

# The Matrixial, a philosophical category

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## Abstract

This article aims to explain the term "the matrixial". It is a philosophical concept, no less than a philosophical category, which designates a basic feature of that real particularity. It is used neither as an a priori form of thought, namely as the basic presupposition of all experience, nor as a concept that structures the experienced world. Rather, I aim to attempt to use the term "the matrix" to make the nature of every kind of being conceivable, conscious and imaginable. The Matrix, as will be explained in detail below, refers to a variety of fields of reference, as the diachronic use of the word demonstrates in its application in the natural sciences (biology, botany, genetics, medicine, geology, mathematics) and linguistics as well as in other disciplines such as technology

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polyvalence, ontology of processes.

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## 1. Introduction

This article aims to explain the term "the matrixial". It is a philosophical concept, no less than a philosophical category, which designates a basic feature of that real particularity. It is used neither as an a priori form of thought, namely as the basic presupposition of all experience, nor as a concept that structures the experienced world. Rather, I aim to attempt to use the term "the matrix" to make the nature of every kind of being conceivable, conscious and imaginable.

The Matrix, as will be explained in detail below, refers to a variety of fields of reference, as the diachronic use of the word demonstrates in its application in the natural sciences (biology, botany, genetics, medicine, geology, mathematics) and linguistics as well as in other disciplines such as technology.

In was in particular the 1999 film "The Matrix" that gave the eponymous term its meaning in (media) culture. Like any popular science fiction cultural medium from the late 1990s, this film draws the viewer into a speculative

environment composed of an arsenal of dreams, desires, etc. not yet recognisable by the subject. The aesthetic effect of the fictional medium has the potential to transform the reality suppressed and inhibited by consciousness into a reality yet to be discovered. The subjectivity of the spectator places him on the threshold between two realities, and now material and immaterial verisimilitude are placed on the same level. The world then abandons its singular absoluteness, the illusion that there was only one world, in favour of its multiplication into infinitely possible worldlinesses that the subject is able to occupy. Modern (cultural) media can stimulate the subject to conquer new worlds. Moreover, as in the film "The Matrix", no possibilities can be assigned to these worlds without a gloomy portrayal of unknowable worlds. Such dystopian moods are due to the metaphysical burden of modern doubt. Metaphysics here signifies the equation of world = reality = logos, the equivalence of which was first defined by Aristotelian metaphysics, i. e. the fact that reality exists insofar as it determines the legitimate order of the world and is recognisable through the logos. After trust in

the world was shattered in modernity, mistrust becomes the proof of the existence of this reality. With Descartes, knowledge is no longer derived from wonder, but from doubting and mistrusting the world. What we are left with is the search for the truth of the nostalgic metaphysical pathos of modernity against which the fictionality of the film "The Matrix" is to be measured.

In the humanities, the matrix remains limited with reference to a material substance. Due to its semantic affinity with the word matter (as will be explained below, matrix derives from the Indo-Germanic root ma-), the matrix refers to a first underlying substrate, a formless and malleable primordial substance (hylé) that is formed out of form, namely the Gestalt that shapes ideas. Husserl's phenomenology uses the term hylé to refer to a fundamental property of the concept. In Eugenio Tria's philosophy, matricial means a category of all that exists that is withdrawn from the logos, which places it at the limit of its possibilities for development.

In the humanities of the 20th century, matrix, matricial and all their variants are dialectically entangled in substantialist discourses, and very much limited by the logocentric project of Western metaphysics. Nevertheless, an interpretation of the symbolic of the matrix can be found in the depth psychoanalytic theory of archetypes. It refers to the mother archetype, which in turn is contrasted with its opposite, namely the father archetype, which is synonymous with logos, eidos, morpho etc. Here we encounter a recursive tautology: the symbolic mother archetype is meant to enter into a representation of the maternal, which is to be determined, as it were, by its archetype. But what does the maternal actually stand for? What orders of speech correspond to it? An answer to this critical discourse-analytical question is proposed by feminist structuralist literature, which aims to ascribe a symbolic preoedipal order to the matrixial in view of which the logocentric law of the symbolic and its structure collapse and a new inter-subjective space emerges. In the psychoanalytic examination of the matrix, research on matriarchal theories and matriarchal cultures claims to make the social, anthropological, symbolic and religious significance of the mother in culture as relevant as her figure is crucial to the formation of social systems.

However, with the term "the matrixial" we want to strive for a philosophical reading beyond psychoanalytical interpretations and the interpretations entangled in metaphysical discussions. Our intention therefore is to make the dependent matter independent of its metaphysical imprint. To this end, we will first address the word and its semantic and etymological interpretations. This is followed by a philosophical problem for which the concept of the matrixial can open up new ways of thinking.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Quintessentially, a term results from a systematic construction of a philosophical problem. In this respect, a philosophical examination of the conclusion of an analytical procedure must be carried out in such a way that the careful examination of those dissected properties of the word is followed by a synthetic procedure. The matrixial arises from the combination of a newly assembled order of the respective properties, from which new insights are gained.

### 3. The Procedure

#### a) Deductive method: Axioms, propositions and problems

The applied method consists of a logical deductive procedure composed of axioms, propositions and problems. Clear statements, the meanings of which are determined a priori and necessary in themselves, prove to be true. They are divided into propositions. Propositions fulfil an enlightening function in that they do not prove the truthfulness of axioms; rather, they provide conclusive proof for each axiom. Their validity is proved by problems.

The procedure with propositions is an inductive one, insofar as one concludes from empirical individual phenomena to general ones. Finally, the demonstrative procedure concludes with a transductive procedure, in which it is a matter of transforming a functionally determined semantic value of the word matrix into a philosophically determined concept. Accordingly, a theorem can be deduced from the three axioms, to which the concept of the term 'matrix' is attributable, which gives it a philosophical meaning and by which the introduction of the term 'the matrix' proves to be philosophically well founded.

#### b) Inductive method: Semantic and etymological investigation

The first step of the analytical process begins with a semantic one. The word matrix is polysemic because it contains several meanings. Its applicability therefore extends to a wide range of fields of knowledge, such as mathematics, geology, botany, biology, technical language, linguistics, etc. Matrix is borrowed from Latin and is derived from the feminisation of mother (mater). Its feminisation refers less to the feminine characteristic of mothers, which would be a tautology, but rather to a classification that includes different types of mothers. Matrix refers to plant-mother, animal-mother, machine-mother etc.

The first conclusion to be drawn here comes from the meaning of the word matrix, which has developed over time: Matrix can be described as a set comprising all

types of mothers . However, what remains to be determined is the specific characteristic of individual mothers in the comprehensive genus Matrix. To this end, we need to examine the etymological analysis in greater depth. First of all, what should be noted is the meaning of the Indo-European root -ma: formation force . Formation force, among other activities of the organism , denotes a life force which is responsible for the formation of organically structured matter. According to the anatomist and anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, nutrition, procreation and reproduction are modifications of the same *nisus formativus*, which is responsible for the ontogenetic development of living beings and drives the formation of their forms.

### c) Referentiality as a determination of the specific difference of each type of mother

Secondly, it should be noted that the Latin word *matrix* is borrowed from the Greek word for mother and uterus, so the semantic value of the term *matrix* is limited to two meanings. Uterus indicates the specific difference in that it expresses the main characteristic of mothers, namely giving birth. Which mother is assigned to the Matrix? The mother who gives birth. Giving birth is, as indicated above, an act of the formation force, the *nisus formativus*. In addition, however, all types of mothers differ from one another. The difference lies in each mother's reference to the framework in which she is placed, in other words, she is embedded in specific environment. The mother-animal refers to the animal world, the mother-plant to the plant world, the mother-metal to the metal world, etc. If we want to draw a synthetic conclusion from the inductive semantic and etymological process used so far: The word *matrix* is composed of the genetic equality of bearing (the same characteristic attributed to the genus), which is complementary to the eidetic difference (the respective specific difference of all types of mothers), and the referentiality in which the formation force of the respective singular mother is carried out (the environment in which each individual is formed).

### d) Transductive method: The Matrixial as a Philosophical Concept

The ambiguity of the word *matrix* is based on the fact that the singularity of any kind of mother is not due to her own formation force. Rather, each kind of mother is determined by this kind's relation to the environment the respective individual is embedded in. This leads to semantics being pushed into the background and semiotics coming to the foreground of a further clarification of the term. The meaning of any kind of mother is derived from the relation

of the respective mother to her environment, so that it is determined by the reference. In this way a problem can be revealed – a problem that transcends the boundaries of language and tackles a philosophical question. The problem therefore has an ontological and logical-categorical nature. Firstly, the etymological origin of the word *matrix*, namely mother and uterus, refers to an ontological difference, especially since the mother stands for a postnatal and the uterus for the prenatal formation force. Prenatal and postnatal environments determine the extreme values of an ontological difference: the postnatal environment is called the world, as opposed to the prenatal one, which cannot be assigned to the category world. Secondly, categorical and logical consequences can be derived from the ontological dimension. Starting from the assumption that the determination of different types of mothers can be attributed to the environments in which they are and will be, we may then conclude that there are as many environments as there are types of mothers. Accordingly, the ontological difference between mother and uterus unfolds in polyvalent ontologies, insofar as there are infinite environments, however incomplete the set of all types of mothers may be

## 4. Central Axioms

The philosophical category derived from the system "the matrixial" is composed of three axioms. They capture the ontological question revealed in the semiotic investigation: worldness as the determination of the philosophical category "the matrixial". Each axiom deals with an order of reference to the world: the first deals with the mother's relation to the world, the second with the relation between mother, womb, and world and the third with that of the womb to the world.

### a) Axiom I: "The mother is within the world"

The first axiom says no more than that she is in the world. Her being there is merely a clear statement. The propositions following the axiom aim at proving their truthfulness.

### b) Parasitological economy and reciprocity concern

A strong argument that justifies the inwardness of the mother in relation to the world can be found in the evolutionary-biological function of mother-animals, in that the role of mother-animals contributes to the self-preservation of phylogeny and the environment in which the individual mothers are embedded. With this argument, anthropologist, behavioural scientist and primatologist

Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy has turned the Darwinian theory of selective adaptation upside down. Darwin's theory of selective adaptation hardly pays any attention to the female side of evolution, especially since, according to him, positive reproductive success is exclusively due to adaptability. On the other hand, the primatologist, in the course of her many years of research based on all behavioural ecologies, has put forward the thesis that positive reproductive success is actually due to concern for the development and conservation of the species in question. The agents that contribute to guaranteeing extrauterine ontomorphogenetic development are called mothers, as long as they are the source of supply for the offspring. The more the mother is concerned about ensuring safe conditions for the growth and development of the offspring, the greater the reproductive success and the greater the adaptability of the offspring to the environment.

In this respect, the mother is the very first environment in which the offspring are housed. She is the offspring's first link to the world because she cares for it and houses it in her body. The relationship is one-sided and asymmetrical, because the cycle of goods begins where something is already there. This very first one-sided and asymmetrical relationship is parasitic from the point of view of a communicative relation and lays the basis of every exchange, especially since the act of communication is an attempt to compensate and a regulatory mechanism to bring the respective inequality into balance.

The asymmetrical position of mothers should not be confused with sacrificial behaviour. The opposite is the case. Behavioural biologists have proven that selfless mothers have a very positive effect on reproductive success in the long term. In this respect, the care system is concerned with neutralising the uneven gift of mothers to their offspring in the cycle of response and exchange. In summary, the parasitic economy of offspring can be described by the following equivalence formulae between concern and assistance: care arouses concern and concern regulates care. According to Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy, mother-centred worlds are the strongest worlds in which a higher level of care is created, the costs of which are distributed between a large number of helpers in such a way that the benefits outweigh the costs. A mother-centred world is obviously a strong rearing system with very high reproductive success.

### c) Maternal housing and endoscalation of the mother significant

The parasitic interaction between the host, mother or all-motherly instance and the guest is ontologically determined. The offspring arrives in a world as a concern (besorgten Welt). In this way, the existence of the mother

not only signifies her relation to the world she inhabits. Rather, her body provides an environment that is a prerequisite for the extrauterine continuation of the offspring's formation. According to the biologist Jakob Johann von Uexküll, only the interior of the individual being is connected to the environment of its surroundings. The parasitic relationship between guest and host finds its equilibrium in the interactive relationship between the inner world and the environment; this co-evolutionary field is where the formation force takes shape. The ontological proof of the matrixial cannot be exhausted in an internal and external relationship between two elements, because the relationship between mother and offspring actually forms a co-evolutionary field embedded in a wider environment. This is where the structural logical proof of a multi-valued matrixiology comes into play. It blurs the sharp distinction between that which falls within the classification universal and that which falls under particular. According to the doctrine of the matrixial, which serves as a basis for ontological polyvalence, the metaphysical distinction between universals and individuals contains a misconception. Every so-called universal is particular in so far as it is exactly what it is. And each individual is universal because it enters into the nature of other existing individuals. Universal relativity thus determines the ontological polyvalence of the matrixial system. Accordingly, the infinity of types of mothers does not enter into any hierarchical structure.



Source: Michael, Maier: *Atlanta fugiens*, Oppenheim, 1618.

### d) Axiom II: The matrixial unfolds an ontological trivalence: mother- uterus-world

The second unambiguous statement is that the philosophical category "the matrixial", although it refers to a dialectical movement, involves three values, namely mother, womb and world. Based on the onto-ecological determination of the matrixial, which was proven in the first axiom, the second axiom aims to show the ontological implications of the relationship between the two formation drives (that of the mother and that of the uterus).

When the semantic meanings of the word matrix (mother, uterus), from which the ontological difference was determined, are brought into a dialectical relationship, the third value, the world, comes into play. The world, the condition of which is described by the term "worldness", determines a transcendental for the ontogenetic translocalisation of a self-contained space into an open one, namely the condition of the act of birth. Closedness of the environment breaks open to the world and birth is attributed to those who have successfully made the transition to the world. Martin Heidegger's existential analytical philosophy attributed the ontological basis of existence to the condition of being thrown (Geworfenheit) into the world. In being thrown into the world, the arrow of irreversible time snaps and with it, existence moves into finiteness. In contrast, Hannah Arendt's birth is oriented towards a start and a new beginning. Hannah Arendt unequivocally establishes the wonderful condition of humanity in birth, as the miracle of a beginning. Radicality can undoubtedly be attributed to the experience of birth. The exit of the foetus as a process in which something interior is expressed brings with it an existential alienation, whereby one ties oneself to a world as the result and outcome of an ontogenetic expression. Matrixial philosophy understands birth as neither an end nor a beginning, but rather a transition the logic of which can be expressed in the form of a perinatal dialectic: The delivery from the maternal body is followed by a connection to the world. The strength or weakness of this connection depends on the relation of the individual mother to her environment.

#### **e) Mother-Alterity: the interface between the pre- and post-natal world**

The mother-X is in an intermediate position. She is an intermediary between inside and outside or between the pre- and post-natal environments. Through contact with the mother, the offspring is aware of the difference between the inside and outside of the world, and in this respect is aware of its exi-stence, because it makes it wonder where the "I" is. The mother now plays the role of an iteration in this estrangement (Entäußerung). Now the two ontological possibilities – inside and outside – unfold in three potential worldness: the worldhood of the newborn (the ontomorphogenetic worldhood of the newborn), the worldness of the mother (a worldly formation force) and

inwardly in the pre-worldness of the mother's body (the worldly formation force).

This ontological development has specific psychoanalytical consequences. The figure of the mother is fundamental for the self-realisation of the ego, even its condition of possibility. In contrast to Freud's theory pattern, according to which separation from the mother's body places the offspring in an unfulfillable longing for the impossible re-merging (a pattern Lacan follows and completes in his mirror stage), here the main approach of the object relationship theories should be emphasised. The real relationship of the maternal bond contributes to the child's personality development and entangles it. The homeostatic model of mother and child replaces Lacan's mirror stage "matrix".

#### **f) Mother-world: re-entry of first nature into the social collective**

Just as matriarchy and social theories prove, the media position of the mother defines an essential figure in the formation process of social units. An examination of the figure of the mother in societies traces her back to the elementary structure of a society, which can be seen in the strategies of bonding and alliance systems. The mother-child bond is in fact a first cohesive force, a microsocial structure of the social system. A social system is characterised by its difference from the environment in this respect: its difference from that which does not belong to it, namely the first nature before all else. In general, socialisation is a process which, as the word implies, does not consist in the formation of structures at the natural level, but in their supersession (Aufhebung). The reference to what exists externally in the natural bond core can be indicated by the prefix *exo-*. Social, ethno- and anthropological research agree that *exo-gamy* is constitutive for formation of social groups. Although the matrixial determines the exogamic strategy of social education processes, it does so in the context of a balance with the *endo-gamic* order. The generic term (*genos*) term matrix indicates all kinds of mothers, and thus comprises the genetic reference to the mother within itself and accordingly introduces her reference to "first nature" into the social entity. Socialisation succeeds exogamically to the mother species, but endogamically to the matrix *genos*.

#### **g) Mother-uterus: the mother is the sign of the loss of the uterus.**

According to philosophical anthropology, the process of becoming human is a process of moving from an environmental specialisation – characteristic of living beings – to a cosmopolitanism – characteristic of Homo

sapiens. Man is a being born prematurely, suffering from foetal retardation, so that he comes into the world too immature to cope with his environment. According to the neotenic thesis, the appearance of the mother-human thus comes close to abandoning an environmental specialisation, namely a direct reference to that environment in which the offspring can continue its ontogeny. Leaving the animal, biologically complete condition is compensated by two strategies: technological systems and a care system (Axiom I). For the homo-descendants, the bond with the world is not immediate but needs to be restored by technical objects and all-maternal instances that ensure all the guarantees of a good upbringing.

The separation of humanity from all other types of mothers is affirmed by the archaeological art findings of the Palaeolithic Age. The very first expressions of an anthropomorphic representation are figurines marked as females. The marking of maternal features is not an argument for fertility. Rather, it expresses (1) equality with her tribe, animal/mother and (2) the specification of anthropological characters.

#### **h) Axiom III: the uterus is external to the world**

The third axiom takes a closer look at the ontological determination of the matrix. In contrast to the mother-signifier as a general description of a genus that includes all kinds of mothers whose specific differences have a concrete reference to an environment, in the case of the uterus the reference of being interior to the world is characteristically withdrawn. The uterus is external to the world, says the third axiom. The prenatal field is anticipated, it is removed from language, from consciousness, it is always world-determined according to the logocentric principles on which philosophy is based. The intrauterine space is withdrawn from the world, it is worldness. Is the worldlessness legitimated by ontology? The analysis of being in Heidegger's existential ontology provides no answer, an ontology of worldlessness would turn it upside down even more. In this ontology, being is superior to nothingness, so that the negation has an exclusively predicative value. Being can be predicted with a negation. It is true that non-being is a kind of being, but without being remaining negated in its totality.

This axiom proves the failure of the metaphysical theory of identity to explain processes in which being takes on a variety of forms. The example of the allegorical motif of the uterus to explain a precosmic state and the ontogenetic process of embryonic development proves the invalidity and failure of the metaphysical identity logic and substantialist programme for the matrixial.

Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim (called Paracelsus) used the allegory of the womb as an

explanation of the high abstraction of a pre-cosmic state for his astromedical and alchemical research. Carl Gustav Jung's depth psychology takes up the pictorial symbol of the iconography of ancient Egypt, Ouroboros, the womb. It is supposed to represent the embryonic state of consciousness by standing as a symbol for all the potentialities contained in it and assigned the meaning of perfection and completeness. Alchemical writings use the symbolic meaning of Ouroboros, the original state of transformation wherein all possibilities are contained in a de-differentiated and amorphous state. The metaphysical interpretation of a precosmic state of universe came to light especially with Plato. He had called the precosmic order the genus of all contained possibilities. He calls it *chora*, and it contains possibilities in a de-differentiated state in which everything is one, namely complete and perfect. A third genus is ascribed to it, which is not equal to being or not being and whose access requires a "certain bastard thinking". The metaphysical perfection of a precosmic order is a paradox from the point of view of logical fundamental logic. The order withdrawn from the world becomes entangled in a contradiction to an excluded third party, namely that between being and not-being. The metaphysical conclusion is that the matrixial ontology necessarily becomes entangled in logical paradox.

If the becoming of the ontological principle of the matrix remains to be proven, hylemorphism – a derivative of Aristotle's identity logic – cannot explain ontogenesis. Preformists and mechanical determinists struggle to explain the ontomorphogenetic processes of embryonic development. The fact that form, as the epitome of an idea, in-forms matter is also regarded as a failed attempt at a self-organising process. The question of how forms emerge in the absence of a world remains open, but the drive to create them is nevertheless a self-organising and self-determined one.

## **5. CONCLUSION: RELATIONAL THINKING**

The philosophical system presented here aims to establish a philosophical category, the matrixial. For this purpose, the system makes use of three axioms, by means of which the ontological nature of the concept of "the matrixial" is shown in all its breadth. It is true that these unambiguous statements were not merely affirmed as true, but their truthfulness was proven with the help of propositions and problems. With this, I want to summarise the core interpretation of the philosophical term "the matrixial". It represents a multivalent ontology that states that there are as many milieus as there are kinds of mothers. The set of all kinds of mothers is incomplete, so the multiplicity of ontologies expands as far as the multiplicity of kinds expands. It corresponds to a heterarchical axiology. In contrast to the hierarchical system value of ontological

conditions, which Heidegger's fundamental analytics of being clearly establishes in that Dasein is world-forming vis-à-vis worldless being, the matrixial perceives this order of being as equal. According to the matrixial, no identity-logical being is superior to another. All kinds of being are equal, since the respective conditions of existence are equally interpretative. Accordingly, the matrixial extends the meaning of ontology beyond Dasein. The world, however, does not exhaust ontological multivalence; rather, it constitutes an anthropological problem for philosophy and its justification for fundamental ontology. From the point of view of matrixial philosophy, the world is therefore an anthropological problem, not an ontological condition. To this end, the environment becomes a general ontology of immediacy. Based on Uexküll's thesis that the inner structure of individual living beings is in a bond with the environment, the philosophical category of the matrixial aims to establish the educational drive in the immediate relation by creating a co-evolutionary ontological field through the inner/environmental interaction.

The matrixial is an ontologically determined philosophical category that demonstrates the generative formative power of these manifold worldlinesses. The matrixial is a category of co-relations and endo-relations in that it dissolves the boundary outside/inside in favour of an immediate multi-valency of the bond between environment and inner self.

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