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MOTHER MIDWIFE

*De silentio* delivers Derrida and Kristeva

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We know our futures from our pasts. The urtext for continental philosophy of religion was penned by the elusive Johannes *de silentio* in 1843 in the small Danish market town, Copenhagen. Surprisingly, the first really comprehensible figure of faith in this text is an unassuming mother weaning her child. Abraham is opaque, elusive -- as if a likely *impostor*. The second graspable figure of faith is an unassuming tax collector, nothing like the opaque Abraham. *De silentio*, the ever-receding author, arrives through the ever-receding Søren Kierkegaard, who gives partial birth to Heidegger, but also to Levinas, Derrida, Kristeva, and Caputo – figures without whom we have nothing like continental philosophy of religion. So *Fear and Trembling* is the mother and father of continental philosophy of religion, its urtext and womb. The continental movement is loosely defined by its labor

- a) in the aftermath of Nietzsche's death of God
- b) under the associated threats – or realities – of loss of a stable unified author, self, text, or ethics
- c) under the loss of a reliable epistemology and ontology, and of a trustworthy method for representation
- d) all under the signs of absurdity, impossibility, aporia.

All this is newborn and wailing in *Fear and Trembling*.

This conference gives rounding tribute to John D. Caputo's brilliant work in bringing continental philosophy of religion into focus (if not into being). Although I

will look primarily at Derrida and Kristeva as children of *Fear and Trembling*, anyone who has even glanced at Caputo's 1993 *Against Ethics* will see in its form and content the *silentio* connection. Derrida too is *Fear and Trembling's* son, despite his wayward mis-reading of Abraham. Kristeva is *Fear and Trembling's* daughter, making perfect sense of *de silentio's* wild evocation of faith as a quiet mother weaning her child – despite Kristeva's saying nothing directly about her ancestor (a kind of Cordelia in her silence).

We can trace the cultural DNA from *Fear and Trembling* forward via Heidegger and Levinas on to Derrida, Caputo, and Kristeva. Equally, *Fear and Trembling* is generative through a present act of existential adoption.<sup>1</sup> As a courtroom judge might, if we have established our authority, we declare that this little non-book by a non-author is henceforth to be deemed, with reason, our common ancestor. We adopt this heroic/anti-heroic, paternal/maternal compendium as our honorary progenitor.

### **THE SO-CALLED “BOOK”**

*Fear and Trembling* is a basket of scraps, false starts, and marginalia, of fantasy, fairy tale, and farce that displays of a unified text, author, or self, a sense of ‘the impossible,’ the death of a certifiably sense-making God. In the early “Attunement”, Abraham's four ascents of Moriah depict *failures* of faith. This is not just Johannes *de silentio's* contingent inadequacy, but is indicative of *necessary* failure in representation of such presumably holy events.<sup>2</sup>

Each failed attempt at portraiture has a caption beneath its frame that sketches a mother weaning her child. It is as if *her* trial were a variation on the trial

of the father – as if Abraham is weaning Isaac, or God is weaning Abraham. The mother is the first unproblematic portrait of faith – a *mother* of faith. The second portrait is of the equally overlooked *tax collector*, that unassuming, nonchalant churchgoer who strides home from work. He imagines a fine head of lamb prepared by his wife. He notes, bemused, a scurry of rats under a board over the gutter. He finds the sublime in the lowly, everyday, and pedestrian. And where Abraham fails tests of representation, these knights of faith pass with flying colors.

Caputo and others are in love with *the impossible*, instanced as *de silentio* gives us the impossibility that a weaning mother or a jaunty tax collector is a knight of faith, or that both are somehow equivalent to that terrible father leading his son up Moriah. The taxman and weaning mothers are as inconspicuous as Abraham is conspicuous. Even less conspicuous than the mothers is a woman knitting by the fire who *silentio* also dubs a knight of faith. She is silent, utterly without drama. But let us return to Abraham, the father of whom every representation must fail. Johannes *de silentio* is infinitely ingenious and outrageous in depicting Abraham's failings:

- *he runs up the mountain too fast,*
- *he stays home too long,*
- *he decides he'll avoid the journey and raise the knife at home,*
- *he decides he'd rather kill himself,*
- *he passes the knife to God, saying, in effect, if you want Isaac, YOU kill him,*
- *he decides he misunderstood, that his God could never ask such a thing,*
- *he raises the knife but feigns being a murderer (not a man of faith),*
- *he raises the knife but sinks in despair, unwilling to forgive God for asking*

Under the sign of the impossible, more a squire than a knight, the jaunty burgher shows us faith's double movements in the homely terms of a walker, and then of a

dancer, whose steps -- a movement up, and a movement down, are leaps forward in resignation, and then landings gracefully in stride. Dancer and burgher are at home, on the *way* home, like the knitting knight, stitching in and out.

One hundred and sixty years later, the burgher, the knitter, the dancer, the mother are still invisible. We want the glorious, impossible *spectacle* of Abraham, not the simplicity of *silentio*'s hidden knights, who can be silently acknowledged, even represented, but not put on publicly as show. Tivoli Gardens opened in Copenhagen the year *Fear and Trembling* appeared – the first theme park in the world. Perhaps Abraham is the main attraction, a grotesque sort of glory, in a tent set on the grounds of the ongoing carnival. Faith is a performance to gawk at and applaud.

Caputo speaks of delivering a theological poetics, and this urtext is neither theology nor scholarship but art -- poetry, several panels and squares stitched loosely together, a carnivalesque poetics of life and death, of embrace and separation. It is dreamy art. The Abraham portraits are moments in '*a beautiful dream*' of an old man who remembers. Remembering dreams might be a key to faith, a giving up of waking life and getting it back. Such faith we're told (again dreamily) allows the faithful to give birth to his own father, wielding powers of the maternal, an immersion in natality, a motherly openness to the generative intervention of gratuitous good.<sup>3</sup> This is not, as Levinas complains, an invitation to killing or violence. It is the weaning of a child who then can give birth to its father in a faithful stride, at home in the world, watching rats scamper under the gutter planks, accepting them heartily as a gift of life.

Kierkegaard lets the story provide:

- *A critique of bourgeois market society (Preface)*
- *A critique of direct communication (Epigraph)*
- *A critique of religion as bible-based hero-worship (Speech in Praise)*
- *An attack on rule-based and bureaucratic conventional morality (Problema)*
- *An appreciation of domesticity (mothers weaning, shopkeepers strolling home for dinner, knights sewing by the fire) – no Cosmic Sovereign need apply*

Furthermore, the story provides:

- *A pornographic peephole into dream-like blood and violence*
- *A critique of the Spectacular City*
- *A range of polyphony: the voice of terror, of praise, of detached analysis*
- *A display of variations: Abe might have dallied, rushed, stabbed himself, asked God to do it, refused, done it in despair, in deception*

Here are the panoply of genres provided:

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| <i>o the carnivalesque and bawdy</i>   | <i>o the fairy tale or fable</i>  |
| <i>o the satirical or farcical</i>     | <i>o the tragic</i>   |
| <i>o the labyrinthine unfathomable</i> | <i>o the grotesque, the sublime</i>   |
| <i>o the dialectical, the lyrical</i>  | <i>o the fantastical and dreamlike</i>  |
| <i>o the antinomian and apophatic</i>  | <i>o the eucatastrophical [unexpected finish that's marvelously good]<sup>4</sup></i> |

### **DERRIDA'S DARING MISREADING**

Derrida appreciates Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* enough to devote a chapter to the Abraham-Isaac scenario in *The Gift of Death*.<sup>5</sup> Derrida's own experimentation with a plethora of innovative and striking literary genres of exposition and exploration mirrors Johannes *de silentio*'s experimentation. Both thinkers abjure the

classic Cartesian, early modern quest for certain knowledge and come to stress the responsibility of singular agency. Kierkegaard's "Truth is Subjectivity" is better rendered Truth is Responsibility, a *troubled* responsibility. But, Derrida parts ways with Kierkegaard – whether knowingly or from inattention to the text, I cannot say.

As Derrida would have it, the troubled responsibility in *Fear and Trembling* is the troubled knowing that I sacrifice many in taking up responsibility for some – that I sacrifice Isaac in being answerable to God, or that in sacrificing Isaac I compromise myself and my answerability to Sarah. But although *silentio* is focused on Abraham's troubled responsibility, he is equally focused on the faith requisite to a spiritual survival. Abraham can weather this agony of crossed responsibilities, but his trust or faith survives an even higher order "impossibility" or "absurdity." Abraham's faith is that God will *give Isaac back*. Faith is the strength to have joy and terror intermixed- - joy in the expectation of Isaac's return, and terror in the expectation that Isaac will be lost. Abraham's faith is akin to God's "trust or faith" that He can order Isaac to be sacrificed and -- quite incredibly -- expect Abraham to keep loving Isaac and keep loving God. Superimposed on that incredulity, He can order Isaac up and expect Abraham to keep believing in the promise that his seed through Isaac will not perish. God is serving Abraham a concatenation of human impossibilities – and must know that Abraham will joyfully-fearfully -- impossibly -- weather them.

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida takes the Abraham-Isaac scenario to exemplify the boundlessness of responsibility which entails the agony that, in answering God, Abraham sacrifices Isaac; in answering the needs of my daughter, I sacrifice the needs of endless other daughters; by feeding my cat, I abandon thousands of others.

Kierkegaard would agree that responsibility, not knowledge of God, is the issue, and that responsibility is difficult, troubled. But he would object to Derrida on two scores.

First, Kierkegaard would not make obligations global and simultaneous. God may be equally responsible for all anywhere at every moment, but finite creatures find the needs of the neighbor sufficient unto the day. To attend in thought to all in need would be frivolous, grandiose, and diminish the full attention that a near neighbor deserves. It's faux-moral grandiosity to think that we owe all to everyone every minute. Imagine the mother weaning her child – the motherly knight. Is she to believe that in nursing, and caring for her infant, she is abandoning all other infants? If she is as anxious about thousands of unseen infants as she is about her own, she is hardly a mother, and hardly of faith.

Second, faith is difficult because it requires that I trust -- “impossibly” – that I *haven't lost* those whom I seem ready to sacrifice. A lesser knight, the knight of infinite resignation, realizes that he will never attain the object of his love – satisfied love eludes him, and he must live with this pain. Derrida will never answer the needs of every claimant on his heart, and he must live with that. But faith is not the capacity to weather such pain, but rather, the trust that I will get Isaac back, that in weaning the child, the child will not be lost. To indulge Derrida's misled direction is to lament lost attention to *endless* others. But this makes a mockery of the specificity, the singularity, of obligations. Furthermore, it is a counsel of despair.

For Kierkegaard-*silentio*, the agony-joy of faith is “knowing” that the double movement, abandoning-receiving back, is possible. It is the Gospel view that he who loses his life shall regain it. Giving up my Isaac is to gain him. Giving up my selfish hold is releasing him for life and conjointly releasing me for life.

### **Kristeva: Silent Approvals**

Kristeva entered animated Parisian debates in the '60s and '70s that were in many ways a continuation of seminal pre-war discussions that placed Kierkegaard, Hegel, Heidegger and Marx in complex, many-sided contestation.<sup>6</sup> After 1945, Kierkegaard was a less obvious presence. Sartre's early atheistic humanism, Marxism, and Heidegger's anti-humanism, overshadowed his seminal presence. Various forms of phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, and the increasing influence of Lacan and Foucault came to dominate the French milieu and put Kierkegaard in partial eclipse. Heidegger gave us anxiety, Sartre responsible choice, Arendt, the critique of a stifling public 'blob'.

Kristeva entered the Parisian scene with a dissertation on Bakhtin recently completed. Bakhtin argues that the polyphony of voices in a novel like *The Brothers Karamazov* marks a polyphony of authorial standpoints. Accordingly, the assumption of a unitary authorial voice becomes problematic. The author becomes not a singular voice but a multiplex spread throughout and between the voices of the characters so vividly delivered. The absence of a unified authorial identity has its parallel in the absence, more generally, of a unified self, agent, or subjectivity. Kierkegaard scholars struggle to find a unitary authorial voice among the plurality of pseudonymous and veronymous writers in the Kierkegaardian *oeuvre*. Kristeva develops Bakhtin's insight in her psychoanalytic writings by transporting his multiplicity of voices inward.

A plurality of contesting voices becomes central to her account of the unfolding of a fluid, elusive self whose putative unity is in fact a fragile polyphony, reminiscent

of the polyphony in the lyric sections of *de silentio's* masterpiece. Johannes is a garrulous writer who remains silent about many things, including his true center. “The” self, for Kristeva, becomes a Kierkegaard-like ensemble of dialogical internal relations, reflecting an unfolding matrix of interpersonal child-parent and self-other relations.

Another theme of Kristeva's early work on Bakhtin is the carnivalesque, a mixture of the grotesque, sensational, and satirically comedic. Showmanship and spectacle are striking features of the first third of *Fear and Trembling*. Copenhagen's carnivalesque Tivoli Gardens opened in 1843, the year *Fear and Trembling*, was published. Johannes de silentio does not spare us the theatrical and macabre, the sensational, horrific, and grotesque in the story of Isaac hauled to the Mountain. Perhaps Johannes de silentio is a carnival barker for a kind of freak show—as if Abraham were a three-headed monster providing an occasion for gawkers to scream and crowds to line up for a view.<sup>7</sup>

As her career proceeds, Kristeva will elaborate what we could fairly call the psychoanalytic carnivalesque of the inner life. Kristeva's two faces of signification has a striking resemblance to Kierkegaard's two faces of communication, what he calls the contrast between direct and indirect communication. Indirect communication resembles Kristeva's semiotic signification, the embodied speech and gesture that imparts a particular individual's feeling and passion.<sup>8</sup> Neither Husserl nor Saussure have a place for embodied speech, the voice of *this* person, speaking in *this* tone of voice—in *this* physical posture, with *this* gesture, among just *these* attentive particular, embodied, listeners. To give language a sort of theoretical and abstract sheen excises the dramatic, even theatrical context of living speech and expression.

Living speech has its genesis in a baby's coos, eyes fixed on a mom, who returns the look and the coo. It emerges later in an orator's sweating or calming exhortations. To insist on passion and embodiment does not denigrate the symbolic but resists the loss of particular speaking beings who avail themselves of the symbolic *and* semiotic, the abstract *and* enacted.

Kierkegaard uses pseudonyms, dramatic narrative, and a variety of genres to set words in living motion in particular contexts, uttered by singular, passionate souls. He valorizes the singular individual, and it is an embodied individual to whom he gives voice in the figures of Judge Wilhelm, Don Juan, the young man of *Repetition*, the seducer, and the professorial anti-professor, Johannes Climacus. Kierkegaard addresses the embodied individual as "My dear reader." Kristeva has no use for a theory of language "removed from historical turmoil" written from a position "midair" and uttered, as she puts it, by "a sleeping body."

We live episodically, our time punctuated by intrusions of the horrific. A psychoanalyst, Kristeva is exquisitely attuned to the generative and dangerous drama of interlocking fathers, mothers, infants, and children. If thunder awakens us to mortality, finitude, and grandeur, and the chaos of cities awakens us to loss of a stable place, the family scenario awakens us also to the horrific, generative, and rejuvenating. Here we can relish Kristeva's schemas of familial tensions, seen now in terms of *Fear and Trembling's* schemas of trauma, near-death, and rebirth. The Abraham story gives theatrical possibilities, dreams that awaken us to nightmarish undercurrents in father-son, mother-infant, God-subject relations -- and hold out an "absurd" hope for survival.

An old man remembers a childhood story, perhaps offered to an attentive

analyst's ear. Each of the early tableaux has a caption reflecting a weaning mother. This transposes Abraham severing into a Sarah severing her relation to Isaac. Transpositions from nightmarish fright to calm will domesticate the horror of near-sacrifice. Knife is replaced by weaning, defusing a horror, yet another is increased: maternal severing can acquire a latent terror. A dreamy mother-infant scenario matches a dreamy father-son scenario -- both dreamed under the demanding gaze of God. Isaac's trust that his father will protect him, Abraham's trust that God will protect him, a nursing infant's trust that its mother will protect her, are all placed at catastrophic risk. Any person's moral sensibility—sense of up and down, good and bad, God and subjects, faith and reason—will now be thrown into disarray. Yet we awake from these nightmares to a world more or less restored.<sup>9</sup>

In *Fear and Trembling*, the tale is framed as a childhood memory of a beautiful fairy tale – by such modulation of register we handle our fears. But the possibility that God could make such a demand and that a father could heed it, remain disgusting, taboo, like mangled flesh. These are thoughts to vomit out, but they remain powerfully there, as what Kristeva will call *abjects*, marking a pollution of meaning, a fate to which any self is heir. Expelling the horrific is fantasized protection, casting it out.

Abraham's freedom might require casting off his internalized Isaac, setting Isaac free of him, and freeing him from Isaac. It might require that God cut off Abraham from God —temporarily suspending that relation. Just so, an infant's independence rests on a mother's casting off at weaning.<sup>10</sup> Johannes gives initiative to the mother who blackens her breast.<sup>11</sup> Abraham takes initiative at the behest of a Father in a position to order fathers. God flirts with the death of Abraham, at least

with Abraham as father of faith. By any reasonable light, Abraham will die of grief whether he obeys or disobeys, whether he loses Isaac (and retains God) or loses God (and retains Isaac). Yet there is method in this madness. In *Postscript*, Kierkegaard says God's wants to give independence to persons over against himself. God's apparent withdrawal of all succor to Abraham might be a gift of independence.

Kristeva names the moment of separation. The wide-screen drama of Isaac and Abraham haunts as a moment of death. But there is also the moment of life that occurs as the infant's cord is severed in birth -- not to mention the moment of rebirth at Isaac's restoration. If we figure separation not in mortality alone but in natality, then the infant's weaning becomes a foretaste of life, and the weaning of Isaac and Abraham, a foretaste of rebirth, as in the return of Isaac from the dead.<sup>12</sup>

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NOTES (incomplete)

<sup>1</sup> See note 7, below, on this way of choosing our progenitors.

<sup>2</sup> The question of why representation of Abraham eludes Johannes de silentio is related to the limits of representation more generally. Simple objects (trees, flagpoles) are amenable to representation but faith, and knights of faith are not. Silentio -- by his own admission -- can't produce a credible portrait of Abraham; yet he offers (apparently credible portraits of tax-collectors, mothers, knitters. We can get an identifying snapshot (as it were) of Abraham on the side of Moriah, or a mother weaning, or a tax collector striding home. But an identifying snapshot does not capture what it is that makes these figures, figures of *faith*. Johannes is of silence because as a reporter, he must be silent about the faith that lies elusively behind these identity pictures. To link faith to dance, to leaps, or to giving up and getting back is more promising, because these are *actions* speak to us – they do not convey their significance by representing anything other than themselves, but by being what they are. Dance is a doing of

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faith, not an explication, or picture of faith. A dance enacting a giving up and getting back is not a speech *about* faith, but faith enacted. A doing speaks to us in a way an orator or philosophy professor or preacher doesn't. A dancing knight or Socrates speaks, but not *about* anything.

<sup>3</sup> Levinas sees ethics as related to the intervention of a demand that can eventuate in a gratuitous good. Edward F. Mooney discusses *de silentio's* allusion to the medieval idea of giving birth to one's father, of being mother to one's father, and hence to oneself, through faith, in *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, SUNY, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Following Polonius, who follows Hamlet, about to catch the conscience of King and Queen, Kierkegaard-*silentio* provide: THE BEST ACTORS IN THE WORLD, / EITHER FOR TRAGEDY, COMEDY, HISTORY, PASTORAL, / PASTORAL-COMICAL, HISTORICAL-PASTORAL, TRAGICAL-HISTORICAL, / TRAGICAL-COMICAL-HISTORICAL-PASTORAL, / SCENE INDIVIDABLE, OR POEM UNLIMITED.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 70-71. (It should be said that Derrida considers several other aspects of the Abraham story that I neglect.) See John J. Davenport, "What Kierkegaard Adds to Alterity Ethics: How Levinas and Derrida Miss the Eschatological Dimension," in J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood, eds, *A Conversation Between Neighbors: Emmanuel Levinas and Søren Kierkegaard in Dialogue*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> At stake in these vigorous discussions were the place of the humanist imperatives of individual liberation from the suffocation of bourgeois conformity and fascist regimentation; the need for a minimal social order and stable institutions; the liberatory imperatives of social change and political revolution; the rational imperatives of science and critique in the formation of a viable society and culture; the ever-present cultural imperatives of art and religion as these intersected social, political, and scientific imperatives.

<sup>7</sup> NB: My thesis is not that Bakhtin derived his theme of the carnivalesque or the loss of authorial standpoint from Kierkegaard or *de silentio*. *De silentio* is claimed ancestor as a matter of present identification – just as an adult might claim as a father someone other than his biological father. Kierkegaard, and *Fear and Trembling*, can be the now-acknowledged mother of continental philosophy of religion, quite apart from having to trace precise influences, a path of cultural DNA transmission, as it were. She can be an adopted mother. This is not backward causality but renewing the present through new and creative adoptions of the past – what Robert Pogue Harrison (in *The Dominion of Death*) calls "Choosing your Ancestors." Similarly, the actual knowledge Kristeva has of the mother's weaning in *Fear and*

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Trembling is, in a sense, irrelevant to my interests, for my claim is that her thinking is so attuned to what we might call the deep meaning of religious separation and trauma and the possibilities of rebirth, or birth itself, that we cannot but see her accounts as accounts of Kierkegaard-silentio's depictions of the trauma and promise of weaning. Mine is an invitation not to assess historical speculations on possible direct influence of Kierkegaard's portraits on Kristeva (perhaps there was such an influence) but an invitation to see Kristeva commenting on those portraits the way we might see the Poet of the Book of Job commenting on my neighbor's struggles with affliction. If Job can address my neighbor across centuries, Kristeva can address the 1843 mothers weaning. I invite a reader, thus, to a theatrical occasion of mutual address and acknowledgment.

<sup>8</sup> The contrast would be an occurrence of disembodied abstract words reporting banal facts or objective directions. Such information or prescription unhooked from any particular speaker or writer Kierkegaard calls direct communication and Kristeva calls the symbolic. Both notice the ease with which theorists overlook the particularities of embodied communication, the non-propositional imparting and transfer of affect, pathos and individualized perspective.

<sup>9</sup> Kristeva's writes on "the imaginary father" (colloquially, a "father figure") and the powerful yet expelled "mother figure." Both are larger-than-life impostors with counterparts in Father-God, weaning-Mother, and knife-wielding Abraham. Viewed from the positions of an infant or Isaac or Abraham as under duress, the near-destructions and wondrous escapes imply a divine Wholly Other. The nightmare of God's demand is the fright of mammoth waves, and the release from terror mimics awakening from a bad dream, awakening, in the best of times, to a rejuvenating wonder and delight—*jouissance*.

<sup>10</sup> A son's survival requires a father's and mother's ever-greater relinquishment of control and sovereignty—without relinquishing love. It is as if these difficult relinquishments were collapsed into three days approaching Moriah and a moment of restoration, freedom, and independence.

<sup>11</sup> Kristeva unabashedly defends the necessity of matricide—surely a hyperbole. Yet that is exactly the hyperbole at work in the Moriah tales of near-infanticide. Matricide is the necessity that the child separate from its mother in the name of independence: there is the necessary severing of the umbilical cord, and the later severing at weaning. Each of these cuts are at the initiative of the mother, however, not of a matricidal child.

<sup>12</sup> Speaking of natality, it is striking that Kristeva ventures beneath language, signification, psychoanalysis, and politics, to hazard an image of primal womb. She ventures beneath

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discourses, disciplines, cultural practices, and institutions that crystallize, articulate, or edit a world—to imagine an unimaginable place holding and giving birth to these. Lifting Plato’s term, she calls this *Chora*. *Chora* is not the stuff -- cultural, psychological, or otherwise -- that becomes edited, organized, or constructed. It is whatever holds or contains that stuff. It is whatever “stuff” and its processes are “placed in.” Of course, “stuff” is born from its predecessor, generative stuff. But Plato and Kristeva venture further to think that it is also primally born from a womb that holds both it and its generative-regenerative processes.

Socrates is midwife, male and female. He brings souls to birth, helps them emerge as individuals, emerge, that is, from wombs. Kristeva is enough of a Bakhtinian and Socratic dialogical thinker to take psychoanalysis as a midwife’s venture. Insight comes as she helps readers or clients trace a genealogy of formative mothers, fathers, siblings, teachers, and neighbors—trace generative ensembles working in embodied, speaking space. These deeply rooted familial and wider ensembles are all held in play in an unnamable place of fright, but also of nurture and rejuvenation. Kierkegaard would call it the place of God. Kristeva lets it be the place of primal natality wherein the pain of dispersal and mortality’s abyss are joyously, affirmatively, answered.