

## Reconsidering *Chôra*, Architecture and “Woman”

Louise Burchill

Two strikingly divergent interpretations of the “*feminine space*” Plato designated under the name of *chôra* have been proffered by theorists seeking to rethink architecture from a feminist perspective. Elizabeth Grosz judges *chôra* to be “a founding concept” of the “disembodied femininity,” associated within our tradition with determinations of space as homogeneous and undifferentiated, whereas Ann Bergren maintains *chôra* offers a conception of moving, differential multiplicity that could, in its feminist implications, open up a radically new approach to architecture. Such a marked interpretative divergence in respect of *chôra*—which extends to the interpretation proffered by Derrida—compels attention: is this femininely-connoted space indeed cognate, *or not*, with attempts to rethink architecture from a feminist perspective?

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle criticizes Plato for having made the “same error” as the authors of the Orphic cosmogonies: namely, that of attributing the cosmos to be born from a pre-existing state of chaos. In the Orphic cosmogonies, this state is designated “Night” and qualified as the “mother of all things” and “wet-nurse”—the same epithets as those Plato uses for *chôra*. See: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12: 1071b 25 sq.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 125.

The association of space with “woman” is as old as the world itself. It spans our entire tradition from the very first cosmogonies—whose account of how the cosmos, or world, came to be typically depicts this as originating in a femininely-connoted entity or “place”—up to our contemporaneity, with the last decades of the twentieth century indeed displaying a singular speculative attention to the imbrication of “the feminine” and space. Two texts from the 1990s contributing to this speculative exploration of the space-woman relation are of particular interest here in that their common concern to rethink architecture from a feminist perspective leads both to re-examine the enigmatic notion of *chôra* that Plato was to introduce—under the influence, no doubt, of the Orphic cosmogonies<sup>1</sup>—in one of his last works, the *Timaeus* (circa 357 B.C.). Arguably the first concept in the Western tradition of space in general, as distinct from the space occupied by any particular thing,<sup>2</sup> *chôra*'s consistent qualification by Plato as “mother” and “nurse of all becoming” is one of the reasons for its quite remarkable reinvestment as a concept of preeminent critical concern from the late 1960s on by contemporary French philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Both of the 1990s' texts of interest here—namely, Ann Bergren's “Architecture Gender Philosophy” (1992) and Elizabeth Grosz's “Women, *Chora*, Dwelling” (1994)—choose to focus, moreover, on the re-evaluation of *chôra* proposed by Derrida which had served in the mid-1980s as the basis for the latter's collaboration with Peter Eisenman on the architectural project *Choral Works*, thus spearheading the philosopher's subsequent sustained theoretical engagement with the question of architecture. Crucially, both Bergren and Grosz take task with Derrida's interpretation, arguing this—much to the contrary of Derrida's own claims—to ultimately prove complicitous with Plato's description of *chôra* as a “passive,” homogeneous support-space that is capable of assuring the faithful reproduction of the forms “impressed” within or upon it because it lacks any specific properties or characteristics of its own. Bergren and Grosz alike underline that such a conception of “space” as a neutral, impassive and stabilized ground or recipient morphologically reproduces the attributes traditionally associated with a femininity determined as necessarily complementary (or rather, subordinate) to the active fashioning of forms, ideas and, indeed, worlds imputed to male subjectivity. Yet, whatever Bergren's and Grosz's concurrence on the problematic nature of *chôra* conceived as a purely passive space-support without any identity, essence or productivity of its own, their respective analyses of both the failings of Derrida's interpretation in this respect and, more overarchingly, the very value of *chôra* for thinking architecture anew from a feminist perspective could not be more divergent.

For Grosz, *chôra* is the “founding concept” of a “disembodied femininity” that, through its association with the homogeneous, isotropic space traditionally informing the built environment, would serve as the ground for the production of our ever-increasingly inequitable and unsustainable,

<sup>3</sup> Grosz, "Women, *Chora*, Dwelling," 124.

"man-made" world. Characterizing architecture as thereby linked in its very concept to the phallogocentric effacement of women and female corporeality, Grosz judges Derrida's "reconceptualization of *chôra*, space and spatiality" to equally perpetuate this appropriation and disenfranchisement of femininity. Theorists seeking to rethink space, time, and dwelling in a manner that no longer erases, or distorts, women's specificity would better turn, she argues, to the work of Luce Irigaray, whose analyses of our culture's *constitutive* non-recognition of the debt it owes to the "maternal-feminine," *qua* the primordial space from which all subjects emerge, underlie Grosz's description of *chôra* as veritably emblematic of the "endless metaphorization of femininity" that serves as "the condition for men's self-representation and cultural reproduction."<sup>3</sup> While gesturing towards a possible feminist reappropriation of *chôra*'s maternal dimension, Grosz discerns *chôra* all in all to offer no resources for devising, occupying, or living in new spaces that would, in turn, help generate new modalities of dwelling within the world and with others.

Bergren, on the other hand, all while equally contesting Derrida's and Plato's depiction of the "matrix of becoming," seeks to *re-instate*, as it were, a very different conception of *chôra* in striking contrast with the conceptualization of femininity and space that has dominated our tradition. Contrary to Grosz (and Irigaray), Bergren refuses, that is, to reduce *chôra* to a passive, homogeneous or characterless, inert space—or femininity—serving as "support" for the impression, or reflection, of virile forms. She instead distinguishes this "passified *chôra*" from what she aptly calls the "pre-architectural *chôra*": namely, *chôra* as it exists primordially, in an ever-changing state of moving, differential multiplicity, *before* its subjection to the processes of geometrization, commensuration and domestication overseen by the Demiurge-Architect of Plato's *Timaeus*. For Bergren, this active, (self-)differentiating *chôra* could well, in its feminist implications, open up a radically new approach to architecture.

Such a marked interpretative divergence in respect of *chôra* compels attention: is this femininely-connoted space indeed cognate, *or not*, with attempts to rethink architecture from a feminist perspective? By revisiting Bergren's and Grosz's texts, alongside (however briefly) those of Plato and Derrida, what follows is an attempt to gauge anew whether *chôra*, and the association of space and woman it forges at the very beginning of the Western philosophical and architectural tradition, offers room for reimagining our conceptual and social universe.

### Chôra—amorphous and undifferentiated space

It is not until about half-way into the *Timaeus* that Plato introduces the notion of *chôra* as the necessary complement to the cosmogonic system he had hitherto set up in terms of the relation between the ontological sphere of Forms or Ideas, intelligible and perpetually selfsame, and the

<sup>4</sup> Bergren, “Architecture Gender Philosophy,” 17, and note 68, 47.

<sup>5</sup> The first occurrences of these terms in the *Timaeus* are found, respectively, at: 50d, 50a-b, 50c, and 52b.

<sup>6</sup> Plato’s description of *chôra* as “amorphous and undifferentiated” (in 50d7 to 50e4) is, for that matter, contested by *all* the French philosophers having reinvested the Platonic notion in the latter half of the twentieth century: all deem it necessary to wrest, as it were, *chôra* from such a metaphysical determination. I’ve elaborated this point elsewhere: Burchill, “Re-Situating *the Feminine* in Contemporary French Philosophy,” 91sq.

<sup>7</sup> See *Timaeus*, 91d.

sensible or phenomenal copies that, “coming to be and ceasing to be,” ever-changing, only participate in “being” insofar as they imitate the intelligible sphere. According to this framework, the cosmos (or universe) is to be understood, then, as the material “likeness,” or copy, of the intelligible realm of ideal Forms: a copy that, unlike the Forms, can be perceived and sensed. A divine *démiourgos*—“craftsperson,” “artisan” or, indeed, “architect”<sup>4</sup>—is specified by Plato to have constructed the cosmos, with this a task carried out by taking the eternal Forms as model or paradigm so as to build the cosmos in conformity with reason and, accordingly, as beautiful and as good as possible (28a6-b1, 30c-31a). Plato was to judge, however, this dualistic framework of intelligible model and visible copy as insufficient to explain the genesis of the sensible world as such. The copy required the support of a medium or something “in which” it becomes, thus compelling Plato to add a “third kind” to his two pre-established kinds of “nature.” Qualified from the outset as seeming to defy rational apprehension, this requisite “third kind” is first referred to in the *Timaeus* “as the receptacle and, as it were, the nurse of all becoming” (49d) before then being given a whole series of other designations—such as “mother,” “amorphous plastic material,” “matrix” or “imprint-bearer,” and “place”<sup>5</sup>—in the attempt to circumscribe its eminently elusive, “obscure and difficult” nature.

The term “*chôra*”—variously translated as “space,” “place,” “milieu,” or “room,” in the sense of “volume”—only appears, in fact, at the end of this designatory series, with a number of commentators maintaining “*chôra*” to thereby yield the *meaning* of the chain of preceding names, qualified as metaphoric or non-technical. Be this as it may, Plato’s use of the word *χώρα* in the *Timaeus* does, as already intimated, seem the first occurrence in Greek literature of the term in the sense of space in general. Which is to say that Plato would have created the very concept of space and have done so, crucially, by way of reference to a feminine principle: *chôra* verily *conceived* as “mother,” “nurse of all becoming,” and “receptacle of all bodies.”

The necessity that *chôra* have absolutely no attributes or features of its own—which is, of course, the stipulation both Bergren and Grosz (as well, in fact, as Derrida and Irigaray) condemn as problematic<sup>6</sup>—follows from its role as an intermediary between the Forms, or being, and the phenomenal copies, or becoming. Were *chôra* to possess defining characteristics or a specific shape, it would be improper to its function of ensuring that the Forms imprinted or impressed, in some strange enigmatic way, within or on it are faithfully reproduced. Nowhere is this requirement of *chôra*’s absolute morphological neutrality more clearly set out than when Plato compares *chôra*, *qua* “the receptacle in which all things come into existence,” to a mother—a comparison no doubt informed by the ancient Greek belief that the father alone fulfilled the role of progenitor; the female simply providing a formless, nutritive soil for the seeds therein sown.<sup>7</sup> In paragraph 50c-d, Plato accordingly states:

We may indeed use the metaphor of birth and compare the receptacle to the mother, the model to the father and what they produce between them to their offspring; and we may notice that, if an imprint is to present a very complex appearance, the material on which it is to be stamped will not have been properly prepared unless it is devoid of all the characters which it is to receive. For if it were like any of the things that enter it, it would badly distort any impression of a contrary or entirely different nature when it receives it, as its own features would shine through.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I'm citing here the translation of the *Timaeus* by Desmond Lee, 69.

To this metaphor of birth or begetting, Plato immediately adds, moreover, those of the impression or moulding of figures or forms in soft, amorphous materials and the concoction of perfumes by adding scent to an odourless base; all of which underline that the one trait defining *chôra* is precisely its lack of definition—which is to say, its utter impassivity or formlessness.

“Amorphous and undifferentiated,” *chôra* yields a space whose sexual modalization is framed by the oppositions of activity/passivity, intelligible/sensible, form/matter and mind/body ... such that space and femininity are conjoined in the figure of an impassive, ever-receptive, ever-penetrable container-recipient. Bergren and Grosz mutually condemn this determination of space and femininity, yet diametrically diverge on the status they attribute to this—whether it is indeed, or not, all that (the concept) *chôra* contains, all that *chôra* offers to thought. Crucially, this divergence transits through the two feminist theorists' reading of Derrida's *chôra*—which is where one can best isolate, then, the core reason for Bergren's and Grosz's conflicting stances on the value of *chôra* for reconceptualizations of space and architecture.

### Chôra's counter-logic

That *chôra*, by virtue of its formlessness and lack of (self-)identity, should furnish the very emblem of disembodied femininity is, Grosz states, in no way surprising since it is itself conceived in terms of all the characteristics that “the Greeks and all those who follow them [...] have expelled from their own masculine self-representations and accounts of being and becoming [...] and] which they have thus *de facto* attributed to the feminine.”<sup>9</sup> As a receptacle whose function is to receive everything without leaving any impression or taking any shape of its own, *chôra* would, that is, replicate the role attributed to women as the “guardians” of everything—materiality, corporeality, nature—men seek to expel or transcend in their cultural projections, with women thereby the negative mirror of masculine self-reflection. Relegated, as such, “the position of the support or precondition of the masculine,” women find themselves, in short, with “precisely the status of *chora* in the Platonic tradition.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Grosz, “Women, *Chora*, Dwelling,” 116.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

Denouncing *chôra* for its obliteration of women's sexual specificity, Grosz's "Women, *Chora*, Dwelling" is essentially an exposition and elaboration of certain tenets of Luce Irigaray's understanding of the "feminine-maternal" as having been distorted or repressed within the conceptual and social configurations comprising Western culture since Plato. Irigaray's reconfiguring the feminine (as well as space) in terms of active, fluid relationality rather than a passive matter-support is, that said, championed by Grosz in opposition not simply to Plato's own formulations in the *Timaeus* but equally to the "reconceptualization of space and spatiality" she attributes Derrida's deconstructive reading of *chôra* to entail. Indeed, Grosz signals her intention to stage a confrontation "in the domain of the dwelling" between Irigaray and Derrida at the very outset of her text, with Derrida receiving attention in this respect both as a philosopher whose work has been of interest to feminists and as the representative of one strand of contemporary architectural theory (namely, deconstructivism). Oddly, however, Grosz never specifies what aspects of Derrida's *chôra* this confrontation would, in fact, centre on. While she indicts Derrida's work for both its "obliteration of spatiality and materiality"<sup>11</sup> and, more pointedly, its complicity with Plato's production of a concept of femininity serving as the support for men's cultural production—Derrida's reconceptualization of *chôra*, space and spatiality being, thereby, of no (or at least, no unambiguous and non-problematic) value to feminist theorists wishing to rethink space and architecture—Grosz never at any point substantiates these claims by referring to what Derrida actually sets down on the subject of *chôra* and space or materiality, or, indeed, *chôra* and the feminine.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 112.

When she turns to Derrida's 1987 essay "Chora"—the text serving, it should be recalled, as the "design programme" for the "architectural translation of *chôra*" Derrida was to undertake with Eisenman—Grosz's concern is, rather, to situate Derrida's interest in *chôra* as in keeping "with the larger and more general features of 'deconstructive reading' that always seeks out terms that disturb [...] the logic, explicit framework and overt intention of the text."<sup>12</sup> *Chôra* qualifies, of course, as such a term precisely because of its status as a "third kind" distinct from both being and becoming, such that, as neither intelligible nor sensible, it effectively opens up an aporia within the very system, or logic, of Platonic ontology. That granted, Grosz charts this counter-logic or a-logic of *chôra* solely with reference to Derrida's analyses of the textual structure of the *Timaeus*, which draw out the way in which the strange topology of *chôra* as an all-receiving, non-self-identical place infiltrates or contaminates, as it were, other apparently unrelated aspects of Plato's narration. As to the specific ramifications of *chôra*'s counter-logic for Derrida's "reconceptualization" of the fashioning of space and femininity Plato would have inaugurated, this is a line of inquiry Grosz never broaches.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 174.

And yet ramifications there are. In both “Chora” and “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” Derrida argues that this counter-logic—the fact that *chôra* “belongs to neither the sensible nor to the intelligible, neither to becoming, nor to non-being, nor to being”<sup>13</sup>—disqualifies the entire sequence of “metaphors” (with the exception of “receptacle”) that refer *chôra* to space or to the figure of the mother. All these “comparisons,” all these “metaphors,” are, precisely *qua metaphors*, inadequate or improper to *chôra*, Derrida states, since its counter-logic exceeds or unsettles the Platonic metaphysics in which the very concept of metaphor originates, namely in its inaugural distinction between the sensible and intelligible.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 184.

Such a disqualification of *chôra qua* space or mother is hardly anodyne, especially given Derrida’s claims that, in distinction to these sexual-spatial metaphors, the “tropes” used by Plato that refer to the impression or inscription of shapes and properties in soft, amorphous substances would exceed, for their part, the opposition of the sensible and intelligible, figurative and proper sense. Indeed, *these* “tropic detours”—as Derrida puts it—along with the terms “receptacle”, “sieve” and even “virgin” (a term Plato never, in fact, uses) must be understood, he states, as “figures of the unfigurable”<sup>14</sup>: figures that do not refer, therefore, to any being or referent but remain “beyond all anthropomorphism,” “beyond all ontology.” Which is to say that, far from maintaining, with Plato, *chôra* to be at once space and feminine, Derrida very concertedly disqualifies both these predicates—and these predicates in particular—as determinations of this aporetic “site of inscription,” and does so to the point of even advancing the curious argument that *chôra* cannot be compared to a mother since, as it is not a being, it cannot be a woman!<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, “Chora,” 29.

That being the case, what are we to make of Grosz’s claims that it is because of a complicity with metaphorizations of femininity that Derrida’s reconceptualization of *chôra* is of little value for rethinking questions at the intersection of architecture and feminism? Insofar as Derrida stringently denies, in fact, any validity to Plato’s description of *chôra* as a “feminine space” in order to impose his interpretation of the primordial matrix as an originary site of inscription/impression, would it not rather be this *conjoint* obliteration of “femininity” and spatiality (as well, one might add, as of materiality) that should cause theorists interested in rethinking architecture from a feminist perspective to view his reconceptualization of *chôra* with caution?

### Chôra—a moving, differentiating multiplicity

<sup>16</sup> Bergren, “Architecture Gender Philosophy,” 27.

It is precisely Bergren’s argument that, by “effacing *chôra*’s gender,” Derrida not only misses the core potential of *chôra* for a deconstructive dislocation of the classical institutions of architecture and philosophy<sup>16</sup> but would find himself thereby in complicity with Plato’s positioning of *chôra* as a homogeneous, impassive space-support—the “founding

concept,” let us recall, of what Grosz designates as “disembodied femininity.” While situating Derrida’s effacement of gender as the core of his metaphorization of femininity seems contradictory, the key to this argument—which is likewise the crux of Bergren’s and Grosz’s divergence on the value of *chôra*—lies in Bergren’s textual attention to the *two* very distinct determinations *chôra* receives in the *Timaeus*. Simply stated: the description of *chôra* as amorphous, with neither shape nor attributes of its own, pertains to the state in which “the nurse of all becoming” exists as a *result* of the creation of the cosmos—which is to say, an ordered whole—out of, or on the basis of, a *pre-existing* state of a disordered universe. Before the cosmos came into being, *chôra* yielded a very different configuration of space and femininity, destined to be “covered over” through the cosmos-constructing operations of ordering, stabilization and commensuration that the *Timaeus* itself describes as architectural.

For the cosmogonic account that is the *Timaeus*, *chôra* does indeed exist before the cosmos comes into being: this “pre-cosmic” *chôra* being described in paragraph 52d4-53a7 as manifesting an active movement in a reciprocal mobilization of itself and the elements—or fleeting traces—found within it. Because these traces—pre-cosmic prefigurations of the four elements, the building blocks of the universe: fire, air, earth and water—are heterogeneous “powers” of unequal weight, *chôra* lacks all equilibrium. Its condition is one of complete and continuous (self-)differentiation: shaken by the elements it contains, *chôra* shakes these in turn. This “reciprocal dynamism” whereby the space and the forces or elements within it impart movement and form one to the other, such that all distinction between activity and passivity is effaced, is aptly described by Bergren as “the ‘choral work’ that must be passified within the circumstructure” of cosmic order.<sup>17</sup> Such, indeed, is the task of the Demiurge—the divine “crafts worker” Plato portrays as an architect deploying mathematics and measurement as the means by which to *construct* the four elements in accordance with the values of rationality and proportion that preside over beauty and virtue. The commensuration and stereometrisation the Demiurge exerts upon the heterogeneous traces equally stabilize *chôra*, such that it meets the criteria of homogeneity and isotropy requisite for it if it is to fulfil its (metaphysical) role as the matrix of a sensible world that is as true a likeness as possible of the intelligible Forms. As Bergren writes: “For these material *mimèmata* [copies] of Being to be born and die true to Type they must enter and exit *chôra* without any threat of maternal (de) placement to distort the resemblance. The pre-architectural condition of *chôra* must be absolutely [relegated to the] past.”<sup>18</sup>

*Chora* remains, however—on Plato’s own admission—refractory to order, reason and measure even after the intervention by the Demiurge, thus thwarting the tentative to subordinate it to the categories structuring Platonic metaphysics. This is the reason why, moreover, not only Derrida but quasi all the French philosophers having reinvested this notion in

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

the latter half of the twentieth century hail it as a precursor of their own notions of “difference” or “differance,” “multiplicity” and “heterogeneity.” All (with the exception of Irigaray, in fact) wish to reclaim, as it were, the infinitely repeatable divisibility and ever-changing configuration that *chôra* as it exists in its pre-cosmic state, before the attempts by Plato/the Demiurge to render it amorphous. As Julia Kristeva makes particularly clear—with her remarks resonating strongly here with Bergren’s—Plato would aim in this way to turn a moving, differential multiplicity into a container or receptacle, and thus construct an architectural, inert space-support out of an infinitely diversified space characterized by constant movement and division.<sup>19</sup> For both Kristeva and Bergren, furthermore, this mobile, heterogeneous space is indeed emblematic of a “feminine modality” resolutely refractory to the imposition and support of phallogocentric structures.

<sup>19</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25sq. and note 13, 239-240.

As for Derrida, he would miss the potential this pre-architectural *chôra* proffers for the deconstruction of both classical ontology and architectural classicism, Bergren argues, because, by disqualifying the attribution to *chôra* of a feminine gender and privileging the tropes of impression and inscription instead, he is led to focus almost exclusively on the “post-architectural” *chôra*—thus corroborating Plato’s repression of “choral instability.” This complicity with Plato’s passification of a moving, “irrational,” primordial space-matrix is compounded moreover, Bergren contends, by Derrida’s surreptitiously *reconstructing* *chôra*’s gender by attributing to the latter, *qua* “inaccessible, impassive, amorphous,” a “virginity radically rebellious against anthropomorphism.”<sup>20</sup> Derrida may well invoke a non-anthropomorphic virginity but, as “a sexual and social category of the female” (albeit the term can, of course, apply to both sexes), “virginity” necessarily reintroduces gender, Bergren maintains, and particularly when the term is used, as in Derrida’s case, in apposition with “inaccessible” and “impassive” where the reference to feminine gender seems intended.<sup>21</sup> What Bergren does not add but which she might well have, is that Derrida is in fact reinforcing here his disqualification of *chôra* as a “mother” in favour of the typographical tropes of printing/impression. For by qualifying *chôra* as virgin, not only does Derrida give us to understand that it is doubly improper to compare this “matrix of all things” to a mother—since it is not only *not* a woman (insofar as it is not a being) but a virgin to boot!—but he substitutes to Plato’s “maternal space,” by the same stroke, a “typographical matrix,” which, as he explains to Eisenman during their architectural collaboration, is indeed what he means by a radically non-anthropomorphic virginity. “Chôra [...] has to be a virgin place, [...] absolutely blank [such that] everything that is printed on it is automatically effaced.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, “Chora,” 17.

<sup>21</sup> Bergren, “Architecture Gender Philosophy,” 30 and note 149, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Kipnis and Leeser, *Chora L Works*, 10.

This being the case, Derrida’s reconstruction of gender, as read by Bergren, proves interestingly to corroborate the two claims advanced (but not textually substantiated) by Grosz in her very different reading of

Derrida's "Chora." There is indeed a "metaphorization of femininity" and "obliteration of spatiality and materiality" in Derrida's reconceptualization of *chôra*, the virginity he attributes to the latter being precisely the metaphorization by which he seeks to assure his interpretation of *chôra* as a blank site of inscription and thus disqualify its spatial and maternal dimension. Had Grosz not equally focused exclusively on the post-architectural state of *chôra*, moreover, she might well have concurred with Bergren that, in its status as a moving, differential multiplicity, actively informing the elements within it just as it is itself informed by the latter, *chôra* offers abundant resources not only for a feminist reappropriation of its maternal dimension but equally for new conceptualizations of space.

What might such conceptualizations look like? One suggestion comes from Bergren herself who was to propose, some twenty years after her article reinstating pre-architectural *chôra*, that the reciprocal dynamism or "perpetual 'loop' of 'shaking' and 'being shaken'" characterizing *chôra* in its pre-cosmic state would find a contemporary exemplification in the "animate form" pioneered by Greg Lynn in the 1990s. Just as pre-architectural *chôra* is simultaneously active and passive, marked by disequilibrium, "so the surfaces of 'animate form' can turn back on themselves, thus erasing the distinction between active and passive movement,"<sup>23</sup> while animation software's capacity to "calculate, measure and construct irregular curved surfaces" creates continual architectural "anomaly."<sup>24</sup> Space as conceived/deployed here is no longer a static, immutable whole but, rather, a continuously transformative multiplicity that both internalizes outside events and imparts a fluidity and mutability to the forces or elements it contains. That such fluid, mutable, continuous, "active" space would qualify as "feminine" was in a sense signalled by Lynn himself, moreover, insofar as he attributed such a conception of space to none other than Irigaray.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bergren, "Plato's *Timaeus* and the Aesthetics of 'Animate Form'," 351.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>25</sup> Lynn, *Folds, Bodies and Blobs*, 60, 83, 84, 171, 173.

<sup>26</sup> I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for having so perspicaciously summed up my argument's implications for architectural discourse, as I would equally Meike Schalk for underlining the limitations of Lynn's project.

This is not to conclude that Lynn's *Embryological House*—the project Bergren focuses on—would be in some sense uniquely "paradigmatic" of an architecture attentive to space's doubly generative and receptive agency. Certainly, the passage from post-architectural to pre-architectural *chôra*—transiting here through Derrida-Eisenman to Lynn—suggests a shift from deconstructive engagements to constructive (and rather more Deleuzian) projective experiments in architecture,<sup>26</sup> but this in no way means we wish to consecrate Lynn as a singular proponent of a non-hylomorphic, "choratic" conception of space. Indeed, Lynn's project is obviously rooted within the American architectural discourse of the late 1990s and, insofar as it is fundamentally about form and program, without any consideration of matter or materiality, it fails to render the intensive, vibratory aspect of this space-matrix of becoming. Simply, what is to be retained here is his recognizing an active, generative dimension to space—a recognition shared, that said, by Eisenman during his collaboration with Derrida when he equally proposed what can be considered (as Bergren again notes) an

<sup>27</sup> Bergren, "Architecture Gender Philosophy," 31.

<sup>28</sup> Kipnis and Leeser, *Chora L Works*, 70.

<sup>29</sup> Rebekah Sheldon aptly remarks that "chora enables us to apprehend with what frequency the plenum or spatium is posed as passive, even in new materialist writing." See her "Form / Matter / Chora: Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism," 212.

apt rendering of pre-architectural *chôra* in its "circular reciprocity" of formant and trace."<sup>27</sup> Space, Eisenman contends here, in its analogy with Plato's "receptacle," would effectively, actively *form* the architectural/built object, with traces of the receptacle being left on the object, while, at the same time, the object forms the receptacle and leaves traces on it. The relation between space and that which takes place within or through it is, as such, "a reverberating, displacing activity."<sup>28</sup> It is, in short, this *dynamic* conception of space that makes both Eisenman's "sensible translation" of *chôra* and Lynn's *Embryological House* apt, or able, instantiations of pre-architectural *anômalia*, just as it equally opens up—indeed, demands—"re-imaginings" of our conceptual and social universe. Suffice it to say in this respect that, conceived as active relationality rather than "passive container," space is not only antithetical to the role that instrumental or technological rationality would attribute to it, alongside "matter" and "the earth," of proffering a fundamentally inert and every-ready resource; it also recalls to today's "new materialisms" that matter cannot be thought anew in isolation of that in, or through, which it becomes or crosses, and which exerts its own autonomous force.<sup>29</sup>

As a re-configuration of "the matricial"—this being now granted a generative power allowing for the emergence of difference rather than passive reproduction of the same—, pre-architectural *chôra* finally sets down the necessity for any rethinking of matter or space to countenance the question of the sexual modalization therein involved. For this reason too, *chôra* can but be judged, in conclusion, as abundantly rich in potential for both feminist re-evaluations and other—still to come—reconceptualizations of architecture and space.

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