

HOSPITALITY – CHORA – MATRIX – CYBERSPACE

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“Telo” (BODY) –

- 1) External physical forms of human and in general, any live organisms
- 2) Corpse
- 3) Something material, substantial, sensible, tactile, and visible, that occupies enclosed space
- 4) Separate object (subject) in space. ... Noteworthy: the multiplicity of meanings the word “telo” had in ancient Russian and old Slavic languages, taken from pre-Slavonic: “substance,” “material being as opposed to spiritual,” “image,” “outlook,” “representation,” “idol,” “doll,” “human body.” If the meaning “something substantial, material, and thus enclosed spatially, limited by certain edges and having form” is oldest, then we can relate it to another nest of roots, based on Slavic affiliation: “tĕlo” as “soil,” “ground.” Compare with Latin tellus: “hard ground,” “soil”... Some connect “telo” (body) with “ten (shade)” (body gives shade!), though the etymology of shade is no clearer. In a new vein, but not convincingly, Makhek explains this word, by approximating “telo” with the Greek τελοϋς: “end,” “target,” “limit,” “duration.”

“Choromy” – “spacious (with many rooms) and wealthy house/home” ... Semantically compare δομοϋς – “house,” “temple,” and δεμω – “building.” ... Etymology – unclear.

“Choronit” – “to conduct a ritual of burial.” ... Came from choroniti – “to keep away,” “to conceal.” Etymology – unclear. (Historico-Etymological Dictionary of Modern Russian Language. Volume 2. Chernykh, P. Ya. 1999)

“A house has some similarity with a tool, but, rather than a sort of thing or instrument or implement, it is the condition for all human action and reference. As a place where I can withdraw and recollect myself, it is characterized by intimacy. ... The intimacy and familiarity proper to a home presuppose that it is already human, although – in this stage of our description – it is not yet necessary to introduce the metaphysical relation of one human to the absolute Other. It demands a certain ‘femininity’.” (Adriaan Peperzak, 1993)

“The urge to virtual realities of any kind relies on a constant domestic space,

whether proximal or distant. The space of domesticity, configured as 'real' space, is still, already ready, the spatial envelope of the cyberventuring subject who explores the public space of the net or the virtual space of simulation. With his body, that hunk of pulsing meat, in his comfortable, safe, warm, uninterrupted, timeless space, he can project himself anywhere, into anything." (Jennifer Bloomer, 1997)

Hospitality of the idea of Home and its Foundation

What is the relationship between matrix and chora, between body within body, between body and space? This relation is through home, home as a space of hospitality, a space that unconditionally welcomes – at least, in the Western philosophical tradition. Derrida points out that etymologically the term “hospitality” is related to the notion of “hostility” since the root of the former, *hospes* is allied to an earlier root of the latter, *hostis*, which interestingly meant both “stranger” and “enemy.” Thus hospitality, as in *hostilis*, stranger/enemy + *potes*, “(of having) power,” came eventually to mean the power the host had over the stranger/enemy. John Caputo, in an interesting commentary on Derrida’s notion of hospitality notes that “the ‘host’ is someone who takes on or receives strangers, who gives to the stranger even while remaining in control.” (Caputo, 1997, p. 111) It is clear that the “host” is in a necessary position of power insofar as he (she?) circumscribes the parameters within which the needs and comforts of the stranger/enemy is attended to. In addition to this circumscription, the host’s “power over” the stranger, Derrida suggests, results from his (her?) ownership of the premises that is thus offered up. Given the fact that hospitality is dependent on ownership before it is offered hospitably to the other, Derrida argues, an essential tension is built into its structure. This is because it is difficult to give over to the other when you continue to own. The aporia for the giver is the tension of wanting to give but also having to have what is given away, for it is having that makes possible the giving. Derrida says that this aporia, which could well paralyze any efforts at hosting the other, is exactly what needs to be worked through rather than be denied. In fact, hospitality is only possible when one resists this paralysis by moving towards what Derrida calls a “hospitality beyond hospitality,” wherein the very impossibility of a hospitality based on ownership as limit-condition is pushed to/at the limits. In having erected its possibilities on their very impossibility, Derrida claims, hospitality, like deconstruction, is a *to come* (*avenir*). The aporia of hospitality *to come* is constituted by one’s inability to know entirely or surely its specific qualities and as such, it is to be struggled with *performatively*.

However, this idea of receiving, unconditional receptivity of receptacle is fundamentally different (politically and ontologically) when applied to chora and to the femininity of the home. It can be struggled with *performatively* only in the case of the host (a member of the community). However, when we deal with hostess, with sexual difference, the situation changes dramatically, as the notion of performativity is anthropomorphic, as least for Derrida and Levinas. What has to be left behind in their analysis is the question of the “awareness” and “consciousness” of those who perform hospitality. It is assumed. Unless one is raising the issue of Femininity, Divinity or Animality, the situation of performativity and responsibility is assumed to belong to a human subject.

Femininity, before human, gives itself up to receive a human, to welcome “all human action and reference,” without ... being, being in the house, or outside it, or anywhere else except inside the human himself. What (outside the anthropomorphism of *the who*) can be without being? What can welcome without owning? What can receive without asking or letting someone else to give? Woman, and – animal. Two ultimate alterities, which that give meaning to any Other sense of otherness, closely related to each other, and both serving as a passage and a vehicle into which every other has to be reduced to become the other, and through which every man has to pass in order to come to his God(s).

According to Derrida, hospitality, as it is conceived by Levinas, is *primarily* and essentially tied to sexual difference, and its very possibility depends on it. Furthermore, the (concept/metaphor of) Woman undermines any claim on safe ownership since she serves as a pre-condition for the hospitality and welcoming of the home for its potential or actual owner. In this case, fundamentally, the master of the property is always already in a situation of *being received* at his own home by so-called feminine alterity, understood as a feminine welcoming being. Here Derrida and Levinas, and another interpreter of Levinas, Peperzak, are all quick to stress that this “feminine being,” or “feminine alterity,” has nothing to do with empirical women. That is, the actual presence of a woman in a given house does not determine or undermine the feminine essence of hospitality.

Thus, for Levinas, hospitality is necessarily associated with the question of Woman, *essentially*, but without reference to *empirical women themselves*. Before embarking on a critique of Levinas’s notion of hospitality, it would be useful to outline some important constitutive elements of hospitality for both Levinas and Derrida.

First of all, hospitality is about *welcoming*. It can be a word of welcome, a welcoming smile, a welcome understood in its utmost openness and passivity – openness to the other, a smile at the threshold of the house, unconditional acceptance of the other. Second, hospitality is about *receptivity*, an ability of

reason to receive, to be “more passive than any given passivity.” The owner is being received in his own house; he is being welcomed there prior to any language proper, prior to linguistic communication. Third, hospitality demands *discretion*. It is manifestation and withdrawal of the face; indirect communication; at the same time it is a silent discrete presence without transgression of the interiority to exteriority. Furthermore, hospitality is more than discrete, it is also *intimate*. Hospitality is about comfort, it is about serenity of being “at home” with oneself. Thus it is absolute “defenselessness,” a conscious and enjoyable vulnerability of feeling in a total refuge at home with oneself. This feeling of being at home with oneself refers necessarily to memory, though here without any psychoanalytic gesture, but understood as *recollection*: the recollection as a relation to the language of the host, a recollection of meaning. And of course, following from all previous formulations, Hospitality is posed through *Habitation*. This relation to habitation, to home, to the interiority of the house, is a reminder of the self’s relation to its own corporeality, in some sense, since “there is not yet the ‘you’ of the face, but the ‘thou’ of familiarity.” (Levinas)

What is of special interest for us here is how the split between communal and domestic is maintained by Levinas’s discussion of hospitality, and Derrida does not seem to question the separation either. If the other of the community is also feminine, “woman as other *par excellence*,” she does not have any place in the sphere of community. She silently prepares a ground for it, only to (pretend to) disappear. That is why it does not come as a surprise when the point of entrance of “Woman” into this discourse on hospitality occurs: with the word *discretion*: “the other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the *hospitable welcome par excellence* which describes the field of intimacy, which is the Woman. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation.” (Levinas, cited in Derrida, 1999, p.36)

The building up of the first “communal gesture,” “communal embryo,” starts at this point, for the figure of “the Woman,” in Derrida’s terms, allows for the next term to come in, that of, “*rapport* or relation,” as the I-Thou of “a silent language,” of “an understanding without words,” of “an expression in secret.” This is not yet the community proper; it is a rehearsal of community, it is a kind of preparation, a building of a flesh on which community will be able to stand and to flourish. This relation/*rapport* between feminine alterity or home, and the owner/masculine subject, does not yet have a dimension of height that is so important for Levinas. It lacks height since Woman does not have a face in this house. She is too discrete and silent to possess such qualities. Actually, this is her role – to lack height, “height of the face.”

Derrida reminds us that Levinas called “feminine alterity” as fundamentally one of the modalities of welcoming, and she provides a silent refuge and asylum. In Derrida’s words: “If the at home with oneself of the dwelling is an ‘at home with oneself as in a land of asylum and refuge,’ this would mean that the inhabitant also dwells there as a refugee or an exile, a guest and not a proprietor. That is the humanism of this ‘feminine alterity,’ the humanism of the other woman, of the other (as) woman. If woman, in the silence of her ‘feminine being,’ is not a man, she remains human.” (Derrida, 1999, p. 37)

As was discussed, the terms of ownership create a contradiction, an impossibility of hospitality: how can one give away what one owns, if one wants to continue to be hospitable. We see now that Derrida seems to resolve this problem of ownership with help, with a hospitable hint, from a position of a “feminine being,” who does not own the place, but provides hospitality to hospitality so that it may exist. Thus hospitality was beyond hospitality; it was impossible since it contradicted the terms of ownership. It was impossible until its resolution, or its birth, through/by/in “feminine alterity,” that, as Derrida and Levinas maintain, is ephemeral and omnipotent, passive and fundamental, silent and human, metaphorical and energy-producing, all at the same time. This non-empirical feminine, haunted by maternal imaginary, brings us, *naturally*, to the questions of the community, legal, ethical, and general transcendental dimension of height, that is, of God: “Hospitality thus precedes property, and this will not be without consequence, as we will see, for the taking-place of the gift of the law, for the extremely enigmatic relationship between refuge and the Torah, the city of refuge, the land of asylum, Jerusalem, and the Sinai.” (Derrida, 1999, p. 45)

As we shall see in a moment, this kind of understanding of sexual difference, when femininity or Woman is disembodied and ontologically emptied to perform a particular function, being a “symptom” of a man’s project/ion, is developed by Hegel in his conclusive discussion of community.

The Hegelian notion of community, especially through his use of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, has established the dialectic between the divine law (family, home, the law of female gender/ womankind) and the human law (city, community, state, the law of male gender/mankind). Hegel’s general argument is well known and cannot be rehearsed here in detail. What is required, however, is to outline the grip of the Hegelian system on sexual difference, for as many claim, it is still in full force in Western thought and culture.

Woman plays a crucial role when she follows her family duties and defends its divine law; she presents herself as a challenge to human law, to community and the state of men who aspire to transgress the family and its laws. Her challenge, in effect, produces the conditions for (human) man’s law to

exercise and reproduce itself. Human law, in the moment of its birth, negates the Family and its laws, in order to establish itself. Thus, on the next stage, it produces it to repress it, to negate it as its worse enemy.

In Hegel's words: "Since the community gets its subsistence only by breaking it upon family happiness and dissolving self-consciousness into the universal, it creates itself on what it represses [*erzeugt es sich an dem, was es unterdrückt*] and what is at the same time essential to it – womankind in general, its inner enemy. Womankind – the eternal irony of the community – alters by intrigue the universal purpose of government into a private end." (Hegel G.W.F., cited in Žižek, 1995, p. 148)

Kelly Oliver in her recent book *Family Values* provides a detailed account of Hegel's position on femininity. According to her, "Hegel calls womankind the everlasting irony of the community because the feminine threat is necessary to sustain the community. ... Within Hegel's scenario, the community is possible only by virtue of the sacrifice and repression of the feminine." (Oliver, 1997, p. 48)

However, while challenging the State, woman does not properly comprehend her act, since for herself, she is *simply and naturally* performing her family duty. In a fashion somewhat resembling that of Levinas' argumentation regarding the hospitality of *feminine being*, Hegel denies woman the level of highest ethical agency – conscious ethical action, since the realm of the Family is the realm of the unconscious, irrational desires and duties based on blood relations. Woman, especially sister (Antigone), is propelled to act by blood ties, not out of ethical consciousness, and this is a crucial point for Hegel: "The feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world." (Hegel, cited in Oliver, 1997, pp. 46-48)

Paraphrasing Kelly Oliver, one might suggest that it is because woman is (somewhat blindly) bound to home that man can escape home and enter community. (See Oliver, p. 46) Slavoj Žižek transforms Hegel's position into almost "heroic feminism:" "It may seem that Hegel simply ascribes to woman the narrowness of a private point of view: woman is the community's 'inner enemy' in so far as she misapprehends the true weight of the universal purposes of public life, and is capable of conceiving of them only as a means of realizing private ends. This, however, is far from being the entire picture: it is this same position of society's 'inner enemy' that renders possible the sublime ethical act of exposing the inherent limitation of the standpoint of social totality itself (Antigone)." (Žižek, 1995, p.148)

Again – woman is assigned a high destiny, – to expose something about the social community, to make it possible. Woman has to feel proud, no matter at what cost to herself. In fact, it is not even her *conscious* decision, as Hegel points out, then again (as in the case with hospitality as femininity *par excellence*) – how to take credit for it, if it seems to be the matter of an “unconscious witness,” whose fate and destiny is to serve a higher order. Which she is unaware of.

Kelly Oliver used a few texts by Luce Irigaray, who had extensively written on the Hegelian dialectic of sexual difference and its operations within the community to suggest a sustained critique of the Hegelian system. Her main point is that there are not two genders in Hegelian dialectic, but only one is playing different roles in the desire to give birth to himself, appropriating maternal and feminine when and how he finds it necessary. This leaves him with a feeling of eternal guilt, binding men together in their drive to forget and exclude women from the community, from fraternity (see Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship*).

In her fundamental volume *Speculum, Of the Other Woman*, Irigaray suggested that Hegelian system of sexual difference weaves itself into a tautological web, in its consumption and assimilation of the feminine: “*What an amazing vicious circle in a single syllogistic system. Whereby the unconscious, while remaining unconscious, is yet supposed to know the laws of the consciousness – which is permitted to remain ignorant of it – and will become even more repressed as a result of failing to respect those laws.*” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 223)

Thus feminine is nothing more than *the other of the same*, that is, the negation of the masculine, produced by him to attain a higher order of community and ethical relation to god. And the constant reminder of her only fuels his obsession to negate her once and again. In the essay “The Female Gender” (See Irigaray, 1993) from the collection *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray evaluates the action of Antigone as an anti-woman gesture, since in fulfilling her family duty, protecting “the home,” Antigone no longer serves her *female gender*, but “is working in the service of men and their *pathos*. ... She already serves the state in that she tries to wipe away the blood shed by the state. The female has been taken along, taken in by the passage out of divine law, out of the law of nature, of life, into male human law. Antigone is already the desexualized representative of *the other of the same*. Faithful to her task of respecting and loving the home, careful not to pollute the hearth flame, she now performs only the dark side of that task, the side needed to establish the male order as it moves toward absolute affirmation.” (Irigaray, 1993, pp. 110-111)

This “dark side” of woman as function sustains and allows man’s ethical

consciousness. Irigaray and Oliver would probably agree with Žižek, that we do not have the *two*, but only the *one* in our culture's claim of sexual difference¹ – at least, in a Hegelian, Lacanian or even Levinas's universe; two modalities of the same voice (Žižek, 1995), “*two functions, two tasks, not two genders.*” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 120)

Thus man seems to live off woman, however insisting on her non-living, on her communal absence, state of ethical unconsciousness and ontological nothingness. “There is no woman,” only mothers, wives, sisters, or whores. (See Žižek, 1995) This violent insistence/erasure in turn leads to the “eternal anxiety of the community,” which is transferred back onto its Others, that is, still onto itself. One could even argue it is this generic crime that makes the community of men possible at all, that unites men into community, that is, through “solidarity-in-guilt.” If woman is Other *par excellence*, then every Other is to be (secretly *and* openly at the same time) killed, every Other does not exist, if the community of men is still to be held together.

It has been suggested, following Derrida, that the notion of hospitality can serve as an intervention that could allow us to sustain and nourish heterogeneous elements within community without eliminating them. However, Derrida's notion of hospitality, following Levinas, seems to exclude feminine otherness as embodied and living difference, thus once again denying that the living and breathing feminine Other is a heterogeneous member of the community of men *and* women, women *and* men. We have analyzed the Hegelian notion of community and its implications for the feminine Other that are largely in tune with those of the hospitality of Levinas and Derrida. The next question that arises would be of *how* we can inject back a living feminine Other into community, if we want it to be welcoming to the living and embodied Others, allowing it to practice heterogeneity? And what especially interests us: do net-communities have more potential than flesh communities in relation to a re-formulated notion of hospitality, or not?

Injecting hospitality into this generic community would not alter its homogenizing logic, if woman (once again) is not welcomed there as woman, but only as a “feminine dimension always already at home.” Femininity modeled for men and by men, to carry out a smooth passage into a heterogeneous community of men, would not wash off “solidarity-in-guilt” for this femininity of home is invited on one condition: to be a femininity of an imagined woman. But if “empirical women” are not needed (wanted?) to form a part of such

¹ “If it were possible to symbolize sexual difference, we would have not two sexes but one. ‘Male’ and ‘female’ are not two complementary parts of the Whole, they are two (failed) attempts to symbolize this Whole.” (Žižek, 1995, p. 160). This Whole is “the whole of Man,” “the full identity of Man.” (Žižek, 1995, p. 159)

new heterogeneous community, then what kind of heterogeneity are we talking about? Especially since sexual difference is supposed as the founding precondition for any community and of any home.

Matrixial Economies

“The Matrix is everywhere, it’s all around us, here, even in this room. You can see it out of your window, or on your television. You feel it when you go to work, or go to church or pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth, ... that you like everyone else was born into bondage ... kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste or touch. A prison for your mind. A Matrix.” (From the movie “The Matrix”)

“Imagine men to be living in an underground cave-like dwelling place, which has a way up to the light along its whole width, but the entrance is a long way up. The men have been there from childhood, with their neck and legs in fetters, so that they remain in the same place and can only see ahead of them, as their bonds prevent them from turning their heads.” (Plato, *Republic*, 514 a, b)

“What is Matrix? Simply ... the ‘big Other,’ the virtual symbolic order, the network that structures reality for us.” (Žižek)

The matrix has been etymologically framed in Indo-European cultures as that from which everything else comes into being, often in endless progression, and this meaning has been variously developed and expressed in its relationship to the terms mother, maternal, material, womb, and pregnant animal. However, definitions from the movie *Matrix* and Žižek’s article with the same name are seemingly empty of any references to the mother and the maternal body, following Platonic tradition. In its most recent usage the matrix has been identified with cyberspace and anything that escapes linearity (like in mathematics).

Michelle Boulous Walker, in her impressive book *Philosophy and the Maternal Body* names it “The philosophical fantasy of self-generation, ... which is a specifically masculine imaginary structured by a desire to displace the maternal in order to speak both in and from the mother’s place.” (Walker, 2000, p. 28) Derrida would agree with her absolutely, as this passage refers to the notion of “chora,” and here distinction between matrix and chora is blurred though it has to be remembered. Derrida does not make this apparent, as matrix/uterus is absent from his discussion on Chora. He treats Plato’s refer-

² “The Mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any a way sensible things is not to be termed earth, or air, or fire, or water, or any of their compounds, or any of the

ence to the Mother and receptacle as metaphoric, without bringing it so far as to take them literally.²

The cave in Plato *stands for* womb/matrix (interestingly enough, matrix here is translated as womb), and the fact that Plato uses a different metaphor for maternal “invisibility” cannot be ignored. Irigaray, who has written extensively on both Plato’s discussion of the Cave in the *Republic* and his discussion of Chora in *Timaeus*, writes on this passage of the Cave: “Already the prisoner was no longer in a womb but in a cave – an attempt to provide a figure, a system of metaphor for the uterine cavity. He was held in a place that was, that meant to express, that had the sense of being like a womb. We must suppose that the womb is reproduced, reproducible, and reproductive by means of projections.” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 279)

The idea of visual perception as a privilege over the darkness of the womb (and what is darkness if there is warmth?) has received a great deal of criticism as the *ocularcentrism* of Western thought. Less attention has been devoted to the fact that it does not only relate to “truth” but fundamentally to the movement “out” to light rather than movement “into” darkness. In order to bring things “out,” pregnancy is detached from the embodied space, becoming “more visible and usable” as an illuminating metaphor. However, we have to be careful, of course, not to collapse the ethical into ontological. Derrida and Levinas both try to avoid such collapse. The question arises when they insist that it is necessary to ban (empirical) *women* from the horizon of thought and their discourse while positioning sexual difference of home and chora as fundamental to the third genre. Furthermore, it is feminine but different from the split between “chaos and cosmos,” “myth and logos.” Here both Derrida and Levinas come dangerously close to Freud and Lacan (“unconscious”), and hence, exit their search for the ethical dimension, as the formulated “dream” of home/feminine places, it is outside of the question of the *ethics* of sexual difference.

Shuli Barzilai in her recent book *Lacan and the Matter of Origins* writes that pregnancy in Lacan’s later works becomes associated exclusively with visual perception, with *imaginary* identifications. From Gestalt theories Lacan assumes a definition of pregnancy that was eloquently formed by Piaget: “Good forms are pregnant because they are simple, regular, symmetrical.” It also designates the force and stability of a privileged field or structure, which for Lacan ultimately is defined as a reflected image. (See Barzilai, 1999, p. 5)

As Shuli Barzilai points out, pregnancy becomes associated with visual

elements from which these are derived, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.” (Plato, *Timaeus*, in Walker, 2000, p. 13).

perception not only on the level of metaphoric analogy, but also on “literal (physiological) and figurative (psychological) levels.” ... Here in particular Lacan draws on “Leonard Harrison Matthew’s research on ‘Visual Stimulation and Ovulation in Pigeons.’” (Barzilai, p. 133) His research shows how the act of one pigeon seeing another pigeon or a mirror image can stimulate ovulation. Barzilai stresses that for Lacan this process is not modeled on the acts of mating or maternity. He presents it as some kind of Immaculate Conception through which a female pigeon can lay eggs from seeing her “lover” in the mirror.

The notion of matrix is used in association with the term pregnancy, with years becoming more and more elevated to the realm of Symbolic, though Lacan continues to exploit it as an engendering and foundational metaphor. Lacanian usage of Matrix is linked to the general desire to self-production, to engendering oneself by oneself alone, giving a “true” birth out of life in the Platonic cave. Barzilai concludes that in this process “matrix disappears from the world of mothers and enters into that of mirrors and signifiers.”

In recent years the notion of the Matrix has become dominant in figurations of cyberspace. It seems as if it is the most desirable, the most contemporary and fitting equation. I would argue that the challenge today is to reintroduce the maternal as an embodied encounter with difference, and not a metaphorical one. We imagine cyberspace as a collection of home-sites, matrices, shelters that are protected by the keys – passwords.

There are at least three associations that currently operate between notions of cyberspace and the matrix that makes the last so appropriate for representations of the former:

Both are seen as infinite and ever expanding, where expansion is itself their function (as in mathematics, where the initial matrix forms the basis for serial and cumulative development, or in contemporary cybertheory and cyberpunk literature where cyberspace is often assumed to be limitless and fully imaginary, to be filled with any desirable content).

They are supposed (and wanted?) as empty spaces, passively waiting to be filled and occupied – a fact that also lends to its being conceptualized as *virtual* vis-à-vis real. It is simply “out there,” without having its own place, though providing a place for everything. As Doug Mann and Heidi Hochenedel define it, after Baudrillard, “it is a desert of the real in which hyper real simulacra saturate and dominate human consciousness,” it is “a map without territory.” Being appropriated by phallogocentric imaginary, matrix has become an empty space to be filled with any content, psychological, scientific, artistic, or philosophical theorizations. It no longer belongs to a body marked by sexual difference; it rather serves self-productions between (spiritual) fathers and sons.

Ultimately, both have been disembodied. Cyberspace has been invented as being nowhere and everywhere, as something which has no corporeal reference or geographical location. It is a place of ultimate escape, where we can explore our desires, anxieties and fears to become more stable, normal and healthier. Of course, the body haunts it, for it feeds on the body, which must be forgotten or silenced, or overcome.

These characteristics imply that the matrixial therefore is indifferent to difference, that its infinite openness does not impose barriers on/to entry and participation. And also participation is understood to be free and on equal terms. The matrix provides a sense of limits and spherical closure to the limitless borderless imaginary of cyberspace; it almost serves as a saviour to the notion that would otherwise be in danger of falling into nothingness. Thus my other disagreement with Sadie Plant and others who celebrate a subversive strategy of mimicry and simulation on the part of the female genre and computers: it is not the Matrix that simulates cyberspace as some place that invades a man – it is cyberspace that is injected with the notion of the Matrix as a grounds for its self-reproduction. The conception of cyberspace is gendered, for it simulates the Matrix without mothers, once again partaking from the maternal while imagining and fixing it as a mere original to make copies from.

There is tension between the generative (as abstract) vs. maternal (as embodied) in definitions and representations of the matrix in cyberspace. The appropriation of the corporeal matrix and its relation to maternal body and subjectivity through scientific, philosophical and aesthetic reductions and abstractions in Western culture has been instrumental in producing cyberspace, fantasizing it as “self-reproducing” matrix-perfect Mega-computer or Mega-ideology. In fact, these domestications of the notion of the matrix, to disarticulate it from its relationship to embodied sexual difference, are the matrixial as matricidal economies of cyberspace.

The hospitality of the matrix as space, as “first” home, is never really analyzed or raised. It especially handicaps our future encounters with “artificial” matrices that chemically, technologically and even psychologically all try to mimic and reproduce maternal space. What is “maternal space?” Spaces of femininity? Home? Matrix? Domesticity, intimacy, warmth? What is the relation between woman’s body as space and spaces that she inhabits? This is a fundamental question for any conception of space and place, even as matricidal and somatophobic as our philosophical tradition, *more so* in our philosophical tradition.

Unconditional Receptivity of Chora

One major quality that is shared by home and chora is not their belonging to the realm of the feminine, as some might expect. For the femininity of both home and chora is not a quality but a necessity, or necessary consequence. This bond between the home and chora is *unconditional receptivity*. Hospitality is a part of both so essentially that in some philosophical elaborations on chora and home we can interchange them without disrupting the drive of the argument (another interchange would be with “matrix,” though usually a hidden one). Certainly, this no-where condition of chora and home (through its singular uniqueness) is particularly beneficial when applied to the WWW. Information (and the technologies that facilitate its flows) has been visualized/imagined/described and even implemented in the temporal-spatial terminology of a big bang, a collapse into a dot: as technological time was supposed to lapse into an instant, a moment, a point; a technological space in its own turn was supposed to shrink, geography lose its significance. Instead of making time-space disappear, this movement of thought and effort has magnified techno-time to eternity and immortality through liberating it from linearity and a collection of “virtually indestructible” records, while space has never been imagined to be so expanding as in its technological incarnation. Macro (cosmos) and micro (atom) are peacefully welcomed together in the house of information, represented by the World Wide Web. The Web that is as Wide as the entire World. A sphere of matter crossed over by threads of information. Depending on how we position the World in WWW, where the World is – inside our imagination or transforming into the entire Universe.

However, this unconditional receptivity of *chora* is two-fold and can never be simply assumed: chora has a spatial dimension, and hence the sense of a home, a maternal touch, a body, creative interiority without limits, inverted inside-out of itself at any moment. Just like in hospitality, unconditional welcome goes hand in hand with the law, the responsibility, the system. Their interplay and constant tension makes ethics possible. Ethics is somewhere, a by-product of the tension between “unconditional hospitality and, on the other hand, the rights and duties that are the conditions of hospitality.” (Derrida, 2000, p. 147) Hospitality and the receptivity of the *chora* seem to be in line with discussions on interactivity, especially in relation to user-centered products. In an interactive artwork or a commercial product, as many have noted, responsibility is pushed onto the user/buyer/visitor, and it grows with the degrees of freedom and number of choices. It is a fake, on the one hand, and not at all, on the other.

As Derrida suggests, “*Chora* receives” all the interpretations of her without receiving them, and without receiving anything for herself. She does not possess anything as her own. She “is” nothing other than the sum or the process of what has just been inscribed “on” her, on the subject of her, on her subject, right up against her subject, but she is not the *subject* or the *present support* of all these interpretations, even though, nevertheless, she is not reducible to them. *Chora* is not that chaos or Gaia from which everything comes to light. She should not be reduced to “the anthropomorphic form” (that is, of a woman, mother, nurse). “And yet, to follow this other figure, although it no longer has the place of the nurse but that of the mother, *khōra* does not couple with the father, in other words, with the paradigmatic model. She is a third gender/genus; she does not belong to an oppositional couple, for example, to that which the intelligible paradigm forms with the sensible becoming and that looks rather like a father/son couple.” According to Derrida: “The ‘mother’ is supposedly apart. And since it’s only a figure, a schema, therefore one of these determinations which *khōra* receives, *khōra* is no more of a mother than a nurse, is no more than a woman. This *triton genos* is not a *genos*, first of all because it is a unique individual. She does not belong to the ‘race of women’ (*genos gynaikōn*). *Khōra* marks a place apart.” As she is left out of law, she does not belong to the realm of ethics, she is privileged to be left out of law, but it also gives her no place and we cannot, it means, have a relationship with her, especially daughters. She is space, *khōra*, always virtual, always that profound philosophical and scientific zero, nothingness. So, *Khōra* marks a space apart, the spacing which keeps a dissymmetrical relation to all that which, “in herself,” beside or in addition to herself, seems to make a couple with her. “In the couple outside of the couple, this strange mother who gives place without engendering can no longer be considered as an origin. She/it eludes all anthropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, and all truth. Preoriginary, *before* and outside of all generation, she no longer even has the meaning of a past, of a present that is past. *Before* signifies no temporal anteriority. The relation of independence, the nonrelation, looks more like the relation of the interval or the spacing to what is lodged in it to be received in it.” (See Derrida, 1995)

Visualized Receptivity: Nothingness – 0 – Interval

Chora marks space apart. She is as an interval, as a spacing in-between, an X that can take any form it receives. This is the integral part of leaving marks, of writing, and of language as a whole – empty spaces and silences, that can add

millions to one single number or open up a space to listen. A few have insisted that “Woman Conceals Nothing” – that was the main secret. She (chora) does not exist although she gives a place for everything existing. What does it mean – to be no thing, to non-be; are Being and thing so distantly-closely related?

Ironically, our relation to nothing is not one of “X” or a sum – $n+n+n\dots$ – how Derrida writes of chora, that she is an “X” that can take any form, any letter. But nothing has been positioned as zero – “0.” And I propose to think of CHORA not as X, but as “0,” following our historical relation to the nothingness. In *The Book of Nothing* John Barrow traces how only 4 cultures in the histories of civilizations known to us, have had a concept of “0,” – Egypt, Babylon, Mayan and Indian civilizations. Their representations of “0” varied, though all of them conceived of “zero” to signify a space left in-between other numbers, space out – just like in Derrida’s interpretations of *chora*. They have developed different images of zero, remarkably all resembling a shell, or a circle, or a half circle. As if the empty space that signifies multiplication has to contain a space inside itself to represent the space/interval it substituted.

Greeks and Romans did not have zero, that’s why Roman numbers do not have it. Later Western culture adopted the Arabic numerical system that was borrowed from India. Indian civilizations did not only see zero as a space to signify a numerical system, but developed a complex relation to it as a notion of Nothing, both philosophical and theological. Zero, sunya, meant “atmosphere, ether, immensity of space, a point, a sky, complete and a hole,” among other meanings. Barrow writes that Indians had a conception of nothing as a generative space, and not only as a disappearance (as in the Greek tradition). However, in Western tradition nothingness and emptiness continued to be treated with suspicion and fear, even though zero was adopted for calculations in the early Middle Age. It would be important, however, as Derrida warned us, not to collapse chora into Greek conceptions of Gaia or chaos (“another” feminine).

For Kristeva, chora belongs to the semiotic and maternal, pre-symbolic. We do not have space here to elaborate on it further, though I would like to stress that her analysis of chora is similar to that of Derrida as she also insists that it does not relate to “real women.” Mother’s body in Kristeva’s work serves the purpose of disrupting paternal logoi, and disappears into metaphorical workings of symbolic and semiotic. M. B. Walker claims, “There is a slide between the maternal and the mother that is largely absent from Kristeva’s work on chora.” (Walker, 2000, p.145)

Irigaray discusses the issue of chora both in Plato and Aristotle. While in *Speculum, Of the Other Woman* she relates *chora* to the issues of visible, sensible

and intelligible, and to its “virginity” (following Plato and later Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida), she explicitly takes the notion of Interval in relation to *chora* in her essay “Place, Interval, A Reading of Aristotle.” (Irigaray, 1993). First of all, Aristotle connects *chora* to matter (this was criticized by many as a deviation from Plato’s notion that is not matter or any ontology). Irigaray writes: “if the matrix is extendable, it can figure as the place of place.” Of course being aware that *chora* has been named as the place of place too, Irigaray brings back the relationship between embodiment, place and matrix. Man cannot separate the first and the last place, and that leads the philosophical tradition to downshift both in its relation to the unique mother and the unique God. As such, this split still has to be resolved. As for “woman,” writes Irigaray, she is place, and therefore, without place – like *chora*. She is receiving without being received, without interval for herself, which would allow herself to be received in a place. As a consequence, we have infinity the without possibility of arresting the fall. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 38) This is a highly political question, especially for discussions of cyberspace and sexual difference. Infinity without the possibility of arresting the fall – for a woman only. Woman remains the container for the world, since she is nothingness. However, being a container for the world and for the child (son), she does not become a container for herself, endlessly falling into metaphors of *chora*, matrix, abyss, multiplication, etc. “The womb, for its part, would figure rather as place. Though of course what unfolds in the womb unfolds in the function of an interval, a cord, that is never done away with. Hence perhaps, the infinite nostalgia for that first home? The interval cannot be done away with.” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 38)

The discourse of *chora* thus plays for philosophy a role analogous to that which *chora* “herself” plays for that which philosophy speaks of, namely, the cosmos formed or given form according to the paradigm. “It is out of this cosmos that will be drawn figures for describing *chora*: receptacle, imprint-bearer, mother or nurse. . . . Philosophy cannot speak directly about that which they approach, in the mode of vigilance or of truth. . . . The dream is between the two, neither one nor the other. Philosophy cannot speak philosophically of that which looks like its ‘mother,’ its ‘nurse,’ its ‘receptacle,’ or its ‘imprint-bearer.’ As such, it speaks only of the father and the son, as if the father engendered it all on his own.” (Derrida, 1997, p. 30) Hence: Nostalgia that finds its ultimate embodiment in the virtual reality. Why? “Because this apparent nostalgia-free zone is, in fact, nothing if not nostalgic, a repression of ‘home-sickness’ so extreme that something is not quite being covered up.” (Bloomer, 1996, p. 164)

Universe, maternal body and cyberspace are conceived as closed vessels,

the receptacle of all elements. There is still no escape in our notions of (cyber)space from this nostalgia, this longing for the first (Woman) and last (God) home, while being left speechless. This would be possible, however, if interpretations and figurations of chora included the ethics of the matrix as the first home/space of welcoming. Philosophical tradition has to welcome what it does not know yet; welcome first and wait, in order to sustain an interval without reducing *chora* to cosmology or the ontology of “0.”

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