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# Staging the Feminine Ethic of Care
## A Review of Reimagining the Academy

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Article abstract

The neoliberal university can be a restrictive, repressive, and/or oppressive space. However, the contributions in this edited publication “Reimagining the Academy: ShiFting towards Kindness, Connection, and an Ethics of Care” by Alison L Black and Rachael Dwyer and published by Palgrave Macmillan represent hope, kindness, love, and compassion. The words and works contained in this book gift to any reader many enriching, impactful storied accounts of academic works from differentiated perspectives. These important works support the re-imagining of academic spaces, scholarship, research, teaching and learning and care for self, others, and the work that matters. My reading of these works engaged my individuated ethic of care and inspired a creative response – artistic and poetic storying as an act of performative synthesis of the experience that awaits the reader.

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ART | RESEARCH international
A Transdisciplinary Journal

# STAGING THE FEMININE ETHIC OF CARE: A REVIEW OF *REIMAGINING THE ACADEMY*

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**Agli Zavros-Orr** is an independent academic, researcher and consultant. Through their scholarship, they have developed an individuated 'ethic of just-care'. They founded Diversitywise Educational Services (diversitywise.com.au). They hold the position of chair for Intersex Human Rights Australia and membership on the Victorian Intersex Expert Advisory Group.

**Artist Statement:** The neoliberal university can be a restrictive, repressive, and/or oppressive space. However, the contributions in this edited publication "*Reimagining the Academy: ShiFting towards Kindness, Connection, and an Ethics of Care*" by Alison L Black and Rachael Dwyer and published by Palgrave Macmillan represent hope, kindness, love, and compassion. The words and works contained in this book gift to any reader many enriching, impactful storied accounts of academic works from differentiated perspectives. These important works support the re-imagining of academic spaces, scholarship, research, teaching and learning and care for self, others, and the work that matters. My reading of these works engaged my individuated ethic of care and inspired a creative response – artistic and poetic storying as an act of performative synthesis of the experience that awaits the reader.

**Keywords:** artistic; poetic; storying; envisioning; ethic of care; review

## Scene 1 – Holding Space for Story

The stage is a safe zone. A feminine space of care.

A space where there is an intimate relationship…all is held in balance…ready for critique, reflection and re-imagining of the infinite games.

The stage, the space…reflects Indigenous sensibilities, a globalised awareness, of Elders past and present, and of communal life and care.

It invites authors of stories to rise and share…

and for recipients to take time to think, reflect and contemplate.

Their authorial voices share wisdom…gained from lived experiences…of learning… that has engaged their heart, mind, and body.

Mother Earth's warmth, love, and compassion is omnipresent in this space.

From this stage, stories emerge…stories that move, that inspire that challenge long-held perspectives generated by those that sought to subjugate the voices of women through the ages.

### Act 1 – Indigeneity Defines the Tune

Bathed in a warm light–three women rise to speak.

They know…they share their wisdom–reminding recipients of the past and guidance for the infinite games.

Their garments billow as they make their stand.

They voice a need for respectfulness, responsiveness, and reciprocity.

Lingering words electrify the space from which stories will unfold.

With their words, a new emergent tune holds to account the heart, the mind and body.

The stage is sanctified…a new phenomenological reality begins to manifest.

The three women step back…a sphere descends…a representation of Mother Earth… reminding all that life is seasonal.

The sphere, a feminine form gently spins on its axis, highlighting that under the one sky there are different ways, perspectives, manifestations, and states of being.

*Mother Earth.*
Multimodal Composition
A sequence of different perspectives
by Agli Zavros-Orr

The sphere represents–the biosphere and troposphere (the fertile ground where plants, water and other resources are gathered to sustain human life and activity) –the stratosphere (where air travel connect a globalised community)–and the mesosphere, thermosphere, and exosphere (representing space–through which star light, moon light and sun lights bathe the earth).

The sphere sustains eight majestic trees. Non-binary form of nature that reminds us all of the diversity of being, belonging and becoming. Of transition, of slumber, awakenings and abundance that is of benefit to all.

The sphere is the representation of the ethic of care that manifests in the natural world despite human interference. The oxygen we breath, the water that we drink, the foot that gives us energy to rise and create.

The three women step back forming a supportive embracing arch.

An invitation for others to rise and speak their wisdom.

**Act 2 – Of Journeying**

We are reminded that human too have roots. They are members of families, communities and context that motivate their being.
Entry into the academy is not easy–there is often a cost–but it is a movement from their ethic of care.

Change happens. New paths are forged.

All adding to the tune their storied accounts and re-presented of lived realities–through words that make knowable their academic journeying.

**Act 3 – Words and Works**

Another woman rises.

They voice hopefulness through the “shiFt” they seek to inspire.

Their words…wisdom formed like pearls are heard.

“In this sacred moment of global fragility, every moment counts, so let’s do the work we care about.”

## Scene 2 – Building Caring Communities

The tune is set, a shifting melody that voices kindness, connection, and the ethic of care.

As part of every voicing, there is acknowledgment.

A reminder to recipients that the works and words are building on words and works of others…informing those present and those that are yet to come.

Respectful acknowledging enables transition as “the shiFt” is given substance…noting and every point that “the shiFt” needs mindful reflexivity of the lessons learnt.

### Act 1 – Of Mentoring

Three more women rise.

There is a need for mentoring support and sponsorship.

In these infinite games, the project has history, dimensionality…and is intersectional.

The women bring consciousness-raising multifaceted storied accounts–complexity is part of being, belonging and becoming.

They inspire collective efficacy–through their sharing.

Their work voice of the need for time and space for connection, collaboration, and friendship.

…differentiated shiFting–through inclusive performativity that inspires and renews.

### Act 2 – Ontologically and Epistemologically…Differentially

Seasonally as the academic phenomenological reality is shiFted forward.

Colonially defined methods must be critiqued.

There is no space for historically defined praxis that is repressive, oppressive, marginalising…

These women voice other ways of being–through their academic work.

The patriarchy has long established the criteria for allowing engagement and participation of women into male dominated spaces.

The time to disrupt is now.

**Act 3 – Emotional Labour**

The journey forward embraces the seasonality of the shiFt.

With each season there are different works that take place.

This calls forward forethought and commitment–in the infinite games as they unfold.

Through scholarship, the ethic of care is understood as a transformative process where care for others cannot cost caring for self.

Rules need to be redefined.

**Act 4 – Time to Question**

Questions must be allowed to surface and be given voice.

They inspire appraisal.

Questions, situated within storied accounts–voicing and illuminating struggles.

There is a call for focusing and refocusing on that which matters–equity and justice.

The words and works emerge as pearls of wisdom…formed in the depth of oceans.

Deep, blue, emerald, and green waters that cool Mother Earth.

The oceans through evapotranspiration bring water to the land.

Like sweat and tears, that move the soul.

“Care is work. Care is not self-indulgence.”

**Act 5 – Creativity is a Must**

STEM cannot be without creativity, yet the neoliberal university consistently drops the A,

It is with STEAM that we have motion for the shiFt to happen.

Women's work is part of this.

Women's work at all levels must be acknowledged–there is work to be done to eliminate the neoliberal mindset within the academic spaces that thwart their efforts.

Self-awareness is everyone's business working to achieve respectful, responsive, and reciprocal workspaces.

**Act 6 – Living with Fragility**

The is a need for balanced, slow, care-full, deep learning.

Complexities are part of every level of the work.

Complexity is often unseen and unheard in the neoliberal hustle and bustle.

Perhaps there is a call for an axiological shiFt.

**Act 7 – Activism has a Place Too**

The women that voice their concerns challenge subconsciously held biases.

There is a need for transparency and regulative praxis that is equitable, fair, and just for all.

In unison they voice,

"we can choose how we will play the finite games and we can play as a team."

**Act 8 – Ripples of Hope**

The two women who have risen to voice their thoughts remind the recipients…

this work is not a self-indulgent act.

There is a society in need of healing, learning, growth and renewal–a task that requires care.

Transactional relations must hold transformative effect.

There is long tradition in the academy and the educating of society's educators–that is rising to the call of the shiFt, embracing the past, energizing the present and envisioning the future–that contributes to the infinite shiFting games.

### Act 9 – Intersectionality is Not a Dirty Word

What is inclusion really? Is there an exclusionary praxis that remains hidden in academe?

The infinite games in understanding and working with super complexity.

It means moving past heteronormative, heterosexist, endosexist paradigms set by those who did not understand–but we now know…

The analysis and the findings must be reviewed.

Intersectional representations of identity, for diverse bodies, of sex, gender and sexualities must be part of this new phenomenological reality.

## Scene 3 – Renewal and Re-imagings

Scene 2 with words and works from acts 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, and 9 linger in the space that is now vibrating as if about to burst…scene 3 begins.

The tune–is constant, the stepping of women past, present heralds a new awareness and new landscape for working in academe, doing scholarship, research, teaching and learning.

### Act 1 – Reflectively Reflexively

The words are heard…

…shiFt in localities… shiFt in perspective…shiFt in mindset…

The infinite games are part of an iterative movement, a collaborative dance, and a transformative movement forward.

This is not easy, tears do fall.

Regret, loneliness, even fear of the uncertain times ahead.

The body wants to hold onto what is new…this is where compassion is called forth.

What counts?

Words are voiced again, persistently and with care voice what they believe. Academic women are a collectivity–they have collective efficacy informing their work, and the work of the women that have forged the path they walk upon.

**Act 2 – Beyond Survival**

Differentiated projections, creations, a kaleidoscope of colour created a new landscape that is fertile.

The senses are enlivened, the body has a renewed intent.

The "good" entails resistance, the rules have been redefined.

The feminist ethic of care is also about self-care, particularly when under attack.

The breath renews,

Oxygen flows through the body,

The body finds its desire to act.

In walking the talk–with the students through shiFt is a must.

They are the future…they too must be inspired to participate in the infinite games.

The shiFt is a poetic, musical, aesthetically transformative experience–the heart, the mind, the hand (or body) must acquire a new code.

**Act 3 – A Torch for a New Olympics**

Passed around…the flaming torch inspires new goals to be set and worked towards.

Words and works give expression openly…

the constraint of the thesis statement and the paragraph give rise to flowing poetic stanzas.

Is that okay? I hear you say.

Creativity enables new re-presentations–the intent of the shiFt materialises as blossom petals fall…

…it is time for the fruit of labour to come forth and nurture…to care-fully and to give purpose-fully the ethic of care.

New methodologies with new potentialities must be given consideration.

**Act 4 – Must Not Forget**

As we understand ourselves, make meaning from the words and works of women who have risen to speak of their learning–we must not turn a blind eye to the neoliberal dis-ease.

What does this mean within localities, perspectives, and mindsets?

The lace has been deconstructed and it has found new form.

Interruptions, new overflowing of activity, new ways–connection forming across a globalised community.

The feminine form is strong.

The tune demands to be heard.

Drop your billowing gowns–stand proud and strong.

**Act 5 – Of Learnings**

We cannot leave behind wisdom gained from games that have been played.

There was learning that we must not forget.

Cannon, legacy, and imprint…

What of these?

The shiFt is relational requiring mindfulness.

The issue is that being, belonging and becoming must be inclusive, not exclusive.

**Act 6 – With Love**

What does it mean to love?

Is there room for critique in loving relationships?

Is there room for differentiation?

What of diversity, disabilities, abilities, and giftedness?

Who notes, who acts?

Pseudo inclusion hurts the soul.

Is there opportunity to step away and then to step back in differently?

What does love look, sound, and feel like in academe?

What is truth?

Whose truth? And,

What comes next?

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