

HOSPITALITIES OF THE BODY: ON MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS OF EUROPE AND ASIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with a crosscultural analysis of the phenomenon of breath in both Western and Eastern contexts. First, it brings to the fore two contemporary examples of an intercultural thought – of François Jullien and Kuang-Ming Wu. It critically approaches the first and shows the ethical relevance of the latter. On this ground, this paper then offers an innovative approach towards thinking of the body, called ethical anatomy of the body. In the second section of the paper, an original ethical platform is offered for the ethics of proximity, based on breath. In the third section, we bring to the fore Luce Irigaray's original philosophy of the breath, also by indicating the relevance of her idea of the coming »Age of the Spirit«.

Keywords: breath, Luce Irigaray, ethical anatomy, hospitality, François Jullien, Kuang-Ming Wu, *prana*, *qi*

LE OSPITALITÀ DEL CORPO: SUL MATERIALISMO E SULLA SPIRITUALITÀ NELLA TRADIZIONE FILOSOFICA EUROPEA ED ASIATICA

SINTESI

L'articolo tratta l'analisi transculturale del fenomeno del respiro nella tradizione filosofica dell'Occidente e dell'Oriente ed inizia con la presentazione di due casi attuali del pensiero interculturale di Jullien François e di Wu Kuang-Ming. I due elementi basilari, l'approccio critico verso il primo e la rilevanza etica del secondo, lasciano spazio nel prosieguo all'importanza etica del corpo, rappresentata con il sintagma anatomia etica del corpo. Nella seconda parte dell'articolo viene presentata la piattaforma innovativa per l'etica della vicinanza, che si basa sul respiro. La terza ed ultima parte è dedicata alla filosofia di Luce Irigaray ed al suo innovativo concetto del respiro quale categoria etica ed antesignana della nuova »Era del respiro« in arrivo.

Parole chiave: respiro, Luce Irigaray, anatomia etica, ospitalità, François Jullien, Kuang-Ming Wu, *prana*, *qi*

TOWARDS AN ETHICAL ANATOMY OF THE BODY

This paper is an attempt to think in a comparative and crosscultural way what I designate as an *ethical anatomy of the body*. It is also an attempt to think the so called “hospitalities of the body” – as perhaps yet not explored but already present ways of thinking within our everyday ethical lives with and towards others – what we in philosophy designate with the problem of intersubjectivity.

Let me begin with two examples from contemporary intercultural philosophy: first with François Jullien’s *Vital Nourishment* and then with Kuang-Ming Wu’s excellent *On Chinese Bodily Thinking: A Cultural Hermeneutics*. François Jullien claims in his *Vital Nourishment (Nourrir sa vie)* that it is high time now for the ideas on breathing, harmony and nourishment to return to philosophy. Has perhaps really come the time for a new philosophy of the breath, we ask ourselves reading his book. Has new philosophy of the body arisen, one being sensitive to others, being hospitable towards the world? What is hospitality? ... But I think that in his attempt unfortunately fails to open up the ethical dimension of breath, for at a certain point of his explanations he quite unexpectedly comes out with explaining Pablo Picasso’s life and work as follows:

Anyone who intends to create an oeuvre should, I think, heed this motto: one’s work requires one not to “waste” one’s breath-energy. To that end, one must voluntarily (ascetically) withdraw from all the ordinary investments among which one’s vitality would normally be dispersed; one must sacrifice those investments – immorally (or “egotistically”), as others may judge – in order to concentrate on the one goal (Jullien 2007, 78ff).

On first view, we may support his claim. But on a more deep ethical level we cannot. There is no place here to discuss ethical temporality and inherent logic of our ethical gestures towards ourselves and towards others, but clearly, for me, or for you, to offer each other a gift of breath, and hospitality/ies of the body, there is *no time* for me to do so. I am always already caught in an ethical paradox: you, in front of me, posit an ethical demand I cannot postpone to some other moment in time. My body is always here, for you, I offer you all my time, all my possessions. It is my firm opinion that Jullien, in this passage, and, as a consequence, perhaps in his entire thought, collides with the very limit of ethics, a limit that he with his philosophy of vitality and breath unfortunately cannot cross. This is what I could not relate to the hospitalities as offered in and by the body towards it/him/herself and towards the living cosmos, in an intersubjective way.

On the other hand, we breathe entirely different air in Kuang-Ming Wu’s beautiful book (1997). Here we find

the entirely different statement, which I find as a most exact presentation of what I describe with the concept of an *ethical anatomy of the body*. In my opinion, no one has perhaps better articulated what takes place in my (bodily-spiritual) interior than this American-Chinese (intercultural) philosopher. In a complete accord with the realisations of Levinas and Irigaray, as I will indicate later – he points at an ethical logic in utter contrast with Jullien’s realisations, that of a radically hospitable *emptying out* of my “inner” bodily space for the other to *inhabit* it. The medium of this action is *qi* or the vital energy of (cosmic) breath. Kuang-Ming Wu’s ethics of breath can thus be set alongside Luce Irigaray’s thought; the two philosophers also share a critical stance towards Hegel’s version of dialectics and the commitment to intercultural hermeneutics or conversation between Western, Indian and Chinese philosophies. Wu advocates the performative character of philosophy. This means that he always operates in concreteness and situational contexts of what he calls *bodily thinking*. The process of accepting the other into the egomania (or megalomania) of the self is in him illustrated by the syntagm *wombing forth*: a metaphor for the uterus also illustrated by the sixth statement of *Dao de jing* by Lao Zi, where he describes the female principle of all ontology. The womb is thus a symbol of void space, an emptied out place within me, and enables a new life-for-the-other: for Wu any intersubjective act (of ethical or any other order) is based on this gesture of motherhood (*wombing motherliness*) which originates in the uterus, yet it is not only a microcosmical or feminised symbol for the opening of the space of the other in my interior, but is a symbol of an universal respect opening up of the mesocosmic space of breath (*qi*), opened between Heaven and Earth. Thus the destruction of the other (i.e., the possibility of or his/her actual death) wombs me forth towards her/him. This means that my *wombing motherliness*, in its compassionate care, offers the most precious gift one has: the gift of hospitality.

Now, what does an *ethical anatomy of the body* mean? First, it relates closely to the topic of hospitality. Hospitality builds upon compassion; both must be understood and felt as a part of a new *material-maternal-matrixial* ethics. According to Derrida (1977, 55) – and this indeed is the secret core of compassion – “one doesn’t know *why one trembles*”. Ancient Greek, Semitic and Sanskrit words for compassion all testify equally for this ethics of compassion: they all relate us to the most intimate bodily phenomena of trembling for/with the other, such as Greek verb *splagkhnízomai* (“to be moved by visceral compassion”), the Hebrew word *rakhamim* (“matrixial compassion”), or the Sanskrit Vedic and Buddhist terms *rdudara* and *anukampa* (“compassionate inside” and “compassionate co-trembling”). All these sacred words testify for the *inside/uterus/womb* as a locus of compassionate feelings, and also as a locus of hospitality. Secondly, the new philosophical

discipline I wish to offer here, thinks of our body as a locus of ethical gestures, springing forth from our eyes (lamentations), hands (gestures, mudras, caress) and skin (Feuerbach; we feel both joy and sorrow through skin), lungs full of air of alterity, and face/visage as a basic ethical phenomenon (Levinas), heart (as a place where *atman* resides) and, finally, womb, uterus and our body as a whole. Thus conceived these all are primarily ethical organs. Needless to say, most of them coincide with the *chakras* and microcosmic bodily systems of Yoga and Tantra (fig. 1).

Needless to say, these body parts/organs also represent almost all of the ancient Indian “senses” (*pranas*) as foremost precursors of all later Indian epistemology (Samkhya-Yoga, Buddhism). In the Vedic texts (see for example *Kaushitaki Upanishad* II.1) there are twelve *pranas*, or fundamental spiritual-bodily vital powers: besides five *pranas* – i.e., breathing, sight, hearing, speech and thinking, there are also others, such as the taste, the body, hands, legs, the sexual organ and intellect (*prajña*) – which all express an ancient representation of the whole micro- and macrocosmic inter-connectedness of the body, the mind and the surrounding World. In addition to singling out and attributing particular meaning to language – or, rather, speech – among the five human “senses” (speech, sight, hearing, intellect, and breath), *breath* is the one particular *prana*, after which all the other senses in the old idiosyncratic Vedic plural *pranah*, which literally means “breaths” or, metaphorically, “vital powers”, follow.¹

Now, to return to our original thesis: in *The Gift of Death* Derrida inaugurated the new philosophical discipline: the *philosophical symptomatology*. In my paper on extreme suffering of migrants in the Mediterranean (“Requiem for Lampedusa”), I have reflected upon Derrida’s thought as follows: We need to come to that “cause closest to our body, that which means that one trembles or weeps rather than doing something else,” as he puts it (Derrida, 1977, 55). As I state in my passage:

Therefore we have an ethical anatomy of the body: one trembles from the outside (skin) to the inside (viscera, bowels) and vice versa; one laments in the eyes (tears) and in the heart (kardia); then, finally, one breathes with lungs full of the wind of alterity (pneuma) in an inspiration that is yet to come (Levinas). Interiority and exteriority, inside and outside: our tears (and their hidden memory of the primeval and all-encompassing cosmic waters) are able to transgress this invisible border between the body and soul, debordering

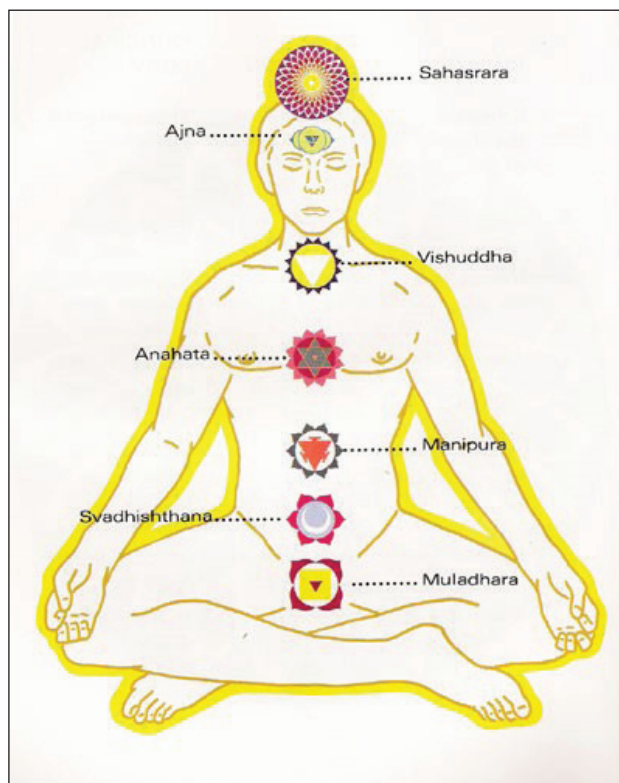


Fig. 1: Chakras (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

them at the very threshold, which is pain, in its most elemental form; lamentation, tears and our sadness – our longest compassion for the pain of mothers, fathers and their children, in the world, full of suffering (Škof, 2015b, 267f.).

BREATH AND ITS ETHICAL RELEVANCE IN THE WORLD

Now, let me turn to breath and its ethical relevance in our world. To be connected with every breath we take denotes our bodily connection with everything and everyone. This process does not contain anything metaphysical; on the contrary, the (new) cosmology, epistemology and ethics are mirrored in it. This is the space of new spiritual energies that feed the impulses, wishes and hopes that guide our actions. Through that, the world of the inter-subjective and the ethics and politics stemming from it, are connected to the most essential aspect of human lives – our breathing in and

¹ Cf. chapter 1 of Gearney’s book for the outline and an overview of the senses as they appear in Chinese thought (Gearney, 2002). See also pp. 9–10 on *qi* and its relation to the body and natural elements. For our concept of ethical anatomy of the body, Gearney’s elaboration on the hearthmind (*xin*: “physical heart”, “mind”; meaning dispositions and intentions of the person) is of special importance (p. 13). Although hearthmind has its own knowledge capacity, it still is considered to be one of the senses. In this way, its role is analogical in its function and position within the body (we may be reminded that *prana* resides in the secret cavity within the heart during the sleep) to the key Indian epistemological element of *prana*.

out and their role within nature and the community culture that are our breath's living spaces. Hence the ethics of breath(ing), as explained in my theory, can be explained as a fundamental characteristic of the newly restored field of intersubjectivity. This growth firstly concerns a person's genuine attitude towards his/her own body and its *ethical anatomy*, as already indicated above. In the West, the move in this direction, which was neglected until Fichte (birth of intersubjectivity in his philosophy, later fully conceptualized in Habermas), Schopenhauer (the body as my first representation, all objectivity originates in our feelings/sensitivity as related to womb, for him), Feuerbach (the importance of skin and organs of the body for ethics),² George Herbert Mead (thinking with sense organs and in particular a "haptic" character of his thought),³ Levinas (the ethical relevance of face and lungs), and Irigaray (the body, touch, ethics of breath, especially in her practice and understanding of Yoga), demands more than just a phenomenological reduction of a hundreds of years of mankind's thinking patterns. We could also include Heidegger into this group of names, namely with the meaning he gives to the *hand* and its gestures, and, of course Derrida with his meditation on eyes and tears, as also already seen above (Kleinberg-Levin, 2010). In this process, the body does not appear as raw matter, or as an opposite to spirit in one of its forms, nor does it take some modern shape of somatics or inter-corporeality; rather, it approaches the old understanding of the world as interconnectedness and interdependence of elements (air or breath, water, fire, and earth) within the entire cosmology of microcosm and macrocosm. Thus, the body is seen as a part of space that breeds ethical gestures – it becomes a part

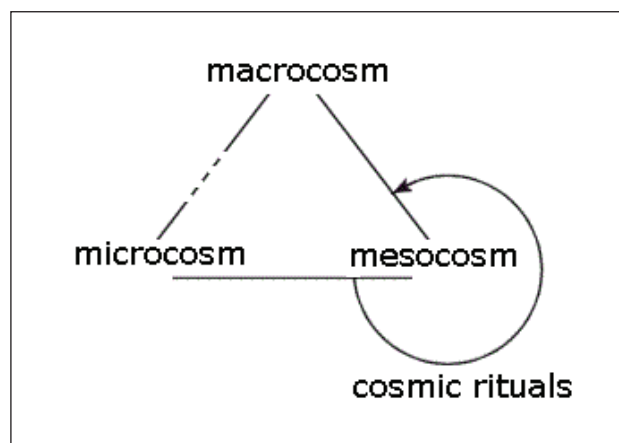


Fig. 2: Cosmic Triade (Škof, 2015a, 195)

of the natural and the spiritual environment that I, fully inspired by ancient Vedic thought, call *mesocosm*.⁴

According to Irigaray (1985), the Western body was immobilised with a fundamental metaphysical-epistemological gesture. In the history of philosophy, the mirror (or, as her most important book's title says, the speculum: *Speculum of the Other Woman*) served mostly as a means of speculation or monological observation of the subject in the mirror of "nature" (as in Rorty's seminal work) or, to take this one step further, as a means of viewing (and appropriating) the Other in the reflection of the subject in that mirror. Philosophy and ethics deserve more, I argue. There is a task waiting to be completed in the future: to become in tune with the process of the new *spiritual-bodily* transformation

2 For Feuerbach (1975, 138) this means to dwell within the body and to communicate through touch with our sensitivity, literally with our *skin* ("Soviel Sinne – soviel Poren, soviel Blößen. Der Leib ist nichts als das poröse Ich"): the new notion of intersubjectivity departs precisely from our sensitivity rather than from rationality. For him, our spiritual essence resides in the *heart*, which is again more (stereotypically) allied with the woman.

3 In his "phenomenology" of gesture Mead ascribes great importance to hand, which also opens interesting possibilities of interpreting him as a "haptic philosopher" (a remark by his student David L. Miller (1982, 22) in the "Introduction" to *The Individual and Social Self*; note also an elaboration of a "hand" in Heidegger – as a gesture, carrying out the bodily felt dimensions of meaning, as David Kleinberg-Levin (2010) asserts). On the other hand, we have Jean-Louis Chrétien, who in his *The Call and the Response* (2004 [1992]) deals precisely with the bodily scheme as already proposed by some interpreters of Mead. Chrétien's epistemological credo ("I never start by saying 'I', I start by being 'thou-ed' by the world" (Chrétien, 2004, 120)), together with his rehabilitation of the touch (and space) is what I find as a most interesting possibility today for extending both Feuerbachian and Meadian concepts of self to contemporary philosophy of intersubjectivity. But Chrétien, in the ethical line of his argument, also mentions a related 'nothingness' of self as a possibility of negating the old Biblical saying "I am, and there is no one besides me" (Isaiah 47:10). Here, both in his concept of touch as well as nothingness of the self, interesting intercultural possibilities open and it is through Watsuji Tetsur 's thought that it would be possible to show the importance of the concept of *aidagara* ("relatedness", "betweenness") understood both as space and touch/contact for the understanding of Mead's philosophy of the body.

4 For the usage of the term "mesocosm" see *Katha Aranyaka*, critical edition with a translation into German and an introduction by M. Witzel (2004, xl, n. 129). Witzel wrote how curious it was that "the term has not been used in this context before". He refers to its first usage in a book on Newar religion authored by Robert I. Levy and Kedar Raj Rajopadhyaya (1990) titled *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city of Nepal*. Witzel argues for the reconstruction of the term "mesocosm": within the Vedic magical interpretation of the world, we face different analogies or magical "identifications" between the macrocosmic and microcosmic realities or gods (for example Sun-eye, Wind-breath, Earth-body, Waters-semen, Fire-speech, etc.). This ancient way of thinking uses different "mystic" correlations and equivalents, some obvious (such as between Sun and the eye or Wind and breath) and some more hidden and esoteric (between Moon and mind). But always there exists a nexus or a connection between two beings (in Sanskrit it is called *bandhu* and *upanishad*). See also M. Witzel (1997), "Macrocosm, Mesocosm, and Microcosm: The Persistent Nature of 'Hindu' Beliefs and Symbolic Forms". See on this aspect my *Breath of Proximity* (Škof, 2015a, 4).

of humanity so as to become enlightened enough to hear the voice of the other, to detect his/her signs and gestures that call for a dialogue with him or her or with nature in one of its beautiful incarnations. It should not be forgotten that this is also a task, for us to learn how to ethically respond to the call of another human being or of a non-human species and their breathing, since breathing means staying alive and sensing everything and everyone that is alive around us.

BREATH IN LUCE IRIGARAY'S THOUGHT AND "THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT"

Let me now turn to one of the most innovative philosophers of our age, namely Luce Irigaray. Her thought represents the peak of entire (both hidden and visible) respiratory philosophy of the West, and it is with her critical examination of Heidegger in her book *Forgetting the Air: in Martin Heidegger* (1999) that all started. In Irigaray's thought there are two interconnected features, a *double reserve*, as it were, which can explain her idiosyncratic (and, for many critics, highly problematic) *topography* of other traditions, and her invocation of "East" and "Eastern" in particular: breath and interiority. Breath is arguably one of the most important anthropological and intercultural constants for human beings of the world, carrying rich epistemological and ethical implications across cultures. According to Japanese intercultural philosopher Tadashi Ogawa (1998), breath has an intercultural potential, for "all humanity is aware of this phenomenon" (Ogawa, 1998, 321). For Ogawa, it is *qi*, which as a natural/cosmic phenomenon "'fills in' both an individual body and all that is between heaven and earth" (Ogawa, 1998, 321). As the wind of breathing, *qi* is both expiration and inspiration. But besides its biological (as breath in the body) and cosmic (as wind in the atmosphere) roles, there is also a communal sense of breath. According to Ogawa, and based on notions of mood (*Stimmung*) in Heidegger, or atmosphere (*Atmosphäre*) in Schmitz, there is something between us human beings that makes it possible for us to be in the world and to interact: the atmosphere of love, for example, "appears in the situational eye contact or in the words of a love conversation" (Ogawa, 1998, 328). This approach resonates with breath and breathing in Irigaray: to be able to reground our intersubjective relations in an ethical way, we have to "acknowledge"

(presubjectively, *internally*, as it were, and with all our sensations and in the sense of a proto-logical truth of the world) the atmosphere of breath (interculturally thought as *pneuma*, *prana*, or *qi*), filling the world with an ethical *mood*, capable of transforming "our elemental vital breath into a more subtle breath at the service of loving, of speaking and hearing, of thinking" (Irigaray, 2010, 4).

In this ethico-cosmological sense, and without implying universal equivalence among the variety of cultural interpretations of breath/breathing, we can see that Irigaray's thought is already a vital part of contemporary intercultural philosophy. The task we share is to attune ourselves to hear the voices of the other, to discern the signs and gestures inviting us to begin a dialogue with others in recognition of their differences. This ethical project will not be the privilege of one single culture or tradition but is a common task of humanity. We seem to find ourselves in an era of erosion of our natural and spiritual dwellings. It is thus an urgent task to learn how to respond to the call of the other person, or a nonhuman animal, and the natural world in an ethical way. The classical tradition of Western philosophy from Plato to Hegel, and even in Heidegger, has repressed and obscured breath and this essential ethical link we share with nature and transformed it to a metaphysical thought that suffocated the world of the other. One of Irigaray's merits is to bring the cultivation of breath to the forefront of philosophical analysis through dialogue with Yoga, Buddhism – thus with various Indian teachings of ethical and spiritual respiration. In a beautiful passage of Irigaray:

In my opinion, this corresponds to the third age of our tradition, an age which would permit to reunite it with other traditions and to overcome the opposition between matriarchy and patriarchy, with all possible inversions between the two, which are not enough to open a new epoch of history. [...] From such a point of view, it is not pertinent to define as pagan certain cultures that precede, or do not belong to, the Judeo-Christian culture. In part, we will find in these cultures, the path to enter the third age of Judeo-Christianity, the age of the Spirit. [...] In the third age of the history of Judeo-Christianity, after the age of the world's redemption, thanks to Mary and to Jesus, the task of humanity will be to become itself divine breath (Irigaray, 2004, 167f).⁵

5 In »Ethical gestures toward the other« Irigaray states:

Breathing corresponds to the first autonomous gesture of the living human being. To come into the world supposes inhaling and exhaling by oneself while, in the uterus, the fetus receives oxygen through the mother's blood. In fact, we forget this first gesture of life. No doubt, we breathe on pain of death, but we breathe poorly, and we worry little about our first food of life: air. Breathing in a conscious and free manner is equivalent to taking charge of our life, to cutting the umbilical cord in order to respect and cultivate life for ourselves and for others. As long as we do not breathe in an autonomous way, not only do we live badly but we substitute the surroundings where we live for a placenta. Then we form with others a sort of mass in which each individual has not yet conquered one's personal life but lives on a collective, social and cultural respiration, on an unconscious breathing of a group, beginning with that of the family. Not only does our culture not teach us how to cultivate breathing to assure our existence in an autonomous way, but it does not make known to us that becoming spiritual amounts to transforming our elemental vital breath into a more subtle breath at the service of loving, of speaking and

CONCLUSION

Now, how does this ethical anatomy of the body reflect in our ethical thinking? Which hidden reservoirs of the body have to be recognized in our thinking to be able to enliven ethically the internal spaces of our bodies? In ancient Upanishadic philosophy there is a beautiful passage, explaining the hidden and obscure link between the eye and the heart:

Namely, the mythological person, residing in the left eye, called Virāj (“the shining one”; being the wife of Indra, a god residing in the right eye, who is called “the one who kindles”; in Irigaray this is the place for goddess Kore) is recognizable by ordinary persons as

radiance in an eye of a human person (or a non-human animal) while being alive (and, while breathing), a radiance which slowly disappears in the moment of death. Death comes in the moment when person is not breathing anymore. Virāj thus is a universal metaphor for the primeval experience (both prelinguistic and precognitive) of a *life*, residing in the other person, whether a human or another sentient being. According to Indian teaching, Virāj’s residence during sleep is in the cavity of heart, where *prana* as vital breath, or later, *ātman* (the *self*) also reside (Škof, 2012, xv).

This heart is the sacred place of all ethical cardiology, and as gatherer or the senses and their ethical dispositions, it is the most vital part of our ethical anatomy.

hearing, of thinking. Too often we confuse cultivation and spirituality with the learning of words, of knowledge, of competences. We have forgotten that to be cultivated amounts to being able to breathe, not only in order to survive, but in order to constitute a reserve of breath as a soul that helps us to transform our natural life into a spiritual life. The forgetting of breathing and of cultivating our breath has led to a separation between body and soul. This mistaken division, moreover, became reflected in our conception of the difference between the sexes: woman would be the body of which man would be the spirit. Now without a cultivation of breathing in each one and between them, man and woman cannot reach a human relation (Irigaray, 2010, 3f).

GOSTOLJUBJA TELESA: O MATERIALIZMU IN SPIRITUALNOSTI V FILOZOFSKIH
TRADICIJAH EVROPE IN AZIJE

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POVZETEK

Članek se ukvarja s transkulturno analizo fenomena diha v filozofskih tradicijah Zahoda in Vzhoda. Najprej predstavi dva sodobna primera medkulturne misli, ki se navezuje na sodobno kitajsko filozofijo oziroma njene reiterpretacije – tj. François Julliena ter Kuang-Ming Wuja. Kritično se opredeli do prvega ter pokaže na etično relevantno drugega. Na tej osnovi se članek posveča etični relevanci telesa, kar je poimenovano s sintagmo etična anatomija telesa. Etična anatomija telesa želi človeško telo misliti kot prostor mikrokozmosa, s čimer želimo inavgurirati nove etične geste gostoljubja naproti drugemu. V drugem delu članka je predstavljena inovativna platforma za etiko bližine, ki temelji na dihu. V tretjem, zadnjem delu, se posvečamo filozofiji Luce Irigaray ter njenemu inovativnemu zastavku diha kot etične kategorije ter znanilcu nove prihajajoče »Dobe diha«.

Ključne besede: dih, Luce Irigaray, etična anatomija, gostoljubje, François Jullien, Kuang-Ming Wu, prana, qi

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