

## Three Gestures on Otherness: (Re)joining with Edgoose Through Derrida's *Khora*

Lynda Stone

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Those who look into the possibility of philosophy...are already engaged in, already overtaken by the dialogue of the question about itself with itself.

Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

Julian Edgoose has offered an elegant rendition, a tasty repast, in his paper "Caring Justice and Ethical Hesitation." He ably updates and rightfully complicates the educational philosophy of caring by exploring "a possible connection" between the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, and that of Nel Noddings. Building from a common concern for the Other, there is much in Edgoose's rapprochement that is subtle and significant. What follows is a partial and varied textual deconstruction as a (re)joining with him. As *we* both know, exploring the "natures" of philosophy and otherness is a necessary "precondition" for our common educational project.

### FIRST GESTURE: EDGOOSE

Who/what is edgoose? From where does he come? If he too is Other, of what kind? There is irony (at the least) in Edgoose's choice of Edgoose. Untellingly he makes a choice, that of logos rather than mythos, both however of the tradition of western metaphysics and philosophy. Within the tradition, he denies the impossible and never named Other, the *Khora*, difference at the origin.<sup>2</sup> Similarity defies difference/différance; logos/mythos denies *khora*. Writes Derrida,

[The] logic, the para-logic or the meta-logic of this super-oscillation...concerned first of all types of existent thing (sensible/intelligible, *visible/invisible*, form/formless/icon, or mimeme/paradigm [now displaced] toward types of discourse (mythos/logos) or of relation to what is or is not in general.[Emphasis added]<sup>3</sup>

But as *Khora* defies the logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers, its relation too is problematic. As Derrida continues, "This is because the quality of the discourse depends primarily on the quality of the being of which it speaks. It is almost as if a name should only to be given to whom (or to what) deserves it and calls for it" (K, 91).

Who/what is edgoose? Et goose, a goose, the centerpiece of the voraciously consumed Christmas dinner. A repast of Levinas, Derrida, Noddings, deliciously devoured. And devouring. A giant maw, carnivorous. Opening, mouth, throat, gullet, stomach, at once philosophy. Here the absence/presence of *khora* calls into question the "whole history of interpretations" (K, 94). Thus et goose too is self-devouring, even as it wishes ethical educational life as hesitation and aporia. Derrida puts the 'cause' "above all [in the presupposition of] the unity or homogeneity of this whole, the very possibility of totalizing it in some ordered apprehension" (K, 94).

### SECOND GESTURE: BEING, ENCOUNTER AND BEING:<sup>4</sup>

[*Khora is*] formless. This very singular impropriety, which precisely is nothing, is just what *khora* must...keep; it is just what must be kept for it, what we must keep for it (K, 97, emphasis in original).

Writes Edgoose, “Vision campaigns for a world of solid objects... [In such a world] other people appear... as moveable furnishings... [as Other that can be rearranged or even disposed of],” Levinas’s project, one to “restore” ethics to metaphysics, offers his own ‘*khoraic*’ form in speech of the face-to-face interaction:

[Speech] “cuts across the vision of forms” and denies neat-edged closure.... The ambiguity of language fails to satisfy the desires of speaker and listener for stable agreed meaning and mutual recognition.... Yet in the failure... the Saying is revealed... [indeed] language... fails by refusing to mean to Others what I want it to mean.

Edgoose continues, “[In] the imperative to speak... we find a situation in which it is the Saying that matters. It matters that *I* (italics in original) am there, speaking, sharing a proximity and uncertainty with the Other.”

[*Khora*] is not, and this non-being cannot but be declared, that is be caught or conceived, via the anthropomorphic.... [‘It’] is anything but a support or a subject which would give place by receiving or by conceiving, or indeed by letting itself be conceived (K, 95).

Edgoose again: “the ethical *empirical* Saying... evaporates at the appearance of the Said. The very language, with which we try to incorporate such pure difference into a philosophical text, destroys it.” (That is, destroys the possibility of “a pure thought of pure difference.”

[What] is said about *khora* is that this name does not designate any of the known or recognized or, if you will, received types of existent, received by philosophical discourse, that is, by the ontological *logos* which lays down the law in the *Timaeus*: *khora* is neither sensible nor intelligible (K, 96).

Moreover; from Edgoose: “Levinas notes that we are all born into a world of maternal Saying. ‘[The proper name (*Khora*) appears, as always, to be attributed to a person, in this case to a woman.... Doesn’t this aggravate the risks of anthropomorphism against which we wanted to protect ourselves?’ (K, 97).” And,

The discourse on *khora*... plays for philosophy a role analogous to the role which *khora* “herself” plays for that which philosophy speaks, namely the cosmos... according to a paradigm.... [From this cosmos, necessarily inadequate] figures will be taken for describing *khora*.... The dream is between the two, neither one nor the other (*logos/mythos*).... [Thus philosophy] speaks only of the father and the son, as if the father engendered it all on his own (K, 126).

The last word. Edgoose: “Law,<sup>5</sup> in its universal language, cannot be made to converse at once with all Others.... Thus, a synthesis of caring justice... and law... is not possible. Both need each, Derrida writes, yet there is always — necessarily — a gap between them.”

### THIRD GESTURE: CLARIFICATION

(*Re*)gesture One: *The Choice*. Julian Edgoose and now I have chosen philosophy, *logos*, and as such the place of the father. We know the choice but there seems no other, no escape. Indeed there is, as I read Derrida, only the possibility of intermittent interrogation — the invention, the gesture — a Derridean deconstruction as on a name. But the point is always to posit a radical Other/Otherness, *Khora*. Importantly, Derrida’s point in *Khora* is that philosophy makes (almost) impossible the “receiving of the Other” that is desired, the ethical, pedagogical relation. For his project and *ours* “it is necessary to go back to a beginning that is older than the beginning... [to *khora*, a ‘third genus’]. One cannot even say of it that it is *neither* this *nor* that or that is it *both* this *and* that (K, 126, 89).

*(Re)gesture Two: Otherness.* The textual juxtapositioning of Edgoose and Derrida's *Khora* manifests the problematic of "locating" radical otherness. Both authors know the problem and both in their ways turn to Levinas. Of him, Derrida writes, "[the] knowledge and security of which we are speaking are therefore not in the world; rather they are the possibility of our language and the nexus of our world" (VM, 82). He emphasizes, "It is at this level that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble" (Ibid.).

With regard to this gesture "toward otherness," Derrida's point, as I take it, is precisely that the language of western philosophy lets us down. Thus the (re)turn to *khora*. Clearly also, Derrida and Levinas differ as to the mode (one might call it) of interrogation. One of the most helpful contributions from Edgoose is to nuance some distinctions between experience and the law. Several questions remain, however: One is whether without *Khora*, Edgoose has articulated radical alterity "not of this world." Another is whether Levinas's "Saying as revelation of the Said" is either possible or itself the Otherness that Derrida seeks. The last question is whether in doing philosophy, all of us deny Otherness. One notes here that while not working from within a Heideggerian phenomenological poststructuralism, Noddings's reliance on feeling may indeed "get beneath" philosophy and a male-centered logocentrism. Still we need additional language to "explicate" this.

Mention of Noddings raises a last substantive concern between Edgoose and *Khora*, that of the "positioning" of woman. Where is woman/existential women in the seeking of Otherness by Levinas and Derrida? Woman who has always been 'othered' both in mythos and especially logos? Derrida writes, "philosophy cannot speak philosophically of that which looks like its 'mother,' its 'nurse,' its receptacle,' or its 'imprint-bearer'" (K, 126). How to bring the khoraic woman into the world remains unclear to me.

*(Re)gesture Three: Education.* This response has been a playful endeavor to work alongside Julian Edgoose in his own project for ethical education. Inspired by Derrida, I have raised questions that we share of what it means to do philosophy and ethics of education today. At the very least, together we have pointed to some fruitful lines of inquiry and some continuing problems. As Derrida concludes *Khora*, our joint efforts, contribute however humbly "to crown...[the story of western metaphysics] with a completion fitting all that has gone before" (K, 127), and implicitly all too that is hopeful and possible.

---

1. Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); hereafter (VM).

2. Derrida takes *khora* from Plato's *Timaeus* to recuperate difference at the origin, the possibility of a third logic, one in "contrast" to all dialectics. See Derrida, "*Khora*," in *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). This compiled text of three essays, by the way, does not exist in France. See epigraph *Khora*, 88, for an initial explanation. Derrida's text is hereafter (K).

3. One notes the initial irony of this text that needs to be seen in order to be "partially" understood.

4. In the following textual juxtaposition, citations from *Khora* are in italics.

5. Read philosophy.