Chôra: Tracing the Presence

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Abstract

Challenging the scholarship of the *chôra*, and what has been thought to be a space of absence and *différance* that cannot reach presence – an idea advocated by Jacques Derrida – John Sallis takes an important turn in his chorology and explores the possibility of manifestation of *chôra*. Unlike Derrida, for whom "*il y a khôra*" (there is *chôra*), Sallis keeps the definite article (*the chôra*) as an index of certain differentiation in *chôra*. This article takes as a point of departure Sallis' thesis regarding the manifestation of the *chôra*, grounded in the manner in which the *chôra* is apprehended, that is, as in a dream. Sallis' interpretation opens up the possibility for a new reading of the dialogue, and offers a tool to examine phenomena occurred in the aftermath of the Platonic cosmogony. One of the most fascinating episodes of the afterlife of the Platonic *chôra* is the Byzantine *chôra*, presented in the article as a chorographic performative inscription in the visible, where the iconic inscription/*graphê* is instrumental in revealing the sacrosanct presence of the Incarnation. Finally, in trying to assess the manifestation of the presence of *chôra*, the article takes into account the obscure phenomenon of the "replication of the *chôra*" in the human body. This I will call the "hepatic inscription" of the presence of *chôra*. A brief assessment will be made around the mantic subjects (the seers), apparently the only human subjects having access to some hidden truth and intimation with the presence of the *chôra* through divination or inspirational creation.

Keywords: Chôra, presence, Plato, Chorology, Byzantine chorography, Divination, Hepatoscopy, Creativity

« nous sommes tous en quête de ce que Platon nomme la *chôra*, espace lisse et blanc d'avant le signe ; c'est le corps du danseur et c'est la page blanche, vierge cire, où le chorégraphe écrit. » (Serres, M. "Le ballet d'Albe" *Genèse*, p. 79)

1. Plato's *Chôra*

The fascination with the evasive presence of *chôra* did not cease to catch the attention of philosophers, psychoanalysts and theologians, Byzantinists, and experts in feminist studies. This paper is yet another quest for the mysterious entity, an attempt for a "chorographic" inscription of her presence from Plato's *Timaeus* to Byzantine *chôra* and beyond. Let us start with a brief reading of the Platonic description of *chôra*, and the context in which she first comes forth in the dialogue. One must say from the beginning that Plato's dialogue the *Timaeus* is about the creation of the universe and the creation of man. This is described as a dramatic process of transition (*Tim*. 27d-28a) from Being – the intelligible and invisible world (*eidos*) – to the world of becoming, the image (*eikon*) of Being – the visible and orderly cosmos. In this cosmogonic process, *chôra* appears to be instrumental. This third kind of reality (*tríton génos*) – *chôra* – is the

nurse, the matrix (*ekmageion*), the womb and the receptacle in which creation takes place. *Chôra* precedes creation, and she is fundamentally amorphous, therefore she is invisible. But it is precisely because *chôra* is "invisible and formless, all embracing" (*Tim*. 51a-b) that can she receive the properties and determinations that first make the cosmos possible. *Chôra* is a space-in-the-making, and in-between, because she partakes both of the intelligible, and the phenomenal bodies visiting her in the process of creation, but she retains neither of them. This symptomatology of *chôra* falls under a hybrid and corrupted logic (*logismo nothō*) – in Derrida's words – "alternating between the logic of exclusion and that of participation" (Derrida, J. (1995). "Khora." p. 89). It is exactly the ambiguous status of *chôra*, her non-determination, and the bastard logic by which *chôra* could be grasped ("as in a dream") that made so problematic for the philosophers to define her presence. On this matter, Derrida's view of *chôra* as a spacing of absence (*différance*), which cannot reach the presence, stands out as an enduring attitude in the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence. My intention in this paper is to challenge this view, and, by following the latest scholarship of the *chôra* exposed by the American philosopher John Sallis, to look into the unstable ground of play between presence and absence in the *chôra*, without intending however to affix her because, as I hope to demonstrate, movement is exactly her nature. I want to place the discussion on different premises. Inspired by Sallis' chorology, I will first present his view of the traces of manifestation of *chôra*, and then move into the iconic trace/inscription (*graphê*) of *chôra* in Byzantine culture – an interesting example of the afterlife of the Platonic *chôra*. I will discuss aspects related to image and imagination, dream and the imaginary, bringing finally into the fore the bodily dimension of *chôra*, or what Sallis calls "the replication of the *chôra* in the body," which should no doubt have significant implications in assessing *chôra*'s presence.

2. *Chorology*: the self-showing moving trace of the *chôra*

Challenging the scholarship of the *chôra*, and what has been believed to be an impossible presence, an idea advocated by Jacques Derrida, John Sallis takes an important turn and explores the possibility of manifestation of *chôra*. According to Sallis, the manifestation of *chôra* should be grounded exactly in the manner in which *chôra* is apprehended, that is, in the dream, described in *Tim*. 52a-d. This passage from *Timaeus* Sallis calls *the chorology*. According to Plato, *chôra*'s reality can be grasped only with great difficulty through a bastard thinking, because she is the stuff of dreams. To look at *chôra* is as if "we look at it as in a dream" (*Tim*. 52b). One dreams of the *chôra*, but in the dream one fails to distinguish the three kinds of being, because this is the symptomatology of the dream. Dreaming is, according to Socrates, mistaking an image for its original (*Rep*. 476c). But as Sallis points out, the dream not only that confounds the intelligible and the sensible, that it fails to distinguish between the image and the original, but also it conflates the *chôra* and *topos*, the *chôra* and its appearances, which are presented before (*Tim*. 51b) and after (*Tim*. 52d-e) the chorology. In short, dream confuses, but also discloses that of which one dreams, that is, *the* chôra. It is at this point of the distinction made by Sallis between the *chôra* itself and its vision in the dream that we truly enter into the heart of the problem of *presence* of the *chôra*, because to speak of the *chôra* itself it would be to speak of some kind of presence. But could we? How could we possibly speak about the presence of the *chôra*?

According to Sallis, there are passages in the Timaeus, which openly refer to the appearing of the *chôra*, "the almost paradoxical structure of this self-showing." (Note 1) Timaeus refers to the *appearing* of *chôra*, to her manifestation in the visible using the verb *phaínesthai*, which means "to become manifest," "to show itself" or "to appear to sight" (*Tim*. 50b-c). The *chôra* appears however only episodically to sight, only the moments when the bodies collide with her. According to Sallis, she appears only *in* the traces (*ichnos*) since only the things that move are visible things and leave their traces in the visible. (Note 2) One could therefore speak of the *chôra* only in movement, as the moving trace of the *chôra*. But at the same time, it is fair to say that the trace of the *chôra* is an impermanent trace.

Let us look with Sallis at some important passages in the dialogue revealing this apparition of *chôra* in the traces, and in the movement of the primordial elements. Before the universe comes to be generated out of the four main elements (fire, water, earth, air), the traces (*íchnos*) (Note 3) of these elements are set apart from each other in different regions, and the traces of these elements visiting *chôra* are instrumental in disclosing the ambiguous and enigmatic *chôra*. The crucial detail is that the phenomenal bodies constantly visiting the hospitable *chôra* are in motion, and that their motion is complex. The movement derives from the difference of the powers (*dynamis*) manifested within the *chôra*, which shakes her and, in turn, she shakes them, as in the description: "the Nurse of Becoming, being liquefied and ignified are

receiving also the forms of earth and of air, and submitting to all the other affections which accompany these, exhibits every variety of appearance (*pantodapèn mèn ídeîn phaínesthai*); but owing to being filled with potencies that are neither similar nor balanced, in no part of herself is she equally balanced, but sways unevenly in every part, and is herself shaken by these forms and shakes them in turn as she is moved" (*Tim*. 52d-52e).

Such picture of the *chôra* precedes the cosmic order, but this does not necessarily mean that there is disorder in the *chôra*. Rather, there is a different principle at work. Let us try to identify this principle. To describe how the elements (shapes, characters, forces, traces), still in a primordial state, move and liquefy or ignify *chôra*, Plato uses the metaphor of "sieve" to describe their motion. This is how he describes the movements inside *chôra*: "the forms, as they are moved, fly continually in various directions and are dissipated; just as the particles that are shaken and winnowed by the sieves and other instruments used for the cleansing of corn fall in one place if they are solid and heavy, but fly off elsewhere if they are spongy and light." (*Tim*. 52e-53a) With the sieve one can separate heavy and thick parts of corn from the scarce and light, but as we will see in a moment, the primordial elements take quite a specific turn in their motion: "her motion, like an instrument which causes shaking, was separating farthest from one another the dissimilar, and pushing most closely together the similar; wherefore also these Kinds occupied different places even before that the Universe was organised and generated out of them" (*Tim*. 53a). Plato's text illustrates how movement inside *chôra* can't be defined properly as chaotic is reigning. The primordial elements get closer or further following the principle of similarity. They tend to get closer to those more similar, and to get further from the different, forming a particular kind of regions in a continuous movement, showing episodically the *chôra*. I should perhaps point out that in the Greek culture such agricultural activities, like threshing and winnowing with the separation of the threshing floor of the grain, played an immense role in the Greek anthropology, which could explain the apparent strange metaphor of sieve used by Plato. As Anthony Bryer has convincingly shown, these activities had an authentically dramatic and bucolic break in the agricultural cycle. Threshing floors were instantly recognizable and difficult to erase from the landscape long after they were abandoned. They literally marked the land and human consciousness. In his words: "In the Mediterranean, the circular open-air threshing floor (*aloni*) is said to be as old as the village harvest ring dance upon it." (Note 4) Such comments are highly significant for my further analysis.

Sallis' reading of the manifestation of the *chôra* in connection with the chorology is, no doubt, after Derrida's work on interpretation, the most important contribution in the field. For Derrida, *chôra* remains definitively beyond sense and determination. For him, "*il y a khôra*," there is *khôra*, but the *khôra* is not. Unlike Derrida, Sallis introduces the definite article (*the chôra*) as an index of a certain *differentiation,* (Note 5) without which the entire discourse on *chôra* "will collapse into itself, into a kind of discursive autarky." (Pasanen, O. (1997). Double truths: An interview with John Sallis. 113). Sallis's contribution to what has been thought to be the aporetic and impossible presence of *chôra*, consists in carrying out the differentiaton introduced by the definite article, stressing out "the almost paradoxical structure of this (*chôra*) self-showing," her *manifestation.* (Note 6) To conclude this brief reading of the dialogue about *chôra*'s manifestation, one may say that there is movement in the *chôra*, following the Greek view of spatiality, and that the presence of the *chôra* could be only glimpsed in this movement, therefore we could call it a "motional presence."

At this point of the analysis it might be also useful to make a brief philological note around the term *chôra*, although I fully share Sallis's view on *chôra*'s untranslatability. The ancient terms *chôra* and *chôros*) are commonly translated as delimited (Note 7) space, region, land, to distinguish it from the place (which is *tópos* in Greek). But there is a sense of movement contained in the Greek word *chôra,* which is linked to the verb *chôréô* having two senses: first, it means to withdraw (give way), to make room for another, like in the *Homeric Hymns*: "The earth gave way from beneath(*gaîa d' enerthe chórêsen*)." (Note 8) The sense is of withdrawing, while inscribing the space in its withdrawal. *Chôréô* means also to go forward, to be in motion or in flux, like Heraclitus said when he referred that nothing in the world remains still, but rather everything moves (*pánta chôreî*). According to the context, the word *chôréô* indicates either a movement with the sense to go forward, or to retreat, withdraw or recede, in both cases having the effect to "make room for," generating a particular kind of space. I should like to introduce also another term, which might help me further in the analysis. The ancient Greek word *chorós* conveys the idea of collective coordinated movement (as action, the dance), or of collectivity in movement (as agent acting, the choir), like *chorós ástrôn* (the dance of the stars), or *chorós melitôn*

(the dance of the bees). This movement is specifically circular; it is an orderly circular movement. It is highly important that *chorós* designated in ancient culture the dancing ground, a term metonymically derived from the place where the choir (*chorós*) danced. The verb *choreúô* meant to dance in a choir, or in a circular manner. The word *chorós* could be translated in Modern English, according to the context, either as "to dance around" or as "the choir of dance" or simply as "the choir." The semantic of these words was almost fully preserved in the Greek-speaking world to come after the fall of the Antiquity, that is, in Byzantium.

3. *Byzantine* iconic inscription of the *chôra*

In the history of the Platonic *chôra*, there is an interesting case of appropriation of the term, which has not been enough discussed from the perspective of the Platonic dialogue itself. This is the Byzantine *chôra* – a most fascinating synthesis of Christian theology and anthropology, on the one hand, and Platonic metaphysics and mysticism, on the other. For the Byzantines, the space designated by the term *chôra* was the matrix of the Incarnated Word, the most sacrosanct presence in Christianity celebrated in the holy icon, and the sacred space of liturgical participation. Thus, speaking of the Incarnation, Gregory Nazianzus defines it as the space *chôrêtòn kaì achôrêton*, (Note 9) that is, "that which occupies space, and does not occupy space." The discourse of the Byzantine *chôra* is apophatic (negative discourse), (Note 10) and oxymoronic, (Note 11) apt to address phenomena located between visible and invisible, both visible and invisible; furthermore both presence and absence. The paradoxical phenomenality of the iconic *chôra* is founded on a theology of *kenosis,* (Note 12) which sole could explain how emptiness and fullness, presence and absense are "foiled" and transfigured in the choraic space. In a most conspicuous way, the language of the Cappadocian Father resembles Plato's, and in a reversed way the deconstructivist discourse. (Note 13) One must stress that in the Byzantine context the earlier record of the term *chôra* emerged in the context of the most violent debate around the definition of the icon in 9th century, and its capacity of the icon to contain the presence of God, which in some ways resembles our concerns for a quest of the presence in/of *chôra*. The argumentation of the Iconodules (those in favour of the image of God in the visible) was conducted towards the idea that the icon does not represent the depiction of the essence (*ousia*) of presence of God, neither is it a mere artistic representation, but nevertheless is an image in which God Incarnated inscribes His presence. This thorny problematic around the image of God received a thorough theoretical definition of the icon in the text *Antirrheticus* by Nicephoros the Patriarch of Constantinople. To the doctrine of sign (*sêmeion*) of the iconoclasts, for whom the inscription (*graphê*) circumscribes and limits the divine infinity, Nicephoros opposes one of the most richly conceptual theories of pictorial inscription, as trace/inscription and word, contained in the uncontainable choraic space. In *Antirrheticus* II, two concepts are defined and clarified: inscription (*graphê*) and circumscription (*perigraphê*). Nichephoros defines circumscription in connection with the Aristotelian *topos*, as a limitation of the body that it contains. Christ, taking on a body, is circumscribed in space (*topos*), but by virtue of His divine nature, He is outlined in an uncircumscribed space, abstract and infinite, in chôra. The icon generated by the iconic inscription (*graphê*) has its specific space, which reveals the *chôra* and not the *tópos*, for which the Christian theorist of the holy image applies to the verb *ekchôréô* (Note 14), that is, to *chôra* notion. (Fig. 1) The iconic inscription (*graphê*) is a trace that defines a space that is and is not there (*achôrêton*). As Marie-José Mondzain comments, the iconic *chôra* is a space extension, where *chôréô* means both to occupy a space and to contain something, which means that the content and the container coincide. The point of contact between them or the edge of this space is *zônê*, in Mondzain's interpretation, which in Greek means the peripheral belt of contact between the womb of the mother and the body of the child (Mondzain-Baudinet, M.-J. (1996). *Image, icône, économie* p. 199). The iconic line (*graphê*) is the coinciding trace between content and container, which makes manifest into visible the limitless Word (*aperígraptos Lógos*). (Note 15) (Fig. 2) The iconic inscription (*graphê*) could be this trace in the visible of the *chôra* space of the Logos, which reveals itself completely only as an imaginary (*hennoêsei*) place (Note 16), yet to be fully enacted in the liturgical performance.

One of the most fascinating episodes in the history of iconic inscription of the presence in Byzantium is related to the notion of "*empsychos graphe*" (ensouled painting), first coined by the Byzantine humanist Michael Psellos (1017-1078). The notion was brought forth by Hans Belting in his book *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, to which he devoted an entire chapter on "living painting." Psellos describes the icon not merely as a reproduction of the model, but as "full of life and nowhere lacks movement" (Belting, H. Living Painting, p. 261).

Bissera Pentcheva and Charles Barber added important researches to the clarification of this notion. As Barber so convincingly demonstrated, Psellos's term of "*empsychos graphe*" seems to point out to an "authentic presence" that is mediated by the painting, but which is not the product of work of art. In his accounts of looking at icons, Psellos describes it as a phenomenon "in between" real and imaginary. There are, according to him, two sources of the image: the art (*téchne*) as the human process of making a likeness and an ineffable admixture of grace (*cháris*), which "does not liken anything else" and which is responsible for the emergence of presence, eventually perceived in the ensouled painting. The extreme manifestation of presence is described by Psellos in the Miracle of the Curtain at Blachernae, the extraordinary thing that happens to the icon on the sixth day of the week after the sunset. People present at that hour in the church witness the miracle (*paradoxon*) by which the curtain (*peplos*) before the icon suddenly is buoyed up as if a breath of wind (*pneuma*) moves it. This phenomenon is described by Psellos as a holy "visitation," which eventually leaves traces in the visible, it alters visibly the image: While the event is happening, the appearance of the heavenly image changes, and it receives, I believe, her (the Virgin's) living visit (*empsychos epidemia*), making what otherwise remained invisible, visible." Psellos' account of the "*empsychos graphe*" of the image is immensely relevant for the assessment of the presence by iconic inscription. The charismatic aspect of the iconic *graphe* described by Psellos as the agency by which the invisible comes into the visible is crucial. One aspect of this phenomenon needs however to be introduced in the equation, namely, the performative dimension of presence manifested in the liturgical enactment. This aspect makes the substance of my research project devoted to chorography, which is exactly focused on the presentification of the *chôra* in performance. I called it Byzantine Chorography.

4. *Byzantine C h o r o g r a p h y* - a space for choreographic inscription

In my research project "Byzantine chorography (Note 17) I challenge the exclusive reading of *chôra* as a spatial oxymoron of the Incarnation discussed in the Byzantine circle of scholarship, and I attempt a definition of the space "in-between" as a space of enactment of presence, a sacred performative space. My Byzantine chorography, a made up term or a syntagm, may be translated as 'writing (*graphê*) space (sacred)' or 'inscribing the sacred space with the dance.' Chorography studies the making of sacred space in Byzantium not as a static notion of some kind, but as a performative spatial inscription. The discourse of chorography is the discourse of the trace of the invisible sacred in the visible. The definition of the trace (inscription) of the *chôra* is obviously at the heart of choro-graphy, due to the instrumentality of *graphê* (the iconic inscription) in revealing the sacred (*hierós*). It draws on the intimate relation between *chôra* and *chorós*, between space and movement, deeply rooted in the ancient Greek language and imagination.

One should stress the idea that Byzantine church performances frequently refer to actions in which angels and humans are engaged. The Heavenly Liturgy is the prototype of the Earthly Liturgy, in which humans could and should join the angelic performance, in which the liturgical hymns are "revealed in a holy manner." (Note 18) and humans can partake into the great cosmic praise in which the whole of creation takes part: "Those in heaven and those on earth form a single festal assembly; there is shared thanksgiving … one single choir" (Chrys. *PG* 56, col. 97). This idea is exemplary explained in the Eucharistic mystery as a hierarchical *choreía* described by Pseudo-Dionysus in his Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. The angels circled together in an invisible series of choruses known as the Celestial Hierarchy. The first rank of heavenly being performs a choral movement: "It circles in immediate proximity to God. Simply and ceaselessly it dances around (*perichoreúousa*) an eternal knowledge of him. It is forever and totally thus, as befits angels." (Note 19) In the world below, the bishops, priests, deacons, and laity imitate the heavenly *choreía*, according to their degrees of illumination. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy is an imitative movement gradually leading to ecstatic communion with God, by which the presence is liturgically enacted. The function of the vast chain of heavenly and earthly orders described by Pseudo-Dionysus was to unite the highest ranks of the angels with the last member of the congregation through participation and shared knowledge of the divine presence.

In a series of articles devoted to Byzantine chorography, I present some cases of what I call "choreographic inscriptions" in the Byzantine *chôra*, manifested as a space of participation – a living body of liturgical experience. (Note 20) In the liturgical experience, the movement performed (*chorós*), the faithful him/herself, and the sacred space (*chôros*) thus created were intimately connected. Space and beholder fused together in a single vision in which everything moved round like a *chorós* indeed. This dynamics of vision reveals not only how space and movement were

conceived together in Byzantium, but also how space was experienced. Space and beholder were neither detached from each other: they formed a choir. It is such experience of space that might explain the linguistic coalescence of the terms *chôra*, *chôros* and *chorós*. At the same time, this points out to a general principle of participation in the Byzantine sacred space. Presence is participative there is no presence per se, but an experienced presence. Thus, in a space of liturgical experience, the movement performed (*chorós*), the faithful him/herself, and the sacred space (*chôros*) thus created were intimately bound together and impossible to be conceived as detached, independent, and abstract entities or concepts. The final outcome of such experience was a living space of presence and participation into the divine, a personified space, identical and continuous with the self (*persona*) and with the divine – an event, one may say, of ontological continuity between Being and becoming. (Fig. 3)

Sacred space of the Byzantine *chôra* was a space of presence and presencing, a verb rather than a noun; hence the type of realization of sacred space was the dance, *chorós*. This was not a mere physical extension of space, but a living body of liturgical experience. It was a space of 'sacred containment', from which the modern distinction between contained space and container should be removed in order to make room to that power of creative imagination, which has once enabled the participation of being in the wholeness of the universe and in Being. Gesture, motion, choreography – this is the evanescent yet essential language in which the idea of the sacred is expressed in space. Here, in the dance, one can perhaps see united those two elements of sacred space, the material frame and the numinous presence, which is called into being within it.   For in the dance, as Yeats wrote, the two are united: 'How can we tell the dancer from the dance?'

5. *Chôra* in the body – a living presence

The Byzantine case of the *chôra* put forth explicitly the role played by the human agent in the enactment of the presence. Presence emerged in the perfomative participation. It might be therefore instructive to go back to Plato's dialogue, fundamental for the assessment of the presence. It must be stressed once more that Plato's dialogue *Timaeus* is about the creation of the universe and the creation of man, both shaped according to the principle of likeness with the Demiurge, with consequences that I will try to asses here. As it comes out later, in the dialogue, Timaeus inquires not only into the making of the cosmos, that is, order, but also into the condition of what *is not* order, neither for the human body nor for the universe before it becomes the orderly universe. What is disorder in cosmogonic terms is felt as disorders (*stáseis*) and diseases (*nósous*) in the human body, which is shaped according to the immortal principle of soul. The aspects concerning human pathology and creativity and the relation to the *chôra* are largely discussed in my article "Creation and Pathology: An Inquiry into the Origins of Illness and Human Response." I will therefore refer here only to those aspects pointing out specifically to the emergence of presence in the bodily *chôra*, and eventually draw some parallels to the cosmogonic *chôra*.

It is interesting to note that Plato's advice to man in order to overcome disease (*nósous*) is to reverse that state of imbalance by constantly imitating "the nurse of the universe," that is, the cosmogonic *chôra*. This idea does not derive from the mere relation between macrocosmos and microcosmos, which is nevertheless the principle at work in Plato's myth, but it has more specific reasons. The main reason is because the cosmogonic *chôra* is replicated in the human body. Thus, according to him, in so far as the disease is the reverse of order and sameness, it is necessary to constantly work on the restoration of the symmetry and balance between soul and body, which must reflect back the prototype. But this is an ongoing and permanent process, by which man should constantly adjust his image to the archetype by imitating the *chôra*. Man should imitate "the nurse of the universe" (*Tim*. 88d), just as in the earlier role of the image of the nurse in the making of the cosmos (*Tim*. 49a, 52d), so that he may stay tune to his creator. As Plato describes, the imitation of the nurse *chôra* consist basically of such action, which "never, if possible, allows the body to be at rest but keeps it moving, and by continually producing internal vibrations" (*Tim*. 88e), thus "duplicating the state of the chora filled with traces being winnowed out" (Sallis, *Chorology*, 136). As I have already mentioned, the Platonic advice is a logical advice because the *chôra* itself is replicated in the human body, but its specific location in the architectural edifice of the body will be capital to the understanding of the manifestation of the choraic bodily presence.

As Sallis has pointed out, in Timaeus' discourse on the human body there are numerous indications as to how the *chôra* is replicated within the body itself, and how such replication is unmistakably indicated in the case of the liver (Sallis,

Chorology, 122, 135). It is well known the crucial role played by the liver in the human body. But most instructive is to note the terms in which Plato speaks about the liver as a ground of some specular reflection, as a mirror. One must stress that the chief quality of this organ is to reflect like a mirror. The liver is smooth, shining *(lampros)*, sweet, and bitter. Likewise, the nurse itself of creation was described as a mere *mirror* in which perpetual being would be reflected and the cosmos fabricated in the same way that all things could be made by the clever and wonderful man who took a mirror and carried it around everywhere (*Rep*. 596c-d). Both the cosmogonic and the bodily *chôra* seem to have been conceived after the same paradigm of a specular ground able to host the reflection of the image. The idea of the hepatic *chôra* in the body like a mirror device, described by Plato (*Tim*. 71b), is immensely important as it will bring us close to the presentification of the *chôra*.

The function of the liver in the body will bring us even closer to the image of bodily *chôra*. As Plato explains: "To guard against this (i.e. images and phantasms) God devised and constructed the form of the liver and placed it in that part's abode; and He fashioned it dense and smooth (*lampros*) and bright and sweet, yet containing bitterness, that the power of thoughts that proceed from *nous* move in the liver as in a mirror that receives impressions and provide visible images, should frighten this part of the soul" (*Tim*. 71b). The function of the liver is to receive images from the *diánoia* (*Tim*. 71c) by a "breath" (*epípnoia*); "the movement produced (by a stroke that is sound), beginning from the head, and ending in the region of the liver, is hearing" (*Tim*. 67b). That's why the liver was apparently fashioned in the body (*Tim*. 71f.), to be an instrument or intermediary of the highest part of the soul whereby the latter could show visions to and terrify or appease *tò epithumetikón* (the motion of desire). The liver is the ground and the means whereby *tò epithumetikón* (desiring) receives intimations from the higher part of the soul or from the outer world. When the mental power bears stern threats it uses the liver's bitterness exhibiting bilious colours, and by contraction making the surface of the liver wrinkled and rough. On the mirroring surface of the liver, the traces of passions and disorders (*stáseis*) are the hepatic presence of the *chôra*, the bodily traces of its presence. It is why a subsidiary organ is provided, the *ekmageion*, which is described as a napkin or a wiping cloth laid besides a mirror, whose primary function is precisely to keep the liver bright and clean (*Tim*. 72 c). With respect to the body, we may call the physiological process of cleansing and imitation of the *chôra* by the term *choral technique*. (Note 21) It imitates the nurse in the primordial cosmogonic process of moulding, which is said to "begin by making it even and as smooth as possible before they execute the work" (*Tim*. 50e). The making of the cosmos is an ongoing process of confronting the motional presence in the *chôra*; likewise, the making of man is also an ongoing process of adjustment to the model, seized by the hepatic inscription of presence in the bodily *chôra*. And thus, we may conclude, the phenomenal bodies colliding with the cosmic *chôra* in cosmogony are, on a macrocosmic plan, what the wrinkles on the liver in the human body are for anthropogony: they are both traces of the ineffable presence of the *chôra*.

6. Dreams, divination, inspiration – channels of presentification of the *chôra*

Yet one must recognize that the access to presence, to this kind of image-mirror-reflection of the *chôra*, is most problematic. As Plato emphasized already in the making of the cosmos, *chôra*'s reality could only be grasped with great difficulty through a bastard thinking. To look at the *chôra* is as if "we look at it as in a dream" (*Tim*. 52b). But in the dream one fails to distinguish the three kinds of being, according to Socrates, mistaking an image for its original (*Rep*. 476c). As I have already mentioned, the function of the liver is that to receive images from the *diánoia* (*Tim*. 71c) by a "breath" (*epípnoia*), which results in some traces inscribed on the smooth surface of the liver. This vision and image on the liver is man's share of truth, according to Plato, because according to the philosopher, man could in some degree lay hold on truth, but on some condition. To have access to some truth, he says, "God gave unto man's foolishness the gift of divination." The shining (*lampros*) surface of the liver is able to reflect thoughts because the soul in the liver area is capable of divination. But vision of divination is achieved not with reason, but as in a dream: "no man achieves true and inspired divination when in his rational mind, but only when the power of his intelligence is fettered in sleep or when it is distraught by disease or by reason of some divine inspiration" (*Tim*. 71e). The person having access to such vision, due to his personal affection is called *mántis*, a diviner. A distinction must be however made between "the diviners" (*mánteis*) having the experience of inspired divinations (*enthéois manteíais*), and the *'prophetes'*, the interpreters (*hypokritaí*) of these visions (*Tim*. 71e-72b).

The diviners belong to the great family of the holy seers, thought in the ancient Greek world to have been endowed with mantic inspiration, a state of divine madness or possession. Pythias was one of these seers (*mánteis*), that is, "raving" (*manikoí*) in "madness" (*mania*) able to communicate with the divine. In their state of inspiration, these human agents were "beside themselves" (*ekstatikoí*), but "full of God" (*entheoi*), that is, "enthusiastic." But it is only in this state of being that were they able to say things impossible to articulate in a normal state, to have some access to truth, as Plato stressed out (*Tim*. 71e). They had the gift of seeing, of knowing, of divination. (Note 22) They had access to the ultimate presence, and the mediation-bridge to presence was their own body. In his poignant description, Plato resembles them to a fountain out of which the inspirational water comes out. The passage comes from the posthumous work, the *Laws*: "There is … an ancient saying – constantly repeated by ourselves and endorsed by every one else – that whenever the poet is seated on the Muse's tripod, he is not in his senses, but resembles a fountain, which gives free discourse to the upward rush of water" (*Laws* 719c). Therefore, says Plato, the poet is the recipient of higher inspiration, the passive unconscious mouth. A specific human typology, subject to disturbances and vibrations (*seismous*) taking place in the *chôra* partakes in a similar experience: these are the poet, the diviner and the melancholy artist. Yet their response appeared to be a discourse beyond logic, and cognition: the prophetic discourse, and the poetic discourse (*furor poeticus*) characteristic of the poet and the melancholy artist. One must insist that the access to presence is most exclusive and reserved to such subjects and channels of some exceptional inspiration.

Thus, dream, divination and inspiration appear to be spaces of the imaginary and human imagination where the presence of the *chôra* emerges through the instrumentality of the body. I should perhaps give one concrete example of art work in which the idea of space in-between of the presence in divination is finely suggested. This is illustrated in one of the many preserved Etruscan bronze mirrors found in the Etruscan culture, which certainly should be connected to the practice of divination by the liver, following the Babylonian Hepatoscopy. Hepatoscopy is the ancient tradition of examination of the visceral surface of the liver, though not the human organ, but of a sacrificial sheep (*amutu*). (Fig. 4) This is a bronze mirror from Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, showing Calchas, the priest of Apollo, mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* – an elderly *haruspex* examining the liver of a sacrificed sheep. (Fig. 5) The Etruscan inscription reads his name *Xalxas*, and the caption: *"A winged soothsayer incised on a bronze mirror reads omens from an animal's liver"*. The mythical Greek soothsayer Chalchas is represented with the attribute of wings, stressing his function of go-between earthly and transcendental reality. His posture, one foot on the rock upwards, and the other one touching the earth, suggests his interstitial placement in-between realms, in the *chôra*, where divination takes place performed by the *haruspex*, who establishes contact between the two worlds. The circular shape of the object, its polished mirror surface, as well as, the explicit iconography related to divination engraved on the surface opposite to the reflecting part, makes it a most interesting case of *choral technique*.

7. Conclusion

Creativity and the presentification of the *chôra*

I would like to take up from the provisory conclusion formulated above concerning the idea that the access to presence appears to be a most exclusive matter reserved to some exceptional subjects. I have called these human subjects *sujets en process* (subjects in process/in trial), using J. Kristeva's concept. The *sujet en procès*, subject on trial, is, according to Kristeva, the psychoanalytic subject interminably in process/on trial between the semiotic and symbolic. Such is the poet, the diviner and the melancholy artist; these subjects are "semiotized" bodies, which live in a permanent "state of scission." It is why they are open to the source; they are channels of some exceptional inspiration which have access to the presence of *chôra* in the body. To follow the same pattern of thinking of Kristeva, one should briefly conclude that the poet and the inspired diviner are facing the negativity process of the *chôra* in which drives are manifested, facing simultaneously the semiotic (unconscious) as well as the symbolic. They are exemplary subjects to describe what Plato suggest to be the necessary gesture to restore symmetry and balance between soul and body in the imitation of the nurse *chôra*, a never ending process. To remind Plato's view, this act consists of never allowing the body to rest but keeping it moving, and by continually producing internal vibrations (*Tim*. 88e). The poet dwells with this rupture, at this boundary and is comparable, according to Kristeva, to a scapegoat. Therefore, in Dennis King Kennan's view, the genesis of the subject is "a scene of sacrifice" (*Question of Sacrifice*, p. 33). This "event" of sacrifice, the *poetic revolution* (which

Kristeva clearly distinguishes from art as a mere cultural form of human activity) is the interval/ the passage from semiotic violence to symbolic order. Kristeva's view of the matter, concerning art as the only means by which *jouissance* (pleasure), can infiltrate the symbolic order (Note 23) is instructive. If creation is, like its human subject, on trial, basically consisting in constantly confronting the choraic motility of the semiotic *chôra*, then creation is that flow of *jouissance*, which is therapeutic. In this dramatic process, creation (vision) emerges as a process of trasformation of the semiotic into the symbolic, which is always a process of becoming**.** Fighting against the unbalance in the body, the mantic subjects confront permanently the *chôra*, turning into an asset what is a *lacuna* in the body, coverting illness into creativity.

The space of creation and mantic inspiration has some kinship perhaps to the Platonic *metaxý* (the interval), where the *daímôn* (Note 24) dwells, or a revelation of some kind always occurs. It is where *the middle voice* is prophered – to borrow Gamard's term. This space of dream and imagination is a phantasm mirror image – therefore it must be assiduously polished according to the *choral technique* (Manolescu, A. *The Pilgrim's place*, p. 56). The story reported by the Persian poet Rumi, familiar with the Byzantine mode of thinking and their vision, is most informative in terms of this technique. The poet tells the story of a contest set up at the court of the Sultan between the painters from China and Byzantium to decorate two walls of his palace facing each other, a curtain separating them. While the Chinese employed all kind of paintings to display their virtuosity, the Greeks were content to spend their time polishing their wall. When the curtain was lifted up, one could admire the magnificent frescoes made by the Chinese reflected on the opposite wall of the Byzantines sparkling like a mirror. What the Sultan has seen on the Chinese wall looked much more beautiful reflected on the Byzantine wall. As Rumi explains, the Greeks are not learned peoples but they polished their heart and purified it of desire, and this purity of the mirror is no doubt the heart, which receives numberless images. Likewise, the saint keeps in his bosom the infinite form without form of the Invisible reflected in the mirror of his own heart (De Vitray-Meyerovitch, E. (1978). *Anthologie du soufisme*, pp. 38-39, apud Manolescu, A. *The Pilgrim's place*, p. 56).

Finally: few words on the act of creation as a moment of revelation, a disclosure of presence. I take here Sallis' path (Sallis, Daydream, esp. 404-406) in discussing the point where the good and the *chôra* are brought into proximity, the moment of vision of the thing "in its own *chôra*," found at the beginning of Book 7 of the *Republic*. Socrates connects the sites and stages undertaken by the prisoner with respect to the affections in the soul and the levels of disclosure of beings, until finally, as a culmination of his ascent, he would be able to look upon the sun, not upon its appearances, but "the sun itself by itself in its own *chôra*" (*Rep*. 516b). By now we know that such glimpse of presence could only be acquired as a godly gift that the god gave to man's foolishness in divination (*Tim*. 71d). As Alberto Gomez, a theorist of the *chôra*, has pointed out, Plato understood that the absolute truth and goodness, like the sun itself, could never be contemplated directly and made an object of pure knowledge, but rather had to be experienced as the lighting that makes it possible for the things of our world to be what they are, indeed, as a reflection in the mirror, in the *chôra* (Pérez-Gómez, A. (1994). Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation. p. 6). The work of art that allowed such lighting to be experienced could be perceived as a means of presentification of the *chôra*. In Gomez's view, Plato is describing nothing less than the space of human creation and participation, postulating a coincidence between topos (the Greek word for natural place), and *chôra,* where *chôra* was a distinct reality to be apprehended in the crossing of being and becoming, in the dream. The manifestation of the *chôra* was, in his view, a prerogative of human artifacts and imagination, which in Plato's tradition it was the province of inspired poetry and music.

The creation of the amphitheatre, contemporary to Plato's philosophy, is an exemplary choraic space of human creation and imagination, a reflection of a paradigm laid up in the heaven. The plan of the theatre was apparently itself construed in accordance with the image of the sky. Tragedy inhabited this space as a space of transition, where the event in-between was enacted, and the mystery was epiphanically manifested at the very moment of performance. The drama was built upon the idea of participation in the epiphany through contemplation (*theoria*) and imagination, where *mimesis* was not mere imitation, but the expression of the manifestation of experience through movement in the *chôra*, on the dance platform or the orchestra (*choros*), where the chorus performed the circular dance. The event took place in the chorus, that is, in the performance on the *chôra* space, which was danced out by the choir. This was a space of

vision and contemplation, of participation and recognition, indeed a kathartic space, of restoration of the cosmic order, as well as of the human microcosm. Embedded within the confines of the cosmos as well as of the human body, *chôra* appeared to be always there, where creation took place, and was constantly in the process of making. The association between the theatre of Epidaurus and the Temple of the god healer Asclepius is perhaps exemplary for the idea that in the Greek culture disorder was understood to be a psychosomatic phenomenon. Therefore it was natural that medicine, ritual and art worked together, according to the principle, by now a Classical adagio, formulated by Plato: "God … bestowed upon us vision to the end that we might behold the revolutions of Reason in the Heaven and use them for the revolvings of the reasoning that is within us" (*Tim*. 47b).

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Kristeva, J. (1977). ″Le sujet en procès", *Polylogue*, Paris: Seuil. See my forthcoming article " Chôra : Creation and Pathology. An Inquiry into the Origins of Illness and Human Response." *EJOP* July 2009.

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Notes

Note 1. Pasanen, O. (1997). Double truths: An interview with John Sallis. *Man and World*, 30, p. 113.

Note 2. The phenomenal appearances, copies of the eternal Forms, are visible and they are subject to becoming (*mímema dè paradeígmatos…génesin echon kaì oratón*) (*Timaeus*, 50c).

Note 3. The Greek *íchnos* appears in *Timaeus* 53B, and can be translated as trace, but also as imprint, or footprint, is a very important notion to come close to *chôra*. The trace has some indexical relevance, you may think, but it is only relative and temporary, due to the impermanence of the trace. Unlike ichnography, the science of fossils, invented by Leibniz, the footstep of the *chôra* is volatile: "(*chôra*) fleets (*phéretai*) ever as a phantom (*phántasma*) of something else" (*Tim.* 52C).

Note 4. Bryer, A. (2002). "The Means of Agricultural Production: Muscles and Tools." In *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* Angeliki E. Laiou, Editor-in-Chief *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39, 109. I owe entirely this reference to Jonas Johnsen Helgason Christensen, to whom I would like to thank very warmly.

Note 5. My emphasis.

Note 6. Ibidem. My emphasis in the quotation.

Note 7. The verb *chorízo*, which is a later term, means "to separate," with the sense "to make (-ízo) a delimitation between two things"; from here we have *chôrismós* which means "parting."

Note 8. "To Demeter," 429f.

Note 9. Nazianzus, G. *Epist*. 101 (PG 37, col. 177B); also *The Akatistos Hymnos*, icos 8.

Note 10. The discourse on the transcendent, which contains both saying and unsaying.

Note 11. A combination of contradictory terms ("living corpse" or "black light").

Note 12. The *kenosis* (from the Greek *kénôsis* = emptying; the verbe *kenóô* = to empty) attempts to solve the paradox between the nature of God and man as united in Christ. It refers both to the Incarnation and His Sacrifice. For example in *Philippians* 2: 7: "Jesus made himself nothing (*ekénôse*)."

Note 13. I am thinking of some paradigms at work that could be recognized in metaphysics, theology and deconstruction, but this article will not undertake the difficult task of developing on this subject.

Note 14. "H graphê dè ekkechôrêke pollô." (Nicephori Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani, Refutatio et eversio deliramentorum Adversus Salutarem Dei Verbi Incarnationem, Antirhreticus II (PG 100, col. 360 A); French translation: "Mais l'inscription est très loin de là (i.e., *tópos*)," in Nicephore Discours contre les iconoclasts, traduction, presentation et notes par Mondzain-Baudinet, M.-J., Paris, 1989, p. 170.

Note 15. Romanos Melodos, the hymn "Rejoice O bride unmarried."

Note 16. "L'espace dont il s'agit est imaginaire… » Nicephore Discours, « Preface, » p. 28.

Note 17. The project is attached to the international network of study of sacred space – Hierotopy - founded by the Russian scholar Alexei Lidov..

Note 18. "And thus the Holy Scriptures have transmitted to the inhabitants of earth certain hymns of this hierarchy in which is revealed in a holy manner the supreme illumination allotted to them. Some men, translating this illumination into sensory images, cry out in a 'voice of a great rushing, saying, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place"'

(Ezekiel 3: 12); other men lift up their voices in that most celebrated and revered utterance from the Scriptures: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isaiah 6: 3) (*The Celestial Hierarchy* VII. 4).

Note 19. Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchy* VII. 4, p. 165. The same is found in Is. 6:2 and Rv. 4:4.

Note 20. In my article "The Dance of Adam: Reconstructing the Byzantine *Chorós*," I read the Resurrection as a cosmic event in which the space of creation is restored again. Creation is restored above and below, in the heavens and on earth, by the circular movement that initially turned chaos into order, the sacred circular movement liturgically performed around the church at the Resurrection, which is a sacred space inscribed out by the holy fire. This is a *chôra-chorós* (space-movement) type of space, as the likes of fire are held in the *chôra*. (Isar, N. (2003). 'The Dance of Adam: Reconstructing the Byzantine *Chorós*,' *Byzantinoslavica* 61, 179-204) See also, Isar, N. (2005) "Chorography (*Chôra, Chôros, Chorós*) – A performative paradigm of creation of sacred space in Byzantium." In *Hierotopy: Studies in the Making of Sacred Space*, pp. 59-90; and Isar, N. (2005). "*Chóros*: Dancing into the Sacred Space of Chora," *Byzantium* tome LXXV, 199-224.

Note 21. I borrow this term from Manolescu, A. (2001) *The Pilgrim's place. The symbolic of space in Eastern Christianity* (in Romanian), Paideia Bucuresti, p. 56.

Note 22. For more on the subject, see Tigerstedt, E. N. (Apr.-Jun. 1970). "Furor Poeticus: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 163-178.

Note 23. "Art - this semiotization of the symbolic – thus represents the flow of jouissance into language." (Kristeva, J. (1984). *Revolution in Poetic Language*, tr. Margaret Waller, Columbia University Press, p. 79)

Note 24. Between god and mortal ("A great *daímon*, for the whole of the daimonic is between [*metaxý*] god and mortal").

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.