity “United States”; it is a phantasmatic territory [...]’ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, 773-797.

¹⁴¹ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 92.

wake - the women's liberation movement and the movements in support of sexual minorities.¹⁴²

The second 'juncture' which supports the current demand for visibility deployed by certain feminist and queer politics is embedded in the particular way 'gender' and 'sex' have been theorized, particularly in 'America'. This source, however, does not, according to my interpretation, only explain why particularly feminist and queer politics are so attracted by the 'spotlights' but also spells out an 'idiomatic', that is, a distinct characteristic of the current feminist and queer political and theoretical scenes.

Berger argues that 'gender' and 'visibility' are intimately intertwined. What certain feminism and queer theory and politics share is that they 'conceptualize gender (or gender identity) as a category that depends on a certain "test of the visible"'.¹⁴³ The rhetoric and the politics of 'visibility' articulated and mobilized by feminists and queers is therefore a consequence of theorizations of gender as an 'act' or, to use the more recent notion informed by it, 'performance'.

'Gender as performance' was, surely, most famously articulated by Judith Butler. According to Berger, however, the conception of gender as performance does not stem solely from Butler's re-readings of Foucault's analytics of power, as the story of the origin of 'gender as performance' is most often presented. One of the key arguments of Berger's book is that such theorizations are characteristic of a much broader theoretical current. She shows with her readings that gender had

¹⁴² Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 92-93; This suggestion challenges yet another 'story' which begun to circulate widely within the discourses on gender and sexuality. Specifically, it challenges an opinion that, until the advent of the term 'intersectionality' used by Cranshow in 1989, but which has not been taken up until recently, the field has not reflected and did not take into account the questions of race. To me, 'intersectionality' seems to be (after 'gender' and 'performativity') yet another highly mobile element of feminist grammar where rigorous work of 'translating' is need to be done.

¹⁴³ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 86.

already been theorized as performance in the 1950s by American sociologists and anthropologists such as John Money and later by Robert Stoller, Esther Newton, and Erving Goffman. Furthermore, theorizations which appeal to ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ as categories that ‘depends on a certain test of the visible’ also appeared, around the same time, outside of America. More specifically, ‘linked to a problematic of social “visibility” emphasizing the “spectacular” character of the masculine/feminine duality’ is the tradition which also includes a certain French psychoanalytical discourse, namely the work of Jacques Lacan, who himself drew on Joan Rivière’s notion of feminine masquerade.¹⁴⁴ Certainly, neither Rivière nor Lacan employ the English word ‘gender’ in their work. Yet, as Berger argues, ‘the Lacanian analytics of desire’, which ‘gives pride of place to masquerade, invites us to read “feminine” and “masculine” identity formations as so many “displays” destined to support the play of sexual seduction’.¹⁴⁵

With her close examination of how ‘gender’ and ‘erotic play’ have been theorized not only by feminist and queer scholars but also by American sociology and anthropology and French psychoanalysis, Berger thus identifies a particular feature which links the discourses produced by feminists and nonfeminists researching on gender, sex and sexuality. Specifically, she shows that ‘gender’ has been theorized as ‘performance’ from the earliest elaborations of ‘gender as role’ by Money, Lacan’s ‘comedy of the sexes’ in 1950s, theorization of ‘gender display’ by Goffman up to Butler’s concept of ‘gender as performance’. And, as Berger further

¹⁴⁴ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 6. In the section entitled ‘Lacan and the “Comedy of the Sexes”’, Berger quoting Lacan’s formulations from ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ argues that, ‘if sex-based identification as identification with an “ideal type” draws the thinking about sexual or gender identity that results from it toward a problematic of the lure (as narcissistic illusion and trap, for both the self and the other) right from the start, for Lacan the “unconscious castration complex” is what generates these at-once stereotyped and differentiated identifications and transforms them into role plays’.

suggests, it is the invocation of gender as ‘a quasi-theatrical social manifestation or production’ which is one of the key ‘sources’ of the current mobilization of visibility by feminist and queer politics.¹⁴⁶

One could, however, raise an objection to this ‘narrative’: Did not queer theory and politics undermine, in significant ways, the traditional understanding of ‘gender’? Do not these theoretical, political and cultural developments which reach, as it is often claimed, ‘beyond (traditional) gender’ therefore, consequently, also introduce different configurations of how visibility is conceptualized and mobilized? Berger’s answer to these questions is not straightforward. Instead, it triggers yet another disruption to the narratives which dominate the feminist and queer theoretical and political scenes.

In other words, in addition to challenging the ‘story’ that gender theory arose in the U.S. in the 1980s as a provocation by the so-called French thought of the 1970s, Berger also contests the conventional and chronological distinction between gender and queer theory which suggests that the former precedes and determines the later.

Berger presents two arguments to support this reading. Firstly, she argues that ‘American’ gender theory has always been ‘queer’. This is because, as she illustrates with her readings, gender theory evolved in close proximity to what normative discourses call ‘sexual deviance’. Furthermore, by referring to Butler who, elaborating on Lacan, theorized the link between ‘gender’ and ‘flirtation’ (which in contemporary French is expressed by the verb ‘*draguer*’), Berger suggests that ‘without gender the sexual scene [was] if not inconceivable then at least

¹⁴⁶ Berger, *The Queer*, p. xx

unplayable'.¹⁴⁷ Thus, 'without "drag" (i.e., the theatricality of gender) there is no possibility of erotic relation and sexuality'; '[n]o *drague* without "drag"!'¹⁴⁸ Secondly, Berger contends that gay and lesbian studies cannot do without gender and its (feminist) theory, which she illustrates with an analysis of 'Sexual Traffic', the famous interview between Butler and Gayle Rubin. In this interview Rubin famously rejects gender as both a tool and an object of her analysis and leans instead toward a 'postfeminist' study of sex and sexuality.¹⁴⁹ As Berger shows with her reading of this text, gender, however, continues to haunt Rubin's wishful dreams of a gender-free discourse on sexuality.

'Gender', according to Berger, thus has not only been, from the very beginning, theorized as 'performance' but it has, as well, 'always already' been 'queer'.¹⁵⁰ This implies for the relationship between queer theory and politics and visibility that although 'gender trouble induces vision trouble and vice versa',¹⁵¹ it triggers a kind of 'troubling' which, nonetheless, still 'depends on a certain test of the visible':

Queer questioning of the gender partitioning and of the normative distribution of roles does not necessarily imply a way out of this paradigm. Even a certain 'American' thinking about sexuality that invokes Foucault and challenges the primacy of the category of gender as a tool for analysing the various forms of sexual oppression still subscribes, despite its denials, if not to a theatrical conception then at least to a theatrical practice of 'sexuality'. Now, as soon as there is theatre, there are roles, and as soon as there are roles, gender tends to reconstitute itself visibly, even if in a queer fashion.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁸ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁹ Gail Rubin with Judith Butler, 'Sexual Traffic: An Interview with Judith Butler', *differences*, 6 (1994): 62-99.

¹⁵⁰ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Berger, *The Queer*, p. 86.

¹⁵² Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 87.

To summarize then, the demand to be visible which to a certain extent defines current feminist and queer politics cannot be accounted for only as an implementation of the Western program of the Enlightenment, nor as a result of the ‘panoptical’ regimes which characterize contemporary societies. Berger suggests that there are two other sources to this demand. Both sources are tied to the political, intellectual and cultural specificity of ‘America’: First, it is the problematization of race by the American civil rights movements and, second, it is the articulation of ‘gender’ as a category that depends on a certain test of the visible further perpetuated by its ‘queer’ questioning.

For me, the second point also spells out an ‘idiomatic’ feature of current feminist and queer theories. As already suggested, showing that a ‘visibility demand’ is part and parcel of discourses on gender and sexuality could be considered to identify yet another ‘grammatical feature’ characteristic of the narratives which dominate discourses on feminism’s past and present, and their visions of its future put forward by Western feminist theory. More specifically, in addition to ‘grammatical features’ Hemmings identified, the ways certain feminist and queer discourses employ the rhetoric and conceptualize visibility might also contribute to the amenability of feminist narratives to institutionalizations and other interpretations which, rather than challenge, promote ‘non-feminist’ or ‘anti-feminist’ agendas. Yet, unlike the ‘grammatical features’ Hemmings’s identified with her analysis, the feature Berger problematizes seems to be of a different kind – it is specific to how the language of gender and sex is used.¹⁵³ This specificity, as

¹⁵³ As Berger argues, the language invoking ‘theatre’ is used in ordinary language on gender and sexuality (‘it has us frequently talk about “roles” to evoke the positions and relations of sex’). ‘In contrast, relations of class or race are almost never conceptualized as rooted in dramaturgy; only in rarefied theoretical circles is the analysis of the performativity of social relationships occasionally

follows from Berger's argument, is one of the reasons why certain strands within feminist and queer politics 'turn toward the spotlights'. It could therefore serve as an evidence that the feminist and queer discourses embracing this view are, if not intrinsically, at least significantly tied to the regimes of visibility upholding accountability cultures which, as argued previously, impose themselves with particular intensity in the context of the university. This insight thus could be seen as implying that prevailing discourses within the field are not only making certain feminist theory amenable, but are perhaps fundamental to the accountability regimes.

But this is not the end of the story that Berger offers with *The Queer Turn in Feminism*. Let us not forget that we are not dealing with a discourse where visibility is simply opposed to invisibility, but with a much more complex play between concealment and unveiling. In other words, because Berger does not treat 'visibility demand' simply as disciplinary but, rather, as a 'theatrical problem' which she approaches in a particular way, her account, as I interpret it, will help us propose a way of theorizing feminist resistance which makes use of this theatricality.

Beyond the Spotlights: Reinventing feminist resistance for a university-to-come.

While Berger is critical of a demand to become visible as characteristic of certain feminist and queer politics, and seeks to imagine strategies which would not depend on this demand, she, at the same time, acknowledges its importance. She argues:

pushed to such an extreme'. Clearly, at the same time, however, and also as both Berger and Hemmings show, 'sex' and 'gender' are not themes exclusive only to feminist discourses. Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 14.

identity politics [...] passes or must pass through a demand for visibility. There is no ‘social identity’ that holds together without recognition, and what is called recognition – the intersubjective mechanism that allows one unquestionably to call out to – or to believe one is calling out to – a given subject as a member of a socially and culturally identifiable category – presupposes or induces visibility.¹⁵⁴

As I interpret it, it is not, therefore, ‘visibilization’ or the ‘visible’ as such, which are the target of Berger’s critique, but a certain configuration of how the visible is distributed, of how discourses and the politics of ‘vizibilization’ are invoked and employed. Berger reminds us of the importance of distinguishing ‘between the epistemology of the visible and the philosophy (or philosophies) of “vision”’. As she points out, ‘[p]hilosophical and historical reflections on “seeing” do not necessarily follow the same logic or belong to the same realms as reflection on “making oneself seen” or “showing oneself,” although for obvious reasons the two are often conflated’.¹⁵⁵

In relation to feminist theory specifically, in this field, we also find more than one approach to ‘vision’ and ‘visibilization’. As Berger points out, the ‘visibility demand’, which dominates certain feminist and queer political scenes, is, at the same time, accompanied by an evident lack of ‘visibilization’. More specifically, discourses driven by the desire to ‘get to the spotlights’ at the same time ostensibly detach themselves from a certain kind of ‘vision’. Namely, they detach themselves from ‘a vision’ understood as a ‘utopian impetus’ which other feminist intellectual and political traditions (particularly those related to the context of the 1970s, and further continued and developed by scholars such as Drucilla Cornell,

¹⁵⁴ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁵ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 88.

Elizabeth Grosz) have considered to be ‘a necessary heuristic condition for theoretical and political progress’.¹⁵⁶

As I interpret it, rather than a critique of desire to be visible and/or arguing for invisibility, the stakes of Berger’s argument lie elsewhere. She challenges statements which are ‘endlessly reiterated in most of the courses and discourses on “gender”’ – that is, that ‘gender’ or ‘femininity’ are ‘constructions’ and are all about ‘performance’:

The claim that femininity is a construction has been repeated endlessly since the difference between the sexes began to attract interest as a social phenomenon. From Freud through Joan Rivière, Simone de Beauvoir, and many others up to and including Judith Butler, who has not given his or her version of “femininity” as masquerade, pantomime, myth, travesty, comedy, performance? Who has not understood, given the advent of the so-called human sciences, that every social organization is a construction and that the relations between the sexes, being rule-governed, do not escape that rule? Who does not know, finally, in the wake of the convergent efforts of linguistics, psychoanalysis, and anthropology, that the universe of every speaking being is a fiction? “Construction” is the destiny of the social animal.¹⁵⁷

As regards her methodology, Berger’s argument proceeds in a direction parallel to that presented in the previous chapter, where I suggested that we conceptualize a university responsibility rather than as a ‘performance’ as an ‘aporia’. I argued that conceiving of ethical relationships as ‘aporetic’ will open a possibility to embrace the ‘utopian impetus’ of feminist thinking, which feminist scholars such as

¹⁵⁶ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁷ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 11-12.

Hemmings and Wiegman, and many others before them (Drucilla Cornell in particular), have argued for.

Berger's book also offers an invitation to theorize a future radically different from our past and present. Her account, moreover, situates this attempt into the problematic central to feminist theorizing – the questions of gender, sex and sexuality. It opens a possibility for theorizing 'a way out' or an "'exit'"¹⁵⁸ from, or radical reconfiguration of, the normative staging of gender'.¹⁵⁹ She challenges an assumption that what we got used to call 'gender' takes place only 'on (social) stage' and introduces a possibility for theorizing it also as being 'off-stage', that is, beneath or beyond the 'performative closure'.¹⁶⁰ She calls for, as Ranjana Khanna would perhaps put it, feminist theorizing which rather than conceptualizing gender, sex and sexuality as 'spectacular' categories, grasps them as 'spectral'.¹⁶¹

Yet, Berger's proposition to consider sex and gender not only as being situated 'on the stage' but also being 'off stage', does not imply a 'theoretical' regression. It does not imply that 'sex' and 'gender identity' are a matter of 'essence' or a 'biological' given. Neither does it suggest we abandon identity politics which, as argued previously, must pass through a demand for visibility.

Rather, an attempt to articulate feminist and queer theories and politics which would

¹⁵⁸ Berger reminds us that the French translation of the word 'exit', *sortie*, serves as a title for Cixous' chapter in the book *The Newly-Born Woman*, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out', Forays'. Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 180.

¹⁵⁹ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 45.

¹⁶⁰ Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 44-45. Similarly, Berger's proposition is not a new one. As she herself points out, 'an entire current of thought which has undertaken to deconstruct the paradigm of visibility' has been developing alongside the more prevalent spectacular theorizations. Among those who 'find the very notion of visibility suspect, along with the role it plays, or may play, in a social problematic of gender identity, whether normative or not' Berger names thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Luce Irigaray and Derrida. Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 87. To this list I would also add other thinkers, such as Helen Cixous, Drucilla Cornell, Elizabeth Grosz, Barbara Johnson, Shoshana Felman, and also Bracha Ettinger and Jacqueline Rose.

¹⁶¹ Ranjana Khanna: 'On the Name, Ideation, and Sexual Difference', differences, special issue *Transatlantic Gender Crossings*, 27.2 (2016), 62-78 (p. 63).

‘escape not only from the logic of binary opposition (whether involving the man/woman opposition or the homo/hetero opposition) but also the logic of recognition [...]’ is done in order to theorize a possibility of political transformation.¹⁶² Theorizing ‘gender’ as that which ‘is yet to come, as the spectral demand from the future’ is an attempt to theorize, through the grammars’ of Western feminist theory, how a more just world than the one we have been inhabiting might become possible.¹⁶³ In relation to the university specifically, it opens a possibility of articulating, by using grammars specific to Western feminist theory, the university beyond its current ‘neoliberal’ and ‘phallogentric’ predicaments, a university-to-come.

¹⁶² Berger, *The Queer Turn*, p. 103-4.

¹⁶³ Khanna, ‘On the Name’, p. 73.

Conclusion – Re-counting and Re-visions

As with every journey, the one followed in this thesis will continue long after having reached its official end point. It will be underway and in motion after I complete my Cultural Studies PhD program at the School of Fine Arts, History of Art & Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds. In my future intellectual work I will continue engaging with feminist and deconstructive thinking. I will also continue questioning the limitations and dominant definitions which constrain the possibilities of the university and thus seek to open a space for its remaking.

Challenges, some of which are yet to be seen, and some which have already begun unfolding, will undoubtedly divert the direction, rhythm and construction of this path. Indeed during the four and a half years through which I have worked on the project, the ground has continued to move. Reorientations and reconnections will be necessary. Furthermore, interactions and disparities with the multitude of feminist and other approaches to the problem of institutionalisation and the university not accounted for in this thesis, will continue to emerge.

But before I attempt to anticipate and outline some of those diversions and reconnections, and propose potential responses to them, I will briefly recount how the problem of institutionalisation and the university has been taken up in this research study.

In this thesis I pursued a line of questioning towards the limitations and dominant definitions of the university and thus sought to open a possibility for its remaking by bringing together particular threads within feminist and deconstructive

thought. These explorations were carried through a ‘pseudo-concept’ *tremendous pedagogies*.

The kinds of trembling feminist thinking and deconstruction trigger were, however, not treated as interchangeable or reducible to one another. This is implied not only by the particularity of the enabling limits of the emergence of these two ‘schools’. Importantly, it is also a question of how they are taken up, how they are put at work by those who are guided by them; who use them and from which place.

How and from where is it, then, that *I* came to these questions? I did not consider the differences and disparities between and within feminist thinking and deconstruction and their particular employments to be a weakness or a defect, and thus as something which had to be overcome and smoothed over. Rather, I embraced this heterogeneity and disparity as a condition and an emerging sign of plurality understood both as an intellectual, a political and a personal aim which I sought to cultivate.

I traced and developed the ‘tremendous’ abilities of feminist thinking and deconstruction and explored their folding particularly around the question of the university. This, however, was not in order to argue that the university is a self-identical formation which, for instance, due to unprecedented pressures of marketization has recently been plunged into crisis. Or, conversely, that we need to put educational institution into crisis, that the university is in need of being ‘trembled’ or ‘shaken up’. In my view, the university is not to be approached as a formation which once had or still has one unifying idea and function. Its history should also not be reduced to a single linear narrative. I argued for conceiving and have explored the university as a formation which has been, from the very

beginning, inherently paradoxical and a source of diverse or even conflicted political, theoretical and institutional effects.

In order to theoretically grasp this peculiar character of educational formations and the diverse effects they set off, I employed the notion of ‘*pedagogies*’. In my view, this word is no less complex and ambiguous than the word ‘tremendous’. The way *pedagogies* lead us is not by taking us through a secure and straightforward path. As we have seen on various occasions throughout the thesis, it is not unusual that pedagogies teach something else or more than they say they do, that they escape beyond themselves and undermine their own foundational principles and rules. This, on the one hand, opens them to unexpected and multiple flows of possibilities. On the other, however, it implies that teaching as well as learning is also a dangerous journey full of simulacra and deception, a path which may lead astray. I therefore conceived of *pedagogy* as a path which makes us both tremble and wonder.

This irresolvable paradox, a certain kind of tremendousness perhaps, is inherent to pedagogies. Yet, despite of it, or, rather, because of it, I argued that we must strive to, as I have attempted to, follow and thus continue our transforming pedagogies. For my part, it is our only hope of instituting the university and its practices which are yet to emerge. Only in this way can we open a possibility for the unheard-of teachings and institutions which are fabulous and extraordinary not only in what and how they teach but also in how they are organized as institutions, a university of the world more just than the one we have inhabited.

To articulate this in a more mundane terms, the ‘tremendous’ question I wrestled with in my thesis was how we could theorize and produce academic work which will not affirm the current configuration of disciplinary powers we seek to

contest. I identified and examined the unfolding of irresolvable paradoxes inherent to *pedagogy* to alert us to the intricacies of ‘teachings’. This was to suggest that we have to differentiate and choose carefully between various schools and to pay attention to how we follow them. More specifically, we must decide which rhetorical and conceptual means are to be used to counter trends such as the marketization of the university or discourses which try to persuade us that we live in ‘post-patriarchal’ and therefore also in a ‘post-feminist’ world.

How did I take up this ‘tremendous’ task in this thesis? Where did Tremendous Pedagogies (mis)lead me and where did I take them? Which intricacies of pedagogies did I engage with? And what kind of possibilities and flows did it open, if any? How do we proceed in this journey?

As the ‘pseudo-concept’ *tremendous pedagogies* indicates, the aim was not to provide definite answers or to resolve aporias and reduce complexities and discrepancies. This thesis did not provide final solutions and resolutions to the problem of the university. Nor did it provide a metanarrative of feminism’s institutionalization within the establishment of Western higher education. It did not provide solutions which would, for once and all, ‘de-neoliberalize’ the ‘neoliberal university’. This, however, is not to say that this endeavour did not take us anywhere and that it was pointless journey which could have been avoided. I will briefly recount the places encountered on this journey before attempting to signpost those which may lie ahead.

In part one, it was Brown’s famous essay ‘The Impossibility of Women’s Studies’ and Wiegman’s reading of it which triggered my journey. The latter’s critical analysis did not only provide a spring board for my own deliberations on how the possibility of feminist scholarship and its disciplinarity can be further re-

thought. It also triggered and guided the examination and the critique of discourses through which the university is most commonly accounted for.

In response to the lessons learnt in the first chapter, the second chapter approached Derrida's essay 'Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery and Magisteriality'. My reading of this text showed that whether academic disciplines are, in their impossibility, possible, and how the two can be negotiated, was always at stake. The modern university is, structurally, 'out of place'. Yet, importantly, this reading also revealed that the forces which keep this paradoxical academic topology 'in place' are not, as Derrida seems to be suggesting in his essay, only 'metaphysical' but also 'phallogocentric'. Paralleling and further developing Sarah Kofman's analysis of Kant's ethics, I showed that the university is founded by the exclusion of the sexually other.¹ In the case of the university however, as I proposed, this exclusion is mastered by the teaching philosopher playing a 'double game', by using 'sexual powers' which are both 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

In the chapters of part two entitled 'Accounting for the University' I was then led to examine discourses which seek to theorize how the university can resist trends which we have witnessed in the academia for nearly three decades, the so called 'neoliberalization' of knowledge and the 'corporatization' of the university. Here the exploration proceeded through a term where this struggle both manifests and forms itself in a revealing way; the word and concept of 'accountability'.

Following Mowitt's work, I did not treat accountability as a disciplinary technique but as a textual problem.² This was done in order to avoid one of the key stumbling blocks which prevent us from theorizing the university and the humanities

¹ Kofman, 'The Economy of Respect', pp. 355-372.

² Mowitt, *Text*.

respectively as other than ‘in ruin’. More specifically, a textual reading was implemented in order to critically address an assumption that the two (the humanities and the university) will survive the pandemics of financialization only by fortifying themselves against encroachment from what is understood to be their ‘others’. In my journey, I therefore sought assistance from scholars working within the ‘textual’ tradition, notably Peggy Kamuf.³ Yet, in addition to Mowitt’s argument (that it is mostly those who follow the ‘critique of instrumental reason’ who rely on and further perpetuate this assumption), my exploration revealed that it has also been followed by scholars of the so called ‘textual reading’.⁴ My intervention in this tradition consisted of tracing how ‘counting’ and ‘accounting’ had been treated in the history of Western theoretical work (drawing on Derrida’s texts ‘Outwork’ and ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’), and by showing how, drawing on the work of Keith Hoskin, ‘accountability’ had been, since its very beginning, intimately intertwined with the modern university and its teachings.⁵

The final third part of the thesis further followed interventions into accounts of the university and feminism’s entanglement with it. In chapter five I developed Clare Hemming’s suggestion to tell feminist stories differently proposed in her book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* in relation to ethics. I further amplified the inherent paradox which I identified in one of the terms crucial to her account, ‘amenability’. By drawing on my reading of Derrida’s work, I proposed *tremendous responsibilities*, a conceptualization of ethicality which would be adequate to the character and aims of her feminist intervention.⁶

³ Kamuf, ‘Accountability’, 251-266.

⁴ Mowitt, ‘On the One Hand’, 311-366.

⁵ Hoskin, ‘The Awful Idea’, pp. 265-282.

⁶ I followed specifically his essay on a problem of a ‘university responsibility (‘Mochlos’) and the book where Derrida follows Jan Patočka’s work, *The Gift of Death*.

This proposition, however, did not tackle one of the key issues, which, as I see it, represents yet another stumbling block in our theorizations of how feminist work can take place in the university, the problem of how we can articulate its irreducible and irreplaceable specificity, its singularity. In order to address this problem I led us to the work of Anne Berger.⁷ I focused particularly on her conceptualization of theatricality in and of feminist and queer politics and theories. I ended this chapter by reflecting on how Berger's work sheds further light on how the narratives feminist theorists produce about feminism entangle with the trends which dominate current Western universities. More importantly, however, I suggested that it also provides a means to articulate how 'stories' produced by feminist theory may help us envision that other university, a university-to-come.

There are particular issues which stand out and which I wish to highlight and thus conclude this thesis. I have followed feminist thinkers who propose new directions and shifts in how we account for feminism's entanglement with the university and imagine its future.⁸ My proposition, however, was not meant to deter us from building on previous feminist work, let alone to break with it. It is not only that such a 'turn', 'shift' or a 'break' would be unnecessary but, more importantly, it would have been a repetitive replay of gestures which would be harmful in the attempt to imagine and theorise transformation. Instead, I therefore sought to excavate and re-cultivate traditions and currents within feminist thinking which developed alongside more prevalent strands. Indeed, as readers familiar with the scene of Western feminist theory have undoubtedly detected, the feminist traditions I am drawn towards are those which explore concepts and paradigms which, as it

⁷ I discussed particularly her book *The Queer Turn in Feminism*.

⁸ In the thesis, I followed specifically the work of Robyn Wiegman, Clare Hemmings and Anne E. Berger but I also drew from work of feminist theorists such as Drucilla Cornell, Elizabeth Grosz and Joan W. Scott.

seems from my vantage point, have been rather peripheral, such as those which mobilize concepts of sexual differences.

One of these thinkers, Elizabeth Grosz, conceives of ‘the force of sexual difference’ as ‘that untidy and ambiguous invocation of the pre-structuring of being by irreducible difference’.⁹ This force, Grosz argues,

is that which both preconditions and destabilizes gender and bodies, that which problematizes all identity, that which discourse and representation cannot contain and politics cannot direct: sexual difference as force; and force itself as divided, differentiated, sexualized.¹⁰

While I am drawn to feminist theorizations of sexual differences such as that proposed by Grosz, I also believe, however, that the way we reach this ‘shift’, or rather, as I perceive it, this ‘distortion’ in the focus of Western feminist theorizing, cannot proceed in a manner seemingly taken by Grosz, that is, by prioritising this current in opposition to the others.¹¹ This is not simply to appeal to a feminist ‘ethical imperative’ of accepting difference and endorsing plurality. Nor is it because one would, by doing so, claim for oneself the position of the right and true feminist, and thus would condemn other positions as being ‘not feminist enough’.¹² It is rather that for feminist theories to be effective, this plurality is necessary.

⁹ Grosz, ‘The Force’, p. 171.

¹⁰ Grosz, ‘The Force’, p. 172.

¹¹ Grosz does not use this strategy only in order to propose a shift in the paradigmatic focus of feminist theory. She employs similar gesture also in relation to philosophy and critical theory. See, for instance, an interview where she argues that ‘the whole linguistic turn’ is a paradigm where ‘all of nature was in fact language, all of the real was symbolic, nature was historicized, history was the overcoming of nature’. Elizabeth Grosz and Esther Wolfe, ‘Bodies of Philosophy: An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz’, *Stance*, 7 (2014), 115-126 (p.125).

¹² For how this strategy has been used within storytelling of Western feminist theory see Hemmings’ *Why Stories Matter*. I discussed this work in chapter V, ‘Narratives of Western Feminist Theory and the Problem of Amenability’.

This is why I find Berger's idea of thinking about the 'feminist theoretical scene' as a 'theatre', where one is not troubled only with what and who is on the stage but is interested and takes into account and problematizes that which is off-stage, particularly useful.¹³ This conceptualization, furthermore, seems to me also a useful way of enabling the future and welcoming the plurality, the richness, the divergences and disparities which are yet to come or have already been unfolding but which my thesis has not accounted for.

The most obvious shift, as it seems to me, is the one in how feminist thinking has been portrayed by the mainstream media and popular culture and how it has been taken up by political movements not only in the U.S. and the UK, but also in France or the Czech Republic. As argued previously, one of the key triggers for the explorations presented in this thesis was a certain diversion, within both the broader socio-cultural and political space as well as certain threads of feminist and cultural theory, stemming from the belief that different worlds are possible. More specifically, I followed feminist scholars who took into account the so called 'turn away from feminism'¹⁴ and the rise of 'postfeminism' and sought to address them in a way which would not further confirm and perpetuate these trends.¹⁵

The rise of women's protests and the founding of multiple activist groups promoting feminist agendas particularly among younger generations within the past few years would indicate that this has changed. We also have witnessed a shift in

¹³ For my discussion of Berger's proposition and its significance for our theorizations of the university and its future, see the final chapter, 'Re-inventing Feminist Resistance for an University-to-come'.

¹⁴ Scott, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹⁵ On the problem of 'post-feminism' see, for instance, Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, p. 137-138.

how feminism is portrayed particularly in English speaking mainstream media and popular cultures.¹⁶ Where these distortions will lead is yet to be seen.

Related to these shifts, and in relation to the university specifically, are a number of intertwined and complex epistemological, political, technological and economic changes provoked by the quick advancement of computational automation under techno-capitalism and anxieties induced by a global financial crisis.

One manifestation of these shifts has been the collapse of employment and the destruction of the salaried condition.¹⁷ Clearly, those previously most threatened by automation were unskilled workers mostly located in the ‘Third World’, followed more recently by specialist manual trades and the liberal professions. However, the opportunities to work are shrinking also for intellectual and creative workers – that is, for those, whose *job is to invent futures*. As always, its negative impact is amplified for those who are systematically disadvantaged by the current configurations of disciplinary powers (based on the intersections of gender, class, sexual, ethnicity or language). This has been further modified and magnified by contestations regarding citizenship and migration alongside other global geo-

¹⁶ See for instance the so called ‘Women’s March’, a worldwide protest which took place on 21 January 2017 (*Women’s March on Washington*, <https://www.womensmarch.com/> [accessed 27 March 2017]). In the Czech Republic, a group of feminist artists and activists which calls themselves ‘Čtvrtá vlna’ [*The Fourth Wave*] started operate in 2016. See, for instance, a video reflecting on sexism in art schools produced by the group reflecting and published in 2017: Čtvrtá vlna, ‘Sexismus na českých uměleckých školách’ [‘Sexism in Czech Fine Art Schools’], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IalaPTetZig> [accessed 21 January 2017]. For activism in the UK see Rosie Collington, ‘Student Feminist Jamboree 2014: Taking student feminism forward’, *The Independent*, 25 February 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/istudents/student-feminist-jamboree-2014-taking-student-feminism-forward-9151762.html> [accessed 27 March 2017]. See also a transnational, transdisciplinary and multilingual collective شبكة نسوية للقراءات / *Sdružení feministických čtení/ Feminist Readings Network* which provides space for the reflection and invention of feminist thinking, art, pedagogy and politics for emerging practitioners and which I co-founded with other feminist activists, artists and scholars in 2016) شبكة نسوية للقراءات / *Feminist Readings Network*, <<https://feministreadings.org/equipe/>> [accessed 27 March 2017].

¹⁷ Bernard Stiegler, ‘Introduction: Functional Stupidity, Entropy and Negentropy in the Anthropocene’, in *Automatic Society: The Future of Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), pp. 1-18; Bernard Stiegler and Anaïs Nony, ‘Bernard Stiegler on Automatic Society: As told to Anaïs Nony’, *The Third Rail Quarterly* 5, (2015): 16-17.

political and ecological shifts. The future of tremendous pedagogies will have to take these issues which are already underway into account.

These changes, however, do not undermine the proceedings pursued in my thesis. Rather, they demand that we take into even deeper consideration the propositions made in relation to how we account for the concept and the institutions of the university and any modifications or alternatives to it. In terms of neoliberalism and techno-capitalism, it is necessary to approach the university and the changes it is currently undergoing with paradigms other than those which currently dominate the debate. This, again, is not a call for a radical break with the traditions of critical thinking. Rather, the argument is that we have to put to work and re-cultivate theoretical traditions and habits of academic work which have, as it seems, disappeared from the toolkits of most of the critical thinkers who seek to address the problem of the future ‘under neoliberalism’.

More specifically, critically addressing, let alone proposing alternatives to ‘societies under neoliberalism’ is not merely a question of choosing between ‘Marxism’ and ‘Foucault’, as is claimed by Wendy Brown who, in *Undoing Demos*, ‘chooses’ Foucault.¹⁸ There are other strands of ‘poststructuralist’ thought than that of Foucault; strands which are not reducible to or may even be in conflict with his discourse.¹⁹ These strands include texts by Jacques Derrida and deconstruction. As I sought to show, Derrida’s work and deconstruction particularly have a lot to offer in our critique of ‘the neoliberalization’ of the university and our search for ways to

¹⁸ Wendy Brown, ‘Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism’s Remaking of State and Subject’, in *Undoing Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), pp. 17-46.

¹⁹ On ‘the widespread misapprehension ... that Derrida is essentially talking about *discourse* when he uses terms like “writing” or “text,” ...’ see Bennington’s rather harsh critique of Butler’s introduction to the new edition and translation of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* from 2016. Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Embarrassing Ourselves’, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (2016), <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/embarrassing-ourselves/>> [accessed 27 March 2017].

theoretically articulate how a university, beyond its current ‘neoliberal’ but also ‘phallogentric’ predicament, could be possible.²⁰

However, this approach must be different from those prevailing among scholars who work under the name of ‘deconstruction’ today. More specifically, as I read it, the aim of deconstruction is not simply to ‘complicate things’ and therefore does not need to be abandoned or replaced when one wants to get ‘things straight’, i.e. give judgments or make decisions.²¹ As follows from my journey through Tremendous Pedagogies, the work of deconstruction is rather a step which it is necessary to take in order to make the ‘right decisions’.

As such, deconstruction can open rather than close the possibility of intervening within the current context of disciplinary powers and thus needs to be put to work in our current and future efforts to rethink the issues of institutionalization, disciplinarity and the university. Yet, in order for me to do so effectively, the teachings of deconstruction need to be both distorted and augmented by feminist thinking. For my part, it is the places where deconstruction and feminist thinking fold into each other that cause the most interesting and profound trembling. It is in the instances of their interfolding, such as those explored in this thesis, where I envision the possibility of tremendous pedagogies.

²⁰ On deconstructive work on the university which takes into account ‘neoliberalism’ see Bernard Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2015).

²¹ Elizabeth Grosz makes similar point. She argues against the prevailing representation of deconstruction, and Derrida’s work in particular: ‘while critical and perhaps in that sense politically useful, deconstruction ... remain(s) ironic, parodic, skeptical, negative: calking a clear plan, given goals, a set of criteria to distinguish better from worse outcomes; that is, having no clear ethical or political stand, it tends toward nihilism’. It is a view which construes deconstruction as ‘destructive, perhaps – but never adequately constructive: able to criticize politics but never able to positively contribute to it’. Grosz, ‘The Time of Violence’, 57.

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