

## Meta, Matrix, Mater: Renaissance Metaphors of the Matrix (online, 13 Jun 22)

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Deadline: Mar 20, 2022

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The female sex has become the core of an increasing number of Early Modern studies since the rise of a gender-sensitive feminist viewpoint in art history. Many have dealt with images of a hairless and polished vulva, sometimes ostensibly eroticized. Pending this approach, the 2022 CHAR Workshop wishes to re-explore the imaginary of the female sex from within and focus on the metaphors of the matrix in images and material culture from the middle of the 14th century to the first decades of the 17th century.

Since the Early Modern Period relied on the writings of Hippocrates and Galen, the womb is confused with the matrix. Both are considered to be the very essence of femininity engaged at all levels from procreation to maternity, as a feminine principle and receptacle. Although it was also considered to be the nasty source of the diseases that specifically affect women, since they were more prone to phlegm than men. The etymology preserves the memory of these two functions, one praiseworthy and the other despicable. The Latin matrix derives from mater (mother) creating a positive affiliation that lives on in French, Italian and even more so in German (gebärmutter/mutter) whereas the pejorative names like hysteria and hystera (uterus) are linked to the ancient Greek hústeros (the lower, the inferior).

Despite being referred to on a daily basis, the matrix defies any attempt of representation. This internal organ is hidden from the eyes of doctors, artists, and spectators because of the opacity of the flesh. Its form thus varies according to the imagination: hollow and moist, blood-red with a blooming rose scent, or plunged in fetid and putrid darkness where the most ignoble diseases arise. Therefore it is still worth wondering how the various metaphors are constructed and used to represent the matrix, whether to exalt its procreative capacity or to blame its horrific and almost demonic aspects; and even more worth questioning how these are related to science and cultural practices.

Fruits, flowers, and animals provide a considerable number of natural metaphors in images and medical treatises such as Johannes de Cuba's Hortus sanitatis published in 1491: pomegranates, roses but also vanilla in the New World; amphibians, in particular toads and the dragon-salamander that accompanies Saint Margaret; cetaceans, especially the whale that swallows up and then spits out Jonah, thus becoming the place of his rebirth, or dolphins based on the etymological link between delphis (dolphin) and delphus (matrix).

Since the Latin matera derives from mater, material itself is to be considered matrix-like. Caves

like those inside the Boboli gardens in Florence, architecture, and textiles are some of the many metaphors involving materials, figurative or real, that symbolize the internal genital organ as the place of procreation or Incarnation in the case of the Virgin. Their characteristics and haptic effects, the sense of their softness, sponginess and malleability similar to that of the uterine membranes or cavity, should be considered as a full part of the metaphor precisely because they help characterizing the matrix in opposition to the virility of manhood.

This obvious proximity between matrix, mater and materia finally calls for the consideration of ex-voto and other items, activated during devotional and folk practices, used to assure pregnancy and easy childbirth. This is particularly true of items in blood-red color, tinted with this colour of the 'irruption of the interior', this non-mimetic figurability of the matrix and its menses (Didi-Huberman), whether they are made of red-tinted wax, coral or precious and semi-precious stones such as ruby, carnelian, red jasper, magnetite, hematite.

Research proposals for papers may address, but are not limited to, the following enumerated themes:

- Natural metaphors using plants or animals,
- Symbolic places, landscapes or buildings,
- Material metaphors of birth,
- Poetics of generation and regeneration,
- Anatomical diagrams and more generally schematizations linked to the matrix,
- Textual metaphors balancing between narrative and rhetoric,
- Reception of these metaphors.

Proposals should be sent via email to atelierduchar@gmail.com before March 20th, 2022 in the form of a 300-word abstract accompanied by a title and a brief bio-bibliographical presentation of the author.

Organisers:

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