

Feminist Women *for* Deconstruction

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Abstract. Certain feminist women have defended a compatible alliance between feminism and deconstruction; this paper examines this alleged beneficial relationship and highlights the impasse it eventually reaches. As deconstruction fails their declared political aspiration, these feminists tend to alter the meaning of politics and appeal to “uncertainty and equivocation” for no apparent reason other than accommodating deconstruction. Ironically, these attempts only neutralize the politics of feminism, leading this alliance into a self-inflicted inertia: a state of paralysis between promises and their fulfillment. The incompatibility between the two stems from the essential traits of each: feminism is a political movement and deconstruction attacks every form of politics. This alliance, therefore, cannot be maintained without activating an aporetic paralysis for which politics is said to be neither “in the world” nor outside the world.

Deconstruction is *certainly* not feminist... if there is one thing it must not come to, it's feminism.... So I would say that deconstruction is a deconstruction of feminism, from the start, in so far as feminism is a form— no doubt a necessary form at a certain moment— but a form of phallogocentrism among many others.⁽¹⁾

Feminism should not be afraid to demand that it should have its cake and eat it too.⁽²⁾

We paradoxically owe to deconstruction the meaning of the appearance of gender as a system precisely in its deconstructability. And it is in this paradox that feminism finds its explanatory power and its political possibility.⁽³⁾

(1) Jacques, Derrida, “Deconstruction in America” *Critical Exchange* 17(Winter 1985), p. 30; emphasis original.

(2) Diane, Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyrne* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 60.

(3) Cornell, Drueilla, “Enabling Paradoxes: Gender Difference and Systems Theory” *New Literary History* 27 (1996), pp. 185-197; quotation, p. 197.

Certain women's cultivation of a relation with deconstruction has driven their feminism to relinquish the political cause which motivates that very relation. As deconstruction fails their declared political intentions, these women advance an *imagined* and "unheard of sense" of the political, thereby modifying the meaning of "politics," "subject," "identity," and "justice." Though they advance high claims for the relation between deconstruction and feminism, they commonly end up showing its poverty for the politics they promote. Within their various arguments, the alleged "limitless possibilities" deconstruction supposedly opens only lead to a self-inflated inertia which activates an aporetic paralysis for which politics are said to be neither "in the world" nor outside the world. Only a faithful acceptance of the "unheard of sense" of the "political" would lead to an "imagined" world where uncertainty, equivocation and ambiguity are privileged. The affinity with deconstruction not only neutralizes the political, but renders feminism "a form of phallogocentrism." In tracing this oxymoronic motif, I shall first present women's argument for the power they see deconstruction imparting to their political cause. Then, I shall show how avid feminist proponents of deconstruction ultimately end up relinquishing the cause for which they advocate the relevance of deconstruction, and advancing a mystic faith in unknowledge, uncertainty, and equivocation. The title of this paper seeks to embody this self-defeating relation; the "for" in the title signifies both "pro" and liable to deconstruction.

I.

The search for the relevance of deconstruction to feminism is politically motivated, and thus the argument revives an old and familiar issue: whether or not deconstruction is political enough. Derrida's commitment to the political has been contested time and again; it has been pointed out that Derrida's left hand takes away what his right seems to give; that deconstruction promises what it does not allow. For detailed arguments and counter-arguments, one may consult Allan Megill, M. H. Abrams, or Paul Jay.⁽⁴⁾ The conclusions of a few scholars are in order here. Irene Harvey claims that "at the moment of finding, or at least naming, the law, Derrida takes back what he gives forth: the law, the name, the justification."⁽⁵⁾ Nancy Fraser asserts: "Deconstruction slides incessantly—strategically, it would say—between a politics of revolution and a politics of resistance. It says the alternative is undecidable and lingers on the threshold, refusing to choose."⁽⁶⁾

According to E. R. Davey, Derrida himself is caught up in this tricky state "of

⁽⁴⁾ M. H. Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel" and "Construing and Deconstructing" *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. with foreword, Michael Fischer (New York and London: W. W. Norton, and Company, 1991); Paul Jay, "Bridging the Gap: The Position of Politics in Deconstruction" *Cultural Critique* 22 (Fall 1992), pp. 47-74; Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁽⁵⁾ Irene Harvey, "Derrida and the Issues of Exemplarity" *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 209; cf. 212, 305.

⁽⁶⁾ Nancy Fraser, "The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political" *Working Through Derrida*, ed. and intro. Gary B. Madison (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 56.

having to deny the efficacy of the tool he uses in the very act of using it.”⁽⁷⁾

As feminist women approach deconstruction for support, they succumb to the paradoxical state of simultaneously maintaining and rejecting the power they perceive in deconstruction. Much of the resulting ambivalence stems from two mutually exclusive interests. Deconstruction deconstructs all politics, revolts against all forms of established norms, and is powerful in exposing biased, hidden politics in Western thought, but it cannot advocate a particular political construct. Feminism, on the other hand, is anything but apolitical. Therefore, while deconstruction’s power justifies these women’s pursuit of an “alliance with deconstruction,” that very alliance is constrained by feminism’s political orientation, for which women have sought the alliance in the first place. Their interest, therefore, seems to be doomed from the start, revealing all the defects deconstruction ascribes to traditional thought: it is teleological, selective, politically oriented, and assumes the self-presence of an autonomously free subject who can freely choose or reject deconstruction. For deconstruction, however, choice is by definition impossible. As Derrida states the case in his *Of Grammatology*, “In the deconstruction of the arche, one does not make a choice.”⁽⁸⁾

Naturally, the recent attempts to relate Derrida’s deconstruction to the political cause of feminism have reached disproportionate extremes. Both avid feminist proponents and scrupulous opponents seem to believe in deconstruction’s ability to account for serious issues ranging from theories of the text to theories of the subject, from jealousy to religion. Books, articles, addresses, interviews, applications, and scattered statements on deconstruction’s relevance to feminism have of late become overwhelming. Nothing can better embody a paradoxical investment than the disparate claims with which feminism accommodates deconstruction. Even cautious and politically involved women now see in deconstructive poststructuralism valuable gains that will advance the cause of women, a case well defended even by women of non-deconstructive orientations, such as Sandra Harding and Mary Poovey.

The sincere intent to establish and appropriate an alliance between deconstruction and feminism bypasses the recognition of their incompatibility. It seeks to insulate Derrida against his alleged anti-feminism and his many detractors, including many feminist women like Linda Alcoff, Margaret Whitford, Susan Bordo, Luce Irigaray, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, Denise Riley, Jane Tompkins, Nicole Ward Jouve, Tania Modleski, Jane Marcus, and Ruth Salvaggio.

The defense, however, often reaches a high pitch. Hoping to revalue Derrida’s importance, Grosz, for example, can only denounce all feminists, morally and intellectually. For her, this revaluation “will function as a mode of criticism of both those

⁽⁷⁾ E. R. Davey, “‘The Words Which We are Using do not Satisfy Me...’, Interpreting Derrida: a Dissenting View” *Journal of European Studies* 27 (1997), p. 15.

⁽⁸⁾ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. and Intro. Gayatri C. Spivak. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 62.

feminists who have resolutely attacked deconstruction... without any familiarity with [Derrida's] writings and those feminists who have actively struggled with his texts... only to reject it as outside of or hostile to feminist concerns."⁽⁹⁾ The linguistic difference between "chairman/chairperson," as Elam phrases her defense, "makes no difference, and those who argue that it does should just shut up and stop complaining about such a silly linguistic convention" (33). Yet throughout her book, she builds her argument on these silly linguistic conventions. Women opponents of deconstruction bear similarly acrimonious sentiment. For Jane Marcus, to cite one instance, deconstruction is nothing but "an arrogant apolitical American adolescent with too much muscle and a big mouth."⁽¹⁰⁾

Whether or not Elam's and Grosz's prescriptive revaluations will straighten the record, doubts and mistrust of Derrida's position abound. If Alice Jardine complains that prior to 1985 Derrida had "never explicitly mentioned a woman writer,"⁽¹¹⁾ Mary C. Rawlinson has recently responded that "Though Derrida addresses woman or the question of woman directly and frontally in only a few of his many texts, nonetheless the figure of woman reappears throughout his writing."⁽¹²⁾ Yet, even such a hesitant recognition of Derrida's more positive involvement in the women's cause usually meets serious doubts. Ronald A. Champagne, in fact, has warned against Derrida's adoption of the "question of woman... so late in his career."⁽¹³⁾ And Feder and Zakin have recently demonstrated Derrida's masculine orientation, especially in *Spurs*, Derrida's exemplar text on the question of woman: "Women have always been exchanged in the service of men's subjectivity. Derrida may simply be offering a new twist to an old theme: he exchanges women in the service of the *deconstruction* of men's subjectivity."⁽¹⁴⁾

The idea of "exchange," however, has its self-defeating limitation. Feminist women adopt deconstruction to promote their own political cause, only to stand deconstruction on its head or to tailor their feminism to fit into an apolitical deconstruction. According to Ellen T. Armour, though Derrida's deconstruction has many achievements, it fails to "fulfill feminism's desire for plenitude leading feminists to seek a replacement

⁽⁹⁾ Elizabeth Grosz, "Ontology and Equivocation: Derrida's Politics of Sexual Difference" *Feminist Interpretation of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy J. Holland. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 74-75.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Jane Marcus, "Still Practice, A/Wrested Alphabet: Toward a Feminist Aesthetic." *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, ed. Shari Benstock. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 87.

⁽¹¹⁾ Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 62.

⁽¹²⁾ Mary C. Rawlinson, "Levers, Signatures, and Secrets: Derrida's Use of Women," *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, ed. Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 69.

⁽¹³⁾ Roland A. Champagne, *Jacques Derrida* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 84.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Ellen K. Feder and Emily Zakin, "Flirting with the Truth: Derrida's Discourse with 'Woman' and Wenches," in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 40, emphasis original.

elsewhere.”⁽¹⁵⁾ This disabling limitation becomes the ground for deconstruction’s relevance to feminism and religion. Its strategic challenging critique and “theologizing” of feminism itself open “the possibility of helping both feminism and religion follow certain courses that each deems important” (195). This leap from strategy to faith becomes the essence of Armour’s theo-political call to ally feminism to deconstruction. In the process, she yokes Irigaray and Derrida, even though Irigaray strongly opposes the position of Derrida.

For Armour, Irigaray’s importance stems from her recognition of woman’s “divinity”; Derrida’s relevance hinges on his rejection of the Death of God. To bring together their different positions, Armour finds in Derrida’s “supplement” the necessary means (199). Asserting the insufficiency of each alone, Armour believes that together they reify the “feminist desired plenitude,” and religion itself justifies the continuous need for the supplement: “feminism is always already involved with religion” (205). As it turns out, feminism will have to be flooded with deconstruction if it is to achieve its desired “plenitude.”

Although the “supplement” regulates the relation between Derrida and Irigaray, strangely enough Derrida alone assumes the pivotal power. At the only place where the “logic” of the supplement seems to function properly, we are given the following statement: “reading them as *suppléments* keeps them circulating around one another” (199). However, this mutual circulation seems to break down as Derrida’s deconstruction inundates feminist discourse and thought. In fact, given the topology of the argument, this inundation is materially graphic: the argument starts with Derrida’s importance for feminism, then defends Derrida against feminist and non-feminist detractors, asserts the insufficiency of feminism, emphasizes Irigaray’s religious stand, then circles back to deconstruction’s importance. The very conclusion of the argument privileges Derrida and religion and puts feminists and their thought on the receiving end: “Following this reading of Derrida and Irigaray on religion and gender through the strategy of *supplémentation* offers a distinctive perspective on Derrida’s value for feminism and on the significance of religion for feminist thought” (211). Still, feminist women are, as always, in need of a Derrida and Religion.

Enlisting deconstruction to further the cause of women is a tendency shared by many committed, though non-deconstructive feminist women. Chris Weedon opens her book by asserting that “Feminism is a politics,” and has sought support from all poststructuralist theories which must “include Jacques Derrida’s theory of *différance*, with its critique of the metaphysics of presence.”⁽¹⁶⁾ For her, however, Derrida’s value for feminism is highly constraining, and leads to nothing but political quietism. Like

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ellen T. Armour, “Crossing the Boundaries between Deconstruction, Feminism, and Religion” in Nancy J. Holland, ed. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 199.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 1, 12.

Armour, Weedon is highly selective in utilizing deconstruction; she limits its usefulness to a method of “instigating new, more progressive theories” (160). However, even this usefulness is undercut by deconstruction’s own practice “in American literary criticism” where it only “reaffirms the status quo” (160).

The challenges deconstruction poses for Western thought, including feminism itself, appear to justify deconstruction’s relevance to feminism. Feminists, therefore, reorient teleologically these challenges to serve their own ends. Feder and Zakin exemplify this tendency at its best: “Derrida’s analysis challenges the structural apparatus that sustains the reproduction of patriarchy” (24). Yet, though Derrida’s masculinist “authorial position remains stable, consistent with that structurally accorded to men” (41-42), Feder and Zakin “aim to distill from Derrida’s text [*Spurs*] its feminist potential to dismantle gender” (25), and to utilize Derrida’s dismantling of “man’s” subjectivity in order to argue for “women” subjects. For them, deconstruction must serve “feminist ends” (43). Whether or not deconstruction supports identity, subject, choice, or even the category “woman” does not seem to be of concern here.

II.

Like Feder and Zakin, and much closer to Armour, Grosz recognizes the challenges Derrida poses to feminism itself and sees in them the only way for a better political status and only political ticket to the third millenium (74). Attending to these challenges, Grosz maintains, will help feminism in its 21st century politics, and inject renewed power into the feminist cause. On close inspection, her advocacy of the “challenges to the self-conception of feminist theories” anticipates a major theme in deconstruction’s relevance to feminism. She wants feminism to be preoccupied with its own position rather than with steps towards a political program. As Grosz advances her argument, a wide discrepancy opens between the profitable challenges deconstruction supposedly promotes and the actual results such challenges assert. For Grosz, these challenges will “make feminist theory more self-critical, more aware of necessary conceptual and political investments and the cost of these investments, and thus more effective and more incisive in its struggles than it may have been before or beyond deconstruction” (75). The word “struggles” becomes the embodiment of an unresolvable paradox; feminism must struggle against itself in order to be “more self-critical”; feminist theory must sharpen its tools against itself to make itself more acceptable and accommodating to deconstruction, a theme common to all feminist advocates of “true” and effective deconstruction.

Naturally, by the end of her defense, Grosz vitiates the high claims she attributes to deconstruction. Thus, although deconstruction is critical of bad faith, she grounds its “*relation*” to feminism on the faithful “acceptance” of “a possibly antagonistic and possibly allied set of struggles” (84, emphasis original). To justify the struggles and the alliance on the basis of “acceptance,” Grosz appeals to “equivocation” only to perpetuate the acceptance and the struggle. She tells us that Derrida “takes seriously feminist

issues,” but he “neither does... (nor could) provide solutions for these issues insofar as feminism is not resolvable through the acquisition of certain specific rights and values” (93). Like deconstruction, feminism must reject any certain and specific “rights or values.” To fit feminism into deconstruction, Grosz bypasses the disarming differences and concedes that Derrida’s work should not “be accepted wholesale as feminist or as readily compatible with and amenable to feminism” (94). In fact, without faithfully embracing “uncertainties, ambiguities, and equivocations,” feminist women would not have learned much; the purpose of Grosz, therefore, is “to demonstrate that feminist demands for a clear-cut position, for answers, for unequivocal boundaries and divisions, and certainties in political judgment can afford to learn much from deconstruction” (75). Feminists, to cultivate this relation with deconstruction, have to commit themselves to these uncertainties.

This is Elam’s enthusiastic position. Like Grosz, she rejects particularities, specific rights and values; nothing will do short of deconstructing the “political” itself, because “the stake for feminism and for deconstruction is not the working out of a particular politics but rather the insistence that the nature of the political must remain open to question, to modification.” Elam examines the two together “allow a new range of differences of opinion to appear” (68). However, the “new range” must remain, as she later says, an impractical pure difference, neither in the world nor in the ivory tower. This very constrained position informs her entire book whose subtitle, *Ms. en abyme*, emphasizes the importance of the abyss which only leads to the common advocacy of “uncertainty,” aporia, and self-imposed inertia.

Like other feminists, Elam admits deconstruction’s incompatibility with feminism. Yet she is more committed to allaying the two, even as she admits the necessity of setting them apart. She wants deconstruction to remain alongside feminism only to vitiate the politics of her feminist cause. Her position looks like the fellowship with which Jonathan Loesberg characterizes deconstruction: “I conceive deconstruction here as an exemplary fellow-traveller than as a theoretical law-giver” (241). Therefore, Elam can only argue “that feminism and deconstruction are beside each other in that they share a parallel divergence from (or dislocation of) politics and philosophy” (1). The very reason for the alliance sets the two apart. Deconstruction’s powerful challenge of traditional politics has motivated this appropriation by feminists, but since it sustains no politics, feminists must choose. Elam cannot make a choice if she has to save the alliance other than neutralizing the politics of feminism.

The process of this neutralization leads feminism back to itself, instead of promoting a political program. Both deconstruction and feminism question incessantly the terms of the opposition, including their own. And the affinity between the two depends on, and entrap them in, this questioning process of “the political.” As Elam asserts: “deconstruction is better understood as a questioning of the terms in which we understand the political, rather than as a simple negation of the political. In this sense, it has much in common with the feminist refusal to accept the terms within and by which

politics is conventionally practiced” (67). Although not “a simple negation of the political,” deconstruction, however, affirms no politics; it only affirms, as Elam explains, a “subtle and sophisticated” negation.

Instead of addressing this subtle non-negation, Elam advocates the importance of “questioning the political” in which both deconstruction and feminism are entrapped. This process enhances the affinity between the two and keeps both toiling on what is already there: “the emphasis would be on deconstruction’s and feminism’s insistent questioning of the political” (81). Such a state is later reaffirmed as an end in itself: “the interpretation of the future (of politics) is always in process without it ever becoming determinable” (84). Deconstruction and feminism, then, invest not in what will be or must be, but in deconstructing what has been. There is no vision, only revision of an existing vision; after all, it is horrifying to predict the future: “the political... should not be allowed to predict the future: the terror of political models occurs when they leave no room for the undecidable...” (86). If a future is envisioned, one must, according to Elam, rest assured that deconstruction and feminism have nothing to do with it. In all senses of the word, feminism has no end.

Though self-defeating, this position underwrites the continuing conversion to deconstruction. Sandra Harding’s recent embrace of poststructuralism seems to exemplify this fact and answers the charges Weedon has leveled against deconstruction. To justify her recent conversion, Harding blames her own previous oversight; for her, poststructuralism in the 1970s and 1980s:

“did not yet seem to offer the resources for feminist science and social science studies that, at least for me, have been identified in it. Discussions of ideology appeared to be able to handle the cultural configurations that are more richly and accurately, in my view, understood through poststructuralist analyses of socially constituted discourse.”⁽¹⁷⁾

In emphasizing the impressive power of poststructuralism, Harding is speaking to the position of many feminist women. They demand of poststructuralism valuable insights to serve the cause of women, even when poststructuralism attacks feminism itself. And as their arguments make clear, the benefits they seek are meager and threatening to their very cause. Both Elam and Grosz assert deconstruction’s power, but both also recognize its non-feminist orientation. Grosz, for instance, enumerates deconstruction’s many advantages only to conclude that Derrida’s “work is both other than and useful for feminist theory” (94). That usefulness, however, filters down to accepting uncertainties and “equivocations” as a way of political life, a move that only implements political quietism. This state is the result of the deconstructive “undecidable” and “mise en abyme.” As expected, Grosz can assert that “Derrida does not offer any political

⁽¹⁷⁾ Sandra Harding, “Comment On Hekman’s ‘Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited’: Whose Standpoint Needs the Regimes of Truth and Reality” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 22:2 (Winter 1997), pp. 382-391; quotation, pp. 383-384.

solutions for either feminism or any other politics"; his work, nevertheless, "has the effect of rethinking entirely the ways in which politics and theory have been considered" (95). And thus this rethinking squares her argument with Elam's position on limitless revisions.

This entrapment in the process of questioning not only promotes political quietism, but also denies the very position-taking eventuated by any politics. Like other advocates, Grosz must change the meaning of politics and shroud it in equivocation and uncertainty; in fact, "things are now murkier: saying no to a political or conceptual structure can no longer remain unequivocal, unilaterally opposed to any (conservative) yes" (95-96). Thus, one can say neither "no" nor "yes" to any position; instead one must appeal to one's own "uncertainty" about any affirmation, an uncertainty that leads to indifference and non-involvement. Derrida provides no solutions to feminism or any other politics; yet he is perceived to be essential to feminism. In the process, feminism must modify itself to accommodate him and his deconstruction under banners of "uncertainty" or "love."

The feminist entrapment in this relation with deconstruction affects its advocates at the personal and public levels, a position that goes with the familiar slogan: "the personal is political." However, to gain access to powerful promises of deconstruction, feminist women have to modify their stand or deconstruction itself. As deconstruction refuses modification, these feminists tailor their feminism to accommodate Derrida. Feminism then becomes brave enough "to have its cake and eat it too," as Elam puts it. Leslie Wahl Rabine holds an "enraged sense of insoluble ambivalence toward deconstruction," and calls for "modifying it quite a bit."⁽¹⁸⁾

Caputo, too, recognizes this necessity: "The 'feminist alliance with deconstruction,' I think, is rather a matter of adjusting deconstruction's velocities: insofar as it advocates displacement, deconstruction needs to be slowed down; insofar as it advocates reversal, deconstruction needs to be given a push."⁽¹⁹⁾ Accordingly, deconstruction passes through a teleological selectivity and a personal, political, willful choice, both of which reorient the perception and accommodation of Derrida and certainly nullify the pretensions of the cause women are at pains to establish. The inertia materializes at the thematic and strategic levels. Rabine, therefore, can only acknowledge the paralysis deconstruction entails: "Strategies based on *différance* and supplementarity can both help and hinder feminism" (28).

For both cautious and avid advocates, then, deconstruction always leads to a self-

⁽¹⁸⁾ Leslie Wahl Rabine, "A Feminist Politics of Non-Identity" *Feminist Studies* 14:1(Spring 1988), pp. 11, 26.

⁽¹⁹⁾ John D. Caputo, "Dreaming of the Innumerable: Derrida, Drucilla Cornell, and the Dance of Gender," in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, ed. New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 155.

defeating hesitancy or complete paralysis. Nevertheless, in their willful choices and selectivity, feminist women persist in attributing high values to deconstruction. Linda Kintz would not have realized her own political stand without Derrida, and her justification of his relevance to feminism is both personal and public. Derrida's critique of the "sovereign Western Subject" has been "very important" and his "critique of Western epistemology" has awakened her "own involvement in feminist theory."⁽²⁰⁾ Yet her commitment ends up in the rejection of "clarity," which has created "First World imperialism" (105). This dangerous clarity, Kintz asserts, enhances belief in "mystified notions of freedom, and democracy" (106). To ward off this danger is to embrace "uncertainty," ambiguity, and equivocation. Such essential traits of deconstruction must mark feminism itself if it has to maintain an alliance with deconstruction. This status is reaffirmed every time "the questions of woman" are put forward. Caputo finds these questions hopelessly unresolvable and permanent aporias constituting "the space within which the question of woman takes place" (143). It seems to be the tragic lot of "woman" to accept this situation which she has occupied throughout history; one only wonders at the great deconstructive lengths feminists have gone to legitimize it.

Like the other feminists, Tina Chanter subscribes to the same position of Kintz and Caputo. Seeking to "read otherwise," Chanter reaches the same self-imposed "inertia" that nullifies the high hopes for which she advocates an alliance with deconstruction. To read otherwise, as she tells us, means "to acknowledge that readings while they may not always succeed in escaping blind alleys, can 'interrupt themselves.'"⁽²¹⁾ This continuous "interruption" ultimately keeps deconstruction virtually preoccupied with its own activity while going nowhere. In this sense, Chanter's position is only a recapitulation of Elam's and Grosz's advocacy of the continuous questioning. Her argument, therefore, advocates hesitation and uncertainty, and casts doubt on the achievements of feminism: "we need to hesitate before confidently asserting our belief in difference, multiplicity, and otherness, and ask ourselves if we have really understood what it is we are calling for" (99). If nothing else, this "reading otherwise" enhances doubts in one's own cause and intellectual abilities.

Chanter's thesis, moreover, ignores two self-defeating limitations. One: according to deconstruction, all readings fail to escape their own blind alleys, and thus justify a perpetual self-interruption; Derrida and Paul de Man confirm this "blindness and insight." Two: the inability to escape one's own blind alleys does not necessitate entrapment in one's own reading, and preoccupation with self-interruption and continual fight against one's own limitations. In advocating this "reading otherwise," Chanter falls

⁽²⁰⁾ Linda Kintz, "On Performing Deconstruction: Postmodern Pedagogy" *Cultural Critique* 16 (Fall 1990), pp. 87-88.

⁽²¹⁾ Tina Chanter, "On Not Reading Derrida's Texts: Mistaking Hermeneutics, Misreading Sexual Difference, and Neutralizing Narration," in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, ed. *New York and London: Routledge, 1997*, pp. 91-92.

prey to her own choice, and concedes that while earlier readings unknowingly fall victim to their own blind “alleys,” current readings knowingly admit their inescapable shortcomings, but go on reading anyway. This “reading otherwise” advocates its own inertia, and imposes its own prejudices. As such, it has nothing to do with deconstruction. For deconstruction, the ability to interrupt one’s own readings is by definition impossible because one’s own blindness is one’s own insight.⁽²²⁾ Indeed, the law of the supplement informs this blindness; and according to Derrida, “*Blindness to the supplement* is the law.”⁽²³⁾

Like other advocates, Chanter reaches this state because she is aware of what deconstruction can and cannot do. However, what deconstruction cannot do is disavowed and targeted by the only thing it can do. The justification of this oscillation and self-validation is, for Chanter, staked on the ability of readings to interrupt their own position and process. “Reading otherwise,” then, invests in its own failure as if the recognition of deconstruction’s failure is nothing but its “success,” a situation aptly phrased, in a different and more thematic context, by Barbara Johnson’s title “Nothing Fails Like Success.”⁽²⁴⁾ William Ray too has recognized this trait: “The success of deconstruction spells its failure.”⁽²⁵⁾ More recently, the Derrida scholar and translator Peggy Kamuf has diagnosed that same impasse as a version of “fetishism.” As the feminist “subject” recognizably fails, Kamuf writes,

“there is a certain disavowal of that recognition, as if the necessary failure could all the same be overcome. This makes it sound like a version of fetishism, the fetishism of the subject who, in saying “I,” believes it is fully itself, not “castrated,” despite what it knows.”⁽²⁶⁾

This will-to-self-deception is itself a manifestation of the self-imposed inertia and faith in “uncertainties.” Kamuf, Elam, Grosz, and Cornell have emphatically defended this self-defeating state.

Elam, for example, values deconstruction because it helps feminist “understand the limitations” of identity, and opens “ways of doing politics differently” (72). Despite the implications of her statement, Elam is caught in the “limitations” she has understood too well. However, “doing politics differently” places feminism and deconstruction nowhere; “they are neither solely in the ivory tower nor in the world but on the line

⁽²²⁾ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd edition, revised. Intro. Wald Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 109.

⁽²³⁾ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* ... p. 149; emphasis original.

⁽²⁴⁾ Barbara Johnson, “Nothing Fails Like Success” *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁽²⁵⁾ William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 209.

⁽²⁶⁾ Peggy Kamuf, “Deconstruction and Feminism: A Repetition,” in Nancy J. Holland, ed. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1997), p. 111.

between them” (92). In such a place, their practice of politics will be absolutely different. Surely a different conception of what politics might be and a rejection of identity must lead to a neutralization of politics as we mundanely know it. In this sense, the “danger” Elam emphasizes has no bearings. Kamuf, too, reiterates the same position. The deconstruction of feminist subjectivism must “entail a *different* sense of the political”(119, emphasis original). Like Elam’s, this different sense of the “political” must eventually come from a mystic unknowable elsewhere, “from places that are unheard-of, or yet not heard from” (123).

This mysticism wards off politics or identity; Elam repeatedly emphasizes this point, and names it the “politics of the undecidable” (81). Having placed politics between the “ivory tower” and the real world, Elam can only echo Caputo and advocate a state of hesitation and indecision. Like Caputo, she takes the abyss as the best place for the subject or the practice of politics: in the “abyss” one can only “imagine a deconstructive politics that does not ground itself on the possibility of a stable or coherent subject free to make its own political decisions” (71). The importance of the “abyssal nature” stems from the evanescence which vitiates decisions or firm positions and leads to the blurring of any clear-cut position. Even Rabine subscribes to this deconstructive state in which the subject not only loses hold and energy but renounces every position it occupies (27).

The renunciation of identity, subject, the political, and position taking marks Drucilla Cornell’s singular “loving” defense of Derrida’s relevance to feminism. Even Joan W. Scott’s enthusiasm for poststructuralism is pale in comparison. Like all advocates, Scott and Cornell find in poststructuralism (especially Derrida’s) all that feminists need. For Scott, it defeats patriarchy, promotes pluralities and diversities, provides a better perception of gender, and a useful political practice. Accordingly, it is “worthwhile for feminist scholars to exploit that relationship for their own ends.”⁽²⁷⁾ However, this promising exploitation yields nothing but ambiguity and unclarity. Poststructuralism “point[s] up rather than resolve[s] conditions of contradiction.” And identity for women follows no “existing stereotypes” (48). The high claims are attenuated quite markedly; poststructuralist theory shows, but does not solve, the conditions of contradiction. This ironically much valued theme is shared by many feminist women. As Poovey rephrases it, “the primary contribution of deconstruction is not its recuperative program but the project of demystification.”⁽²⁸⁾ Elam’s enthusiasm for deconstruction builds overtly on this very theme: “deconstruction is neither a magical method nor a mystical practice, and we’re kidding ourselves if we think that the work of deconstruction necessarily solves all our problems or provides all answers” (67). Moreover, Elam makes it quite clear that deconstruction solves no problem at all; it only problematizes every position. Throughout her book, she makes it even clearer that

⁽²⁷⁾ Joan W. Scott, “Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism” *Feminist Studies* 14:1 (Spring 1988), pp. 33, 34.

⁽²⁸⁾ Mary Poovey, “Feminism and Deconstruction” *Feminist Studies* 14:1 (Spring 1988), p. 58.

without faith in deconstruction's magic and mysticism, no feminist will accept a relation with deconstruction.

As is shown repeatedly, the claim for deconstruction's demystifying ability leads to a self-imposed inertia. Scott, for example, refuses the "ultimate truth" in the name of "differences that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of fixed binary opposition" (48). But deconstruction's limiting powers lead her to dissolve identity and subjectivity in order to avoid "stereotyping," and thus she lines up with masculinism in erasing "woman." Scott at once asserts and denies difference; like Elam, Grosz, and Rabine, she only emphasizes the importance of the "in-between," the state of continuous oscillation in which difference is neither affirmed nor denied, and in which one is entrapped in the process of deconstructing binary oppositions rather than constituting any positive structure. This "in-between"—sometimes called "elsewhere," "reading otherwise," or the "dividing line"—neutralizes every political stand and attracts every feminist effort to maintain a relation with deconstruction.

In the spirit of Elam and Scott, Poovey too recognizes yet advocates the disarming value of this "in-between." For her, the "in-between" is first a strategic "tool for dismantling binary thinking." Yet, Poovey instantly takes back this value; this "strategy would not abolish either the hierarchical thinking... nor power more generally conceived" (59). Scott's position is nothing but this "in-between"; her final words only reify the paradox of adopting poststructuralism for a self-defeating end. The "exploitation" of the relationship for feminist ends cuts both ways, and thus feminists must at once affirm and deny difference: "To do anything else is to buy into the political argument that sameness is a requirement for equality, an untenable position for feminists (and historians) who know that power is constructed on and so must be challenged from the ground of difference" (48).

Drucilla Cornell travels the same route with unmitigated enthusiasm. While Scott sees poststructuralism as one theory among others, Cornell reduces all other theories to fit the deconstructive frame. In a series of almost identical articles dating from 1992 through 1997 (in addition to her book of 1991), she has articulated the positions of Luhmann, Levinas, and Lacan along deconstructive paths. Her intense preoccupation with deconstruction, which she renames "The philosophy of the Limit," is grounded on its unlimited and liberating advantages for women and feminism.⁽²⁹⁾ Integrating Luhmann's systems theory and Derrida's deconstruction, Cornell seeks to expose gender as a system "that operates to limit the possibility of the representability of woman and, as a result, the status that can be given to 'woman' as an observer" (1996, 187). The combination, therefore, has a liberating thrust, and her appropriation of deconstruction is narrowly oriented; thus "by looking more closely at Derrida's deconstruction of the

⁽²⁹⁾ Drucilla Cornell, "The Philosophy of the Limit: Systems Theory and Feminist Legal Reform," *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 69-70.

current meaning given to gender hierarchy, we can enrich our understanding of the relationship between deconstruction and [Luhmann's] systems theory more generally" (1996, 187). Accordingly, deconstruction enables women and men to see the gender system for what it is, a blind spot which prevents the recognition of the systematicity of the system (1996, 195).

More importantly, deconstruction articulates women's singularity along a deconstructive "ethical aspiration" of dreams and love. As she elaborates, "That aspiration is Derrida's dream of a new choreography of sexual difference in which our singularity, not our gender, would be loved by the Other" (1996, 195).⁽³⁰⁾ Having emphasized this importance of one's lovable singularity, Cornell comes around to tie its hand and foot to the deconstructability of the meaning of woman, the very woman whose observations count and who recognizes the gender system for what it is. Cornell argues: "the possibility of the feminine observer as an observer whose observations count and thus can mark a system of gender as a system, is inseparable from the deconstruction of the meaning of woman as the one who is observed but is never the observer" (1996, 196). As described by Cornell, this "woman" who observes cannot be disentangled from the possibility of being deconstructed. Once this state is achieved, "woman" must dissolve into a "lovable" singularity. Ironically, she demands Woman's deconstruction, even though she laments woman's abuse throughout history as owing to "a masculine imaginary that erases women."⁽³¹⁾

Cornell seems unaware that "singularity" itself (loved or hated) is more than enough to deconstruct "woman" as observer or observed; "singularity" is by definition impossible. Derrida never tires of attacking the "unique" or the "one time" of which "singularity" is only another name. For Derrida, it is a sign "that refuses to signify... a language without a trace" (1978, 175). As he reiterates, "the unique is hailed in vain."⁽³²⁾ And since Cornell attaches this "lovable singularity" to Derrida's ethical aspiration, it would be proper to cite Derrida's comment on the singular and ethical. In his "La parole soufflée," Derrida writes: "If... we seem unsure of the treatment reserved for the unique, it is not because we think... that subjective existence, the originality of the work or the singularity of the beautiful, must be protected against the violence of the concept by means of moral or aesthetic precautions" (174). And since Cornell sees Derrida's "ethical aspiration" in "Choreographies," it is there that Derrida recognizes the dance as the necessity of compromising "the political chances of feminism" and of serving "as alibi for deserting organized, patient, laborious 'feminist' struggles." As he concludes, "Each man and each woman must commit his or her own singularity, the untranslatable

⁽³⁰⁾ Cf. Drucilla Cornell, "Where Love Begins: Sexual Difference and the Limit of the Masculine Symbolic," in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

⁽³¹⁾ Drucilla Cornell, "Civil Disobedience and Deconstruction," in Nancy J. Holland, ed., p. 153; see also p. 150 (cf. 1992, pp. 68, 88-89).

⁽³²⁾ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 175, 172 respectively.

factor of his or her life and death.”⁽³³⁾ Only in love and for the sake of love can “singularity” receive its privilege.

Cornell asserts the inseparability of the woman observer and the deconstruction of the meaning of woman for the love of the other. This inseparability ties sexual difference to social change, and thus justifies Cornell’s insistence on deconstruction’s relevance to feminism. However, despite the great advantages she attributes to deconstruction, Cornell becomes mundanely realistic: theory changes nothing; action does. “If systems theory and the philosophy of the limit are in alliance with feminism,” she says, “then it can only be an alliance, because theory does not change the world, although it can help us see how and why it can be changed” (1992, 89). The aim of feminists then is to change the status quo; although realistic in her diagnosis, Cornell, however, dreams on: “It is still up to feminists to elaborate the dream of a different world for women beyond the gender hierarchy and to try to make it a reality” (1992, 89). Perhaps it is the cadence of Derrida’s “dream of a new choreography of sexual difference” which justifies the desire of transforming a dream into a “reality.” Nothing but paradox could lend credence to “the dream of a different world for women beyond the gender hierarchy,” especially as gender limits the very vision of this utopian world.

Ironically enough, Cornell herself recognizes woman’s entrapment in a representation beyond which no one knows what woman “is.” In a subsection entitled “The Impossibility that Gives Possibility,” Cornell demonstrates that “love” begins where knowledge “leaves off.” This renunciation of knowledge leads to the dissolving of “woman,” the very woman for whom feminists should create a world beyond the world, a world of dreams which is perhaps congruent with the “unreality” of woman. “If Derrida knows anything at all,” postulates Cornell, “he knows that he cannot know that that representation of Woman is her truth” (1997b, 197). Woman, therefore, is nothing but her “representation”; and representation never coincides with that of which it is a representation. Naturally, for Cornell, Derrida’s renunciation of knowledge “is based in the knowledge that there is ultimately ‘no-thing’ out there that we can know in its contours” (1997b, 197). For Cornell, this is the basis of the dream of a world beyond, an unknowable and unknown world for woman (neither the world nor the woman can be anything but pure representations). This is indeed singularity par excellence, a non-iterable, unerasable trace (Derrida 1978, 230); and only love will justify the dream in which abuse and love are never a bipolar opposition. One therefore cannot help but wonder about the reality of the abuse that gender enforces on women! It would seem (according to Cornell’s argument) that the fault is theirs since these women are not pure representations, and thus can be known and accordingly abused. Cornell’s pleasant dream looks more like the horrifying nightmare with which she closes her “Philosophy of the Limit.”

It is certainly tragic that Cornell’s dream is dedicated to “such an important

⁽³³⁾ Jacques Derrida, “Choreographies” *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf *et. al.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 95.

feminist thinker as Mary Joe Frug” whose murder is “brutal, tragic and, as yet, unaccounted for” (1992, 89). Though the incident is real, tragic, and horrifying, Cornell still dreams of the deconstruction of the “meaning of woman”: “[Frug’s] death is also a call, an obligation to continue to critique the subordination of woman and to dream” (1992, 89). This is love and singularity, “the untranslatable factor” of one’s life and death Derrida has associated with the dance. As Cornell closes her dedication, she writes: “In the death that demands redress we will always hear the call of the other” (1992, 89). Strangely enough, not only does “woman” disappear from this “call to the other,” but also we can never “know” the woman for whose sake death must be redressed. Nothing but the mystery of “singularity” will justify this “erasure,” the very masculine erasure Cornell herself has identified and contested.

At one crucial point Cornell corrects the misunderstanding of certain feminists concerning Derrida’s deconstruction of the “meaning of woman.” These feminists wrongly believe that Derrida’s treatment of Woman is “one more attempt to put her in the place of the mysterious, unknowable Other” (1997b, 195). For Cornell, there are no mysteries, no unknowable others. Derrida only disrupts the masculine symbolic order, and “the question of Woman is ineradicably associated with the question of how to adequately address the ‘real’ alterity of the Other” (1997b, 195). This corrective is promising; how can one adequately achieve such an adequacy? By love. In love and for the sake of love one can bypass the mysterious and the unknowable. Having just denied the mysterious, unknowable Other, Cornell nevertheless comes around “in love” to make woman just that mysterious, unknowable other: “love is the possibility kept open by the impossibility of knowing the reality of the ‘sex’ of the Other or, indeed, knowing the other at all” (1997b, 197).

This is the total eclipse which renders life and death inseparably equal. Strangely enough, only “woman” seems to be lost for ever. Nothing but mysticism could enhance a faithful commitment to such a state and the excessively unlimited sense of justice to which it leads. Both Cornell and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek believe that only the alliance between deconstruction and feminism can bring about this kind of “justice.” As expected, this justice is wide open. Taking issue with Derrida’s detractors, Ziarek sees deconstruction’s contribution to feminism built on the eternal “anticipation,” not fulfillment, of this “justice”: “Always in excess of the historically determined conditions and possibilities, justice requires the immediacy of action without the assurance of fulfillment for its non-satisfiable demands.”⁽³⁴⁾ This is the theological theme which promises full justice in a “different” utopian world; it demands nothing less than one’s death to achieve the assurance of the fulfillment and satisfaction of justice. The common motif tying deconstruction to feminism is this will-to-mystification and non-knowledge, together with the call for the deconstruction of “woman.” This major impulse stems from the entrapment in deconstruction’s vertiginous *mise en abyme*, a

⁽³⁴⁾ Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, “From Euthanasia to the Other of Reason: Performativity and the Deconstruction of Sexual Difference,” in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 136.

state of continuous oscillation that only affirms and reaffirms inertia. To challenge masculinist systems, Poovey, for instance, finds nothing better than deconstruction's "endless deferral," thus denouncing identity, truth, and being (52). And the many advantages of deconstruction affirm nothing but a will to ignorance and mysticism. Under the deconstructive challenge, the whole situation "would necessarily feel like a loss, but it might also create the conditions of possibility for as yet unimagined organizations of human potential" (60). Poovey not only recognizes that this possibility is as yet unimaginable, but bases it on the modal verb "might" to punctuate her own hesitation. Still, she acknowledges openly deconstruction's failure in the brave world it promises: "This brave new world of the reconceptualized subject may be implied by deconstruction, but it does not follow necessarily from its current practice" (61). Poovey's disarming irony materializes in her assertion of the only "certainty": in this brave new world, "woman— or even women— cannot remain a legitimate rallying point for political action" (62). She is bound to reach such a conclusion because her perception of deconstruction depends on the deconstructability of "woman." Like Cornell, Elam, and Scott, Poovey too asserts that deconstruction "deconstructs not only the relationship between women and certain social roles but also the very term 'woman'..." (60).

Such political quietism results directly from the political employment of deconstruction to promote the cause of woman and feminism. Yet, this state of affairs seems to be preordained. The aporia of deconstruction, however, knows only its own logic, and entraps in it what it can pull into its vacuum. Rabine identifies this situation, but attributes the feminist failure to "a contradiction internal to feminism itself" (14). Contrary to Rabine's position, feminist political quietism is the outcome of embracing deconstruction's "undecidability" and the abyss to which it leads and which prevents deconstruction from ever getting "to ethics and politics" (Frazer 1997, 159). This self-defeating situation calls for detailed substantiation. Its better reification is nowhere better illustrated than in Elam's enthusiastic defense of deconstruction's relevance to feminism.

Like other advocates of deconstruction, Elam not only calls feminism itself into question but demands the deconstruction of the ever unknown "woman." Subscribing to the deconstructive position of Judith Butler, Elam denounces "woman" in Butler's own words: "it would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of 'woman'..." (32). Woman, for Elam, "is a *permanently contested site of meaning*" (32, emphasis original). This definition not only dissolves "woman" into a battleground but also leads to the advocacy of the very mysticism she has earlier denied. Therefore, Elam capitalizes on nothing but "uncertainty." Throughout her book, she keeps reminding the reader of the dangers of knowledge and certainty. Her own thesis succumbs to this theme: "The abyssal relation that I hope to inscribe within this rhetorical structure is one which joins feminism with deconstruction in order to take up, but not necessarily to answer, questions of women" (32).

Elam keeps very close to her declared intention; she takes up but never answers "questions of women." Thus, feminism, "enlightened" feminists, women, sexual difference, gender, are all taken up with the intention to emphasize "uncertainty."

Feminism and sexual difference, when taken up, yield the following: “feminism is about keeping sexual difference open as the space of radical uncertainty” (26). This uncertainty is thematically launched against the easy answers which she has already promised not to provide: “mainstream culture in the United States is suffering from too much certainty and false belief in the possibility of easy answers” (31). If answers were hard, one would accept this objection; but an answer, easy or difficult, is denied. Certainty, to which uncertainty is the only antidote, is a disease infecting even enlightened feminists: “Even supposedly ‘enlightened’ feminists have suffered from too much certainty” (31).

Uncertainty not only relieves feminist suffering but also justifies the non-knowledge of what woman is. Its many advantages include keeping the sexual difference open, a denial of knowledge, opening unlimited possibilities of social justice, rectifying of women’s misrepresentations, and more. Woman must be obliterated for her own good: “a feminism that believes it knows what a woman is and what she can do both forecloses the limitless possibilities of women and misrepresents various forms that social injustice can take” (32). As deconstruction prohibits issues of “being,” Elam must adopt a position between euthenics and euthanasia. Not surprisingly, when she takes up the question much later, it is taken up in relation to her and to other feminists’ concerns: “As feminists, we are concerned for women, yet we do not know what they are. And what binds us together is the fact *that we don’t know*” (84, emphasis original). This will-to-ignorance pertains as much to identity, subjectivity, position-taking, and knowledge as it does to politics. When Elam identifies the politics and knowledge both deconstruction and feminism seek, she is unable to assert anything but the uncertainty of an “imagined” possibility: “to think the politics of knowledge as such, as feminism and deconstruction seek to do, cannot be to *know* those politics but only to *imagine* them” (95, emphasis original).

Western and non-Western thought has always believed in the devaluation of woman in areas of politics, power, knowledge, rationality, and the pursuit of humanistic ideals such as justice, democracy, progress, and happiness. Now, women themselves (through a subtle and sophisticated argument) are subscribing to this very thought under the banner of resisting it. These ideals, however, have always been oriented programs, seeking to impose order on an “imagined” or “real” world. When these were the privileged values (whose enforcement excluded the feminine), women kept fighting for an equal share. Masculinism fought back through by now well recognized ruses. Women, then and now, were always late to the party (political or social). As women have gained some ground, masculinism has changed the values; before the era of woman, it was the subject, the individual, rationality, science, etc.; the demystification of the politics of these values has taken women a whole century. Yet, just as women are about to achieve their own values, they have been forced to follow what masculinism deems essential: no subject, no knowledge, no rationality, no justice, no man, and no woman. Women, again, must follow; they must arrive late if they ever arrive. It seems to be the “lot” of women to accommodate the wishes of the masculine, even though Elam sees herself opposed to “Brides of Derrida” and “Daughters of Deconstruction” (20).

Though this situation is common to the postmodernist scene in general, it finds its full embodiment in the advocacy of the relevance of Derrida's deconstruction to feminism. Feminist women turn themselves into Derrida's "purloined letter" whose destination is forever deferred. And they do so for an alleged political advantage. Hannah Arendt once seriously joked: "What will we lose if we win?"⁽³⁵⁾ If the position of the advocates of deconstruction's relevance is any guide, woman will be a "loss" deservedly "won."

⁽³⁵⁾ Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "From Euthanasia to the Other of Reason: Performativity and the Deconstruction of Sexual Difference," in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, ed. p. 136.

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دافعت بعض النساء المتميات للنقد النسوي عن إمكانية قيام تحالف مفيد بين الطرح النسوي والطرح التقويضي؛ وهذه الورقة تستكشف فائدة هذه العلاقة المزعومة وتبين الطريق المسدود الذي ستصل إليه. فهاتى النساء، ما إن يُخيب التقويضي الطموح السياسي لما تسعى إليه العلاقة، حتى يملن إلى إعادة تعريف "السياسي" ثم تبني مفاهيم "التشكيك والغموض"، لا لسبب واضح سوى تهيئة المناخ لعلاقة الطرح النسائي بالتقويضي. وتكمن المفارقة الحادة في أن هذه المحاولات "تُعيد" النزعة السياسية في الطرح النسائي فقط، فنفضي بالعلاقة إلى قصور ذاتي، أي إلى حالة من الشلل بين ما يعد التقويضي به من إنجازات سياسية وما يتحقق فعلا من تحييد لهذه النزعة السياسية.

إن عدم الملائمة بين الطرحين تنبع من أساسيات كل منهما: فإذا كان النقد النسوي حركة سياسية أصلا، فإن التقويضي يحارب كل سياسة. ولهذا فإنه لا يمكن صيانة هذا الاتحاد دون الوصول إلى عماية من الشلل يُزعم عندها أن السياسة لا هي "داخل هذا العالم" ولا هي خارجه.