In her very helpful paper, Mary Louise Gill is concerned to describe a problem, a "paradox," for Aristotle's theory of substance, and to show how Aristotle's theory can solve it.

The problem is this. Aristotle believes that primary substance must be paradigmatically one. He also believes that in the course of the generation, career, and eventual corruption of a substance, there must be a continuing subject or substratum for these changes. But if this is so, the continuing subject—the matter—must have a nature distinct from the form which gives the composite substance its identity. The composite substance thus seems to be made up of two distinct natures, matter and form, whose duality threatens the unity of the composite substance. The unity of the substance, and the presence of matter within it, seem to be in conflict.

Gill argues that Aristotle's solution to this problem is this. Since the matter is only potentially preserved in the composite substance, some sort of continued existence is secured, but not the sort—namely actual existence—which would deprive the composite of "vertical unity." So stated, this solution is a scholarly commonplace—most students of Aristotle will tell you that the way he preserves matter as a substrate without destroying the unity of the substance is by arguing that constituent matter is merely potential.

What is new and valuable in Gill's account is her argument that what permits Aristotle to successfully claim that constituent matter is merely potential is his recognition that generation and
corruption (unlike mere alteration) proceed according to what
she calls the "construction model." The ultimate matter, e.g.
earth and water, which nourish a plant, are metabolized and
transformed into plant tissue; the plant, which nourishes the
animal, is concocted into blood, and so on. At each stage the
matter itself is chemically transformed, so that the stuff which
was there earlier is no longer actually present. A second trans-
formation occurs at corruption: hands and feet and flesh and
bone are no longer strictly speaking hands and feet and flesh and
bone when they belong to a corpse. Underlying her account is
evidently the image of a sort of scala naturae, a natural hierarchy,
in which beings from lower levels form the matter for higher-
level beings, and are themselves transformed in the process.
The transformation of the matter at the higher level justifies
Aristotle's claim that it is no longer actually, but only potentially,
present. This takes care of the "vertical unity" of substance.

The second main feature of Gill's account is her suggestion
that what allows Aristotle to preserve the horizontal unity of the
matter—to claim that it really is present in a way, even if not as
actuality—is that the original matter does make a contribution
to the observable characteristics of the substance. Earthy bodies
will be heavy, wooden boxes stiff and flammable, and so on.
The presence of these properties is evidence that the matter is
still present—in a way. She concludes her paper with an
account of how these material characteristics, in resisting the
activity of the soul, are the cause in living creatures of aging and
eventual death.

This account is very interesting and instructive. Nonetheless
I have some doubts and questions.

First, not all of generation and corruption is "constructive" in
Gill's sense. Certainly some is, and her delineation of the con-
structive vs. linear models is very helpful in understanding
these cases. Most importantly, generation and metabolism in
living things do seem to fit her model.

But, to take the most basic case, the mutual transformation of
the elements earth, air, fire, and water is generation and corrup-
tion, but does not involve a change of level. Moreover, this sub-
stantial change does not have the "directional" character which

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