

Chiasmus in chorology – encounter in the interval. A Choral Interface of Heuristic Coincidence and Transparency

Nicoletta Isar*

Abstract: This article argues for a chorological reinscription of the fathomless Platonic *chôra* in what I call the field of contemporary ‘cultural intersectionality’. It aims to define a dynamic and generative space of heuristic coincidence and transparency to address important intercultural issues or emerging tasks in the contemporary.

According to Agamben, the full meaning of chorology is revealed in the medial position (*metaxú*) of *chôra* as «three in three forms» (*tria triché*). If the *chôra* is a third genre (*genos*) and the medium (*medio*) that holds together the intelligible and the sensible, there should inevitably result a ‘fourth’ from this union, argues Agamben. This fourth has the structure of *chiasmus*. Although Agamben does not develop further the implication of the chiastic disposition in chorology, his introduction of *chiasmus* as the fourth term is crucial as rooted in the *chôra*. The term helps refine his reading of the specificity of ‘coincidence’ between the apparently split categories; it is a response to their division (*chorismos*). The mediality of the *chôra* allows Agamben to define «the thing in the medium of its knowability» and to admit that politics cannot be anything other than chorology. «True philosophy, like true politics, is a chorology».

* isar@hum.ku.dk

The contribution of this paper resides in that it takes further to explore *chiasmus* in chorology as a generative dynamic principle. It postulates that the chiastic coincidence between the intelligible and the sensible detected by Agamben could be imagined as a point of intersection that prefigures the potentiality of convergence of ideas that would bring together a world of division and create a bridge of tolerance and reconciliation. Taking further Anca Vasiliu's view of the middle point of *chiasmus* as «an encounter in the interval», this paper proposes that *chiasmus* could become the auspicious ground or interval (*metaxú*) for a chorological encounter to reveal, through the transparency/diaphaneity of its discourse, how the things are «in their own *chôra*», thus reaffirming what scholars, since Plato, problematized how to look at the ultimate vision and see the thing not in its appearance, but as «the thing itself in its own *chôra*». As it came out, our view, as well as Agamben's, joined John Sallis's view, as well as Anca Vasiliu's stand, especially when she claims that *chiasmus* can be regarded as a double event that marked once the birth of the World Soul, as well as the birth of the visible. In promoting *chiasmus* in chorology, we dedicate this encounter in the interval to the Other and Othering as fundamentally distinct, unique, and even sometimes opposing.

Keywords: *chôra*; chorology; *chiasmus*; *metaxú*; Agamben

Exposing once again the ontological-political machine of the West and its historical power with the partition of reality into essence and existence, possibility and actuality, which has led to the splitting of being into conflicting fragments, Giorgio Agamben's recent book *L'Irrealizzabile* (2022)¹ sets the floor for new questions and new situations. In point is the theory of the philosopher-king that Plato expounds in a famous passage from *Republic* Book V (473d), an issue on which Foucault and Benjamin reflected before, and that Agamben reiterates in his book as a starting point:

Unless, either philosophers become kings in our states or those, whom we now call our kings and rulers, take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately (*philosophêsôsi gnêsiôs te kai ikanôs*), and [unless] they are united in one and the same (*eis tautôn sympésê*), the political power (*dýnamis te politikê*) and philosophy [...] will not diminish the evils for the city and for the human race, and the politics itself of which we have now spoken will not be born (*phyei*), as far as it is possible, nor will it see the light of day (Rep Book V 473d).²

At stake is «the identity between *the way of being* (my emphasis) of the philosophizing subject and *the way of being* of the subject who practices politics».³ Taking Foucault's thought further, Agamben reckons that it is not simply a

¹ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile per una politica dell'ontologia*, Einaudi, Torino 2022.

² G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 10.

³ M. Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, Seuil-Gallimard, Paris 2008, p. 274. Apud Agamben, G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 11.

question of making philosophical knowledge coincide with political rationality: what is in question is rather *a way of being* or, more precisely for the individual who does philosophy, «a way of constituting himself as a subject on a certain way of being».⁴ In the philosopher-king paradigm from Plato's *Letter VII*, «the possibility of philosophy and that of politics coincide, "by a divine fate," in a single subject».⁵ The coincidence of the two powers, argues Agamben, is the reality and the truth of both terms for Plato. The Platonic issue came about when all political activity had become impossible in the polis, and «the possibility of philosophy coincided with the impossibility of politics».⁶ In his *Letter VII*, Plato explicitly warns against the idea that the philosopher can become the king's advisor without the king changing his way of being. As Agamben argues, philosophy must not seek to realize itself in politics: «Philosophy must not try to realize itself in politics: if it wants the two powers to coincide (*coincidano*) and the king to become a philosopher, it must, on the contrary, become *the guardian (custode) of its own unrealizability (irrealizzabilità)* each time».⁷ But how is it possible that the realization is also its negation – the resistance to its realization, to preserve its own *irrealizzabilità*? The question revolves around thinking of a reality that is not the result of realization, but an attribute of being. The Platonic issue of how philosophy can be 'realized' in politics leads Agamben to Plato's *Timaeus* and his *chôra* in the second chapter of his book suggestively entitled *The Ancient Forest. Chora Space Matter (L'antica selva. Chora Spazio Materia)*. At the end of a fine analysis, in a short

⁴ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 11. My translation from Italian to English throughout the whole paper.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

sentence Agamben concludes: «True philosophy, like true politics, is a chorology».⁸

This paper takes up as a starting point Agamben's intricate analysis of chorology, especially on *chôra*'s abscond knowability and its medial position. Combining ideas from different theorists of the *chôra* and different theoretical perspectives, this paper searches to bring its contribution in creating a vocabulary to enrich the theoretical apparatus of chorology and eventually clarify some of the *aporias* that are at the heart of Platonic thinking. This article argues for a chorological reinscription of the fathomless Platonic *chôra* in what I would call the field of 'cultural intersectionality'. It aims to define a dynamic and generative space of heuristic coincidence and transparency to address important intercultural issues or emerging tasks in the contemporary that require an authentic dialogue and communication to ponder, meditate, and deliberate over the right judgement useful in legal studies. Ultimately, it aims to shape a discourse that makes human action creative and innovative, ingenious and imaginative – truly demiurgic.

1. The spurious 'knowability' of the *chôra*

I start by shortly recalling the essence of what John Sallis terms *chorology*⁹ in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*. Chorology or chorological discourse unfolds in the dialogue from lines 48e up to 53c, which reopens the discourse of cosmogony, after the failure of the first dualist frame of a sensible cosmos based on an eternal paradigm. This

⁸ *Ivi*, p.123.

⁹ *Chorology* is Sallis' term: see J. Sallis, *Chorology. On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*, Indiana University Press 1999, pp. 96-97.

discourse, which is a veritable Platonic *pharmakon*, names for the first time *chôra* making thus possible that «we must begin the discourse anew» (48e). Pointing out to Derrida's interpretation of Plato's shift from dualism to *chôra* as, what he calls, the 'Platonic *pharmakon*', Gregory Shaw comments: «Derrida's examination of the Platonic *pharmakon* and the *chôra* strips us of our unconscious habit to acquire discursive certitude in Platonic text».¹⁰ Speaking of *chôra* and «the beginning of all things—or their beginnings, or whatever else might seem appropriate» (48c).¹¹ *Timeaus* declares that three kinds of reality are now on stage, not two, to participate in the cosmogony. The chorological discourse refers to the deepest, most 'archaic', and most 'abysmal' part of the entire dialogue that reveals the most troublesome and obscure *eidos* engaged in the making of the cosmos. This unusual narrative of the Platonic cosmogony requires not only a shift from dualism, but also a shift from time, a time before time itself, «before the birth of heaven» (Tim. 52d), the archaic time which is for Plato the origin of time itself. As Sallis argues: «The turn back will thus be a turnout of time, not from time to eternity, but to the cosmos in a condition which neither time nor eternity has any pertinence».¹² Turning away from reason, as well as from time, one finds oneself in the middle

¹⁰ G. Shaw, *The Chôra of the Timaeus and Iamblichean Theurgy*, in «HORIZONS», 3,2, (2012), p. 108. J. Derrida, *Plato's Pharmacy*. In Dissemination Trans. Barbara Johnson, Athlone, London 1981, pp. 61-171.

¹¹ He will not speak now about it because he is undecided about what name to call it. As clarifies Timaeus in the dialogue, «there is difficulty in setting forth (Gr. δειξοδος: showing, making manifest) how things seem by the present mode of passage » (48c), apud. J. Sallis, *Chorology*, cit., p. 97.

¹² *Ivi*, p. 95.

of *chôra*'s *aporia*: *chôra* can scarcely be thought at all except through a bastard kind of reasoning (Tim. 52b).

In connection with this antinomy in the apprehension of the *chôra*, Agamben proposes in his *L'Irrealizzabile* three modalities of knowledge that pertain to each being engaged in the cosmogony. The knowability of the intelligible is not perceptible with sensation, it is *anaistheton*, while the sensible is instead perceptible with sensation (*met' aistheseos*). The third genre, «the *chôra* contracts the two modes of knowledge onto one another and perceives itself, so to speak, with an absence of sensation, or 'nonsensation', (*met'anaisthesias*)».¹³ «The knowledge of the *chôra* is bastard» – writes Agamben – «because it experiences not an intelligible reality, nor a sensible object, but its own receptivity, it suffers its own anaesthesia (*anestesia*)».¹⁴ As a third genre (*genos*) – as that into which it becomes (*tò d'en hoi gignetai*) – the *chôra* is fundamentally generative. It is, according to Plato's *Timaeus* (50d), in the medial position (*metaxú*) between that which becomes (*tò mén gignómenon*), and that in the likeness of which that which becomes is born (*tò d'other aphomoioúmenon phyýetai to gignómenon*). As Agamben sustains, in the «three in three forms (*tria triché*, 52d)» the full meaning of chorology is revealed. If the *chôra* is the medium (*medio*) that holds together the intelligible and the sensible, there should inevitably result a 'fourth' from this union.¹⁵ The fourth remains so far unnamed until the antinomy is solved, when it becomes «the true figure of the cosmos».¹⁶ Any association with temporal succession must be excluded from this reasoning. The fourth should not be

¹³ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 107, with reference to Tim. 52b2.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 122.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

understood as a «measurable chronology» (*una cronologia misurabile*), or as an «ecstatic cairology» (*un'estatica cairologia*).¹⁷ This fourth is revealed at the end of the dialogue, when the discourse will reach its *telos*, and «this cosmos has taken the living mortal and immortal together and has reached its fullness».¹⁸ Plato reveals in the figure of a «sensible god (*theos aisthetos*) the image of the intelligible, the greatest, the most beautiful and the most perfect, a single monogenital heaven» (92c).¹⁹ Wrapping up his demonstration, Agamben recalls the Socratic vision from Plato's *Republic* 516b, the passage in which the vision of the sun appears, a vision remarkably similar to the one at the end of *Timaeus*'s first discourse that opens eventually to *chôra*.²⁰ The Platonic passage in question reads: «Then finally I suppose he would be able to look upon the sun – not in its appearance (*phantásmata*) in water or in some alien abode (*edra*), but the sun itself by itself in its own place (*chôra*) – and to behold how it is» (Rep. 516b). Agamben's response to the Platonic vision of the sun is exemplary for his chorology. He states: «The sensible god is the sensible intelligible, that is to say, the thing in the middle of its knowability: the sun – the idea of the good – in its *chôra*. True philosophy, like true politics, is a chorology».²¹ Agamben's chorology propels us into a special kind of 'knowability'. It shows that in the *chôra* the intelligible and the sensible are precisely one and two.²² When we perceive neither the sensible nor the intelligible, it

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p.122-123.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p.123.

²⁰ J. Sallis, *The Place of the Good*, in Id., *The Verge of Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press 2009, p. 44.

²¹ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p.123.

²² *Ivi*, p. 111.

is however possible to acknowledge – but with a bastard kind of knowability with nonsensation (*'met' anaisthesias*) – «their realization, their indoctrination and their being one in the other».²³ At this point, «the intelligible and the sensible coincide (my emphasis) in some way they fall together».²⁴ This space of 'coincidence' of terms, where the intelligible and the sensible, once separated, fall together, opens up to a new interesting reading of chorology that reveals a dynamic interface of heuristic transparency. «Heuristic transparency» is an innovative term that I put forth in order to define the shifting moment of coincidence governed by the logic of *heuretics*, that is, the logic of invention developed by Gregory L. Ulmer in his book *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*.²⁵ This vocabulary finds inspiration in Ulmer's analogy of creation in hypermedia with the art of selection and combination, imagined as a virtual staging fashioned as a collage of signifiers ordered by negotiation, intuition, and strategy.

Reflecting on the receptive disposition of the mediation in the *chôra*, the French philosopher and author of the book *Du diaphane* Anca Vasiliu makes some striking observations about its status as participative receptacle. She claims that by this vocation, the third genre, the *chôra* gives account of the image in all its dimensions and manifestations: on the one hand, as *mimesis*, as *participative* resemblance, and at the same time, as emblematic mediating (*médiateur*)

²³ *Ivi*, p. 112.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ The term 'heuretics' designates areas of *logic* devoted to discovery and *invention*, which G. L. Ulmer takes up in his book, devoting a good deal to *chora* by using its signifying potential as *chora*, *choral*, *chorus*, *coral* and presenting in Part two a dynamic definition of choreography. The Greek *heuresis* (from Ancient Greek εὕρισκω, *heuriskō*, meaning, 'I find, discover') means both invention and discovery; Latin *invenio*.

place of the difference – an immanent distinction which separates the image from the model.²⁶ She argues that the *chôra* becomes luminous, as a consequence of being a participative receptacle enforced by the inseparability and the absence of clear limits between the agent of the form and the fugitive traces that occur in the *chôra*.²⁷ As a spatial interval, or a distance yet a non-void, *chôra* gives rise to sight (*la vue*) and to visibility (*le visible*) while it is itself properly neither sight nor visible (*ni vue ni visible*). Vasiliu claims that the ‘mediating effect’ of the *chôra* by which the sensible and its ‘aesthetic phenomenality’ are born under the realm of *mimesis* reminds one structurally of the Aristotelian definition of the *diaphane*.²⁸ While taking into account Vasiliu’s input toward a presumed diaphaneity of the *chôra*, I would like to engage further Agamben’s term «coincidence» in the cosmogony that will disclose unexpected parallels between Plato’s *chôra* and his paradigm of the philosopher king evoked at the beginning of the paper. In taking up Agamben’s term, I hope to advance as well in tracing the diaphaneity of the *chôra*, its manifestation as a transparent interface. Therefore, I should now introduce a key term, which plays an integral role in Agamben’s theory, and which is crucial for both chorology and the diaphaneity of *chôra*.

2. The Chiastic Knot of Mediality and Convergence

²⁶ A. Vasiliu, *Du diaphane. Image, Milieu, Lumière dans la Pensée Antique et Médiévale*, Vrin, Paris 1997, p. 239. My translation from French to English throughout the whole paper.

²⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 239-240

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 240.

Agamben's reasoning is this: What keeps together the idea and the object in the *chôra* is, paradigmatically, a «pure mediality (*pura medialità*), by which the intelligible can be touched by *anestesia* and the sensible thought with a bastard reasoning».²⁹ This medial position (*metaxú*) has been clearly defined in *Tim* 50d. If, through the mediation of the third, the first two terms become one, [as in the *chôra* the intelligible and the sensible become one], it follows that this hen (*hen*) will then be a *fourth* (my emphasis) in relation to the first three, which is not named as such here.³⁰ Agamben notes that the same scheme is applied in the dialogue with reference to the creation of the World Soul, except that in this case the 'fourth' is explicitly evoked, both in the composition of the World Soul (35a), as well as in the construction of the Circles of the Same and the Different and the planetary circles (36b-d). I begin with the first passage on the composition of the World Soul:

From the mixture of the indivisible essence always identical to itself and the divisible corporeal essence, he created a third kind of being (*triton* [...] *ousías eidos*), as the middle of the other two (*ex amphoin en mésôsi*), of the nature of one and the other, and placed it in the middle between what is indivisible and what is divisible according to the bodies. And having taken these three, he merged them into a single form (*eis mían pánta idan*) (35a).

The chiastic structure of the fourth becomes even more evident in the following section (36b-d) describing the construction of the Circles of the Same and the Different. As Cornford comments in his *Platos's Cosmology*, Timaeus now

²⁹ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p.113.

³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 122.

speaks as if the Demiurge had made a long band of soul-stuff, marked off by the intervals of his scale. This he proceeds to cut lengthwise into two strips, which he puts together by their middles and bends round into two circles or rings, corresponding to the sidereal equator and the Zodiac.³¹ I will use Cornford's translation of Tim. 36b-c to highlight the explicit chiasmic disposition of the two halves of World Soul designed as the Greek letter chi (X):

This whole fabric, then, he split lengthwise into two halves; and making the two cross one another at their centers in the form of the letter X (*oion kheî*), he bent each round into a circle and joined it up, making each meet itself and the other at a point opposite to that where they had been brought into contact. He then comprehended them in the motion that is carried round uniformly in the same place, and made the one the outer, the other the inner circle. The outer movement he named the movement of the Same; the inner, the movement of the Different. The movement of the Same he caused to revolve to the right by way of the side; the movement of the Different to the left by way of the diagonal.³²

The structure of the cosmic soul shows how the Same and the Different are united, and at the same time, separated. Chiasmus is instrumental in the demiurgic project. On this note, Agamben concludes with an observation that confers a great importance to chiasmus: «In the *chora*, which offers a common place and a focus to the two principles, one must perceive, as was inevitable for a Greek ear, a reference and

³¹ F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*. The *Timaeus* of Plato, Hackett Publishing Company 1997, p. 72.

³² *Ivi*, p. 73.

a response to their division (*chorismos*). The *chôra* has, in this sense, the structure of a chiasmus (*la struttura di un chiasma*)». ³³ Plato describes the stuff out of which the cosmic soul is made as a sort of fabric or a veil, interwoven from the centre everywhere, which chiastically unites and at the same time divides the intelligible and the sensible. The lines of the equator and the ecliptic symbolize the cosmic Soul, crossing each other to form the Greek letter chi. Once the chiastic veil is spread over the universe, the 'true cosmos' is revealed. Then it becomes a 'blessed god'. ³⁴

When the whole fabric of the soul had been finished to its maker's mind, he next began to fashion within the soul all that is bodily, and brought the two together, fitting them centre to centre. And the soul, being everywhere inwoven (*diaplakeisa*) from the centre to the outmost heaven and enveloping the heaven all round on the outside, revolving within its own limit, made a divine beginning of ceaseless and intelligent life for all time. (36d-e)

But the cosmic soul was created even before the creation of the body as «the best of things created» since it partakes of reason and harmony and is made by the best of intellectual and everlasting nature, «the one and only existing thing which has the property of acquiring thought is soul» (46d). A closer look into the passage *Tim.* 36b6 sq., which deals specifically with the project designed by the demiurge to accomplish the structure of the world to come, will help us

³³ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 111.

³⁴ «And in the centre he put the soul, which he diffused throughout the body, making it also to be the exterior environment of it; and he made the universe a circle moving in a circle [...] he created the world a blessed god» (*Tim.* 34b).

understand this coming to being of the cosmos and the relation with the *chôra*. The chiasmic disposition of the Soul was designed to 'embrace the body of the world', which existed already in the *chôra* – the receptacle of generation. This mental demiurgic project of the universe «initiated a divine beginning of unceasing, intelligent life for all time» (Tim. 36 e4) manifests as a descent from the intelligible paradigm toward the corporeal framework of the Soul of the World.³⁵ The Chi band turns its shape into an orbital sphere making the transit from a plane to a volumetric dimension – the sphere originating in the X.³⁶ But as Velásquez argues, this should not be read as a mere inscription of a rectangle in a circumference, but rather as «educing a sphere from a figure 'similar to a Chi' (*oion chei*)».³⁷ With this linguistic nuance of the term *educing* or deducing the form, something latent emerges, the manifestation of the demiurgic design. The 'new geometric creature', «a sphere caused to revolve about its axis» is achieved according to a *modo geometrico*,³⁸ ready to exhibit its independent existence separated from the demiurgic immanence, and join the body of the world «centre to centre» (*mésôn mésê*) (Tim. 36e 1).³⁹ The perfection of the project can be contemplated in the perichoretic intertwining of its parts: «In virtue of this reasoning, when he (demiurge) framed the universe, he fashioned reason within soul and soul within body, to the end that the work he accomplished might be by nature as excellent and perfect as possible»

³⁵ O. Velásquez, *The X of The Universe (Timaeus 36b6 sq.)*, in C. Santini, L. Zurli, L. Cardinali (eds), *Concentus ex Dissonis: Scritti in onore di Aldo Setaioli*, Tomo II Università Degli Studi di Perugia 2006, pp. 751-757, note 24.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 7.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 10.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 8.

(Tim. 30b, Cornford's translation). Now the cosmos has come into being, as *Timaeus* put it, «a generated shrine for the everlasting gods» (Tim. 37 c).

This paradigmatic vision of the chiasmus is a powerful form of thought and structure of the cosmos in old cosmologies. In his Fragment 51 Heraclitus describes how the cosmos is centred on the unity of opposites allowing oppositions to be bound in unity. The opposites are linked together into pairs of parallel and inverted oppositions, which manifest them as an inverted unity. The result is «that what is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony».⁴⁰ The unity and the totality of the universe are made of chiastic reversals. Plato's text shows the same principle at work in the two spheres of Sameness and Difference revolving in opposite directions.⁴¹ The Fathers of the Church recognized the Christian cross in the cosmic structure of the pagan universe emerging through the chiastic agency. The cross was the symbol by which the universe has been reconfigured in Byzantine theology.⁴² According to Philo, the Creator impressed the Logos as his divine seal upon the cosmos (*De somniis*, 6 III, 266). The cross of His sacrifice sealed the world (Philo, *De somniis* II, 6). It marked the whole world, both its length and breadth and height and depth, as the Son of God was also crucified in these dimensions.⁴³ Justin the Martyr even believed that what

⁴⁰ K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Cambridge University Press 1983, p. 25.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² N. Isar, *The Dance of Adam: Reconstructing the Byzantine XOPOS*, in «Byzantinoslavica» LXI (2001), pp. 179-204.

⁴³ Irenaeus, *Demonstration* (34 p. 69f) is referring to Plato, perhaps via Justin the Martyr. See G. Q. Reijnders, *The Terminology of the Holy Cross in Early Christian Literature*, Dekker & Van de Vegt N. V. Nijmegen 1965, p. 196.

Plato meant, when he said that the Demiurge placed Him (the cosmic Soul) in the form of the letter Chi (*echíasen autón*) in the universe,⁴⁴ it was the Son of God. This vision, shared both by the Platonic cosmology and the Byzantine theology (with the addition of the biblical dimension), is a paradigm of sacred space generated by chiasmus.⁴⁵

An outstanding and most relevant case of chiastic intersection and coincidence of powers is revealed in the Byzantine sovereignty's inherently religious character, and the characterization of the emperor's role in religious affairs as caesaropapism. In his book, *Empereur et prêtre: Etude sur le césaropapisme byzantine* (1996), whose title echoes the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (717-41) own remark («Am I not both emperor and priest?»), French historian Gilbert Dagron has demonstrated that the study of power in Byzantium must focus on its unity, rather than on some artificial distinction between church and the state. Byzantine sovereign power was based less on ideas and more upon models, not (only) from the Hellenistic or Roman worlds, but from those provided by such images of royal priest and priestly king as the enigmatic priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem) Melchizedek or the Hebrew David. The mission of Christ on earth did not bring the division between the sacred and secular power but assured its coincidence and unification in the image of Christ's power that should recreate an elaborate construction of the *emperor's priestly status* (my emphasis) within the Christian empire as an idealized Davidic regime reflected both in ceremonial and imagery. As Dagron has shown, the

⁴⁴ G. Q. Reijnders, *The Terminology of the Holy Cross in Early Christian Literature*, cit., p. 195, note 8.

⁴⁵ N. Isar, *Chorography (Chôra, Chôros, Chorós) – A performative paradigm of creation of sacred space in Byzantium*, in *Hierotopy: Studies in the Making of Sacred Space*, Moscow 2005.

notion of 'legitimate power' did not involve limiting absolute power by constitutional rules, but rather «by taming it, disciplining, rationalizing, and moralizing the violence in which it originated».⁴⁶ From this perspective, the emperor was supposed to embody in himself an image of God offered for the imitation of men; «he should be governed by the laws of God so as to be able to govern his subjects legitimately».⁴⁷ In this respect, the emperor should see himself as a companion of men in the 'earthling' (*syndoulos*),⁴⁸ that is, made of the same dust as all the mortals symbolically suggested in the pouch filled with earth (the *akakia*) with which he was portrayed in imagery to remind him of the human mortal condition.⁴⁹ In the Roman and Byzantine period, this mirror was closer to the spiritual exercises used by the Stoics.⁵⁰ Dagron has eloquently testified in his book the Byzantine inability to separate the concept of 'church' from that of 'emperor', affirmed, as late as in 1393, in Patriarch Antonios IV's scolding of the Muscovite rulers for their attempt to make that separation. As Marie-José Mondzain so astutely observed, the Byzantine Church knew how to support and defend an uninterrupted alliance of sovereign and sacred offices with economic offices.⁵¹ After the iconoclastic crisis, the Church based itself on the principle

⁴⁶ G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 17.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ *Syndoulos* is, according to Strong's Greek Lexikon, a fellow servant, one who serves the same master with another; the associate of a servant (or slave); one who with others serves (ministers to) a king.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris 1981, especially pp. 13-74. Apud, G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, cit., p. 18.

⁵¹ M.-J. Mondzain, *Iconic Space and the Rule of Lands*, in «Hypatia», 15, 4 (2000), p. 71.

of *diarchy* – a shared temporal power with the emperor and a symbolic hegemony of the Church assuming the power of God on earth. The iconophile Church and the imperial power achieved the realization and the transparent coincidence reflected in specific signs of power. The role of the icon was in this sense foundational.⁵² The icon played the role of the interface of heuristic transparency. It was the icon, which provided the generating and generative principle towards this transition leading to an invasion of profane space by an instance of (sacred) power.⁵³ Iconic economy, allowed this practice of sharing and delegation of power. An exorbitant representational apparatus (*dispositive*) of *iconocracy* has been created in which emperors and empresses appear in the sacred image accompanied by Christ, the Virgin and the saints.⁵⁴ The intelligible was intermingling with the visible world in what has been called, ‘the empire of gaze’,⁵⁵ an *iconocracy* defined by a ‘reality’ constituted by virtue of an extraordinary treatment of the space,⁵⁶ which I call *chôra* space. «The theocracy of the visible becomes the key to all authority – a doctrine, both speculative and strategic, of exchanged looks and imposed visions».⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that by contrast, the concept of the emperor *mimetes tou théou* promoted by the iconoclast council intended to counteract the principle of *diarchy* of the iconodules that is the sharing of power with the Church, which was impossible to accept for the iconoclast emperor. As Mondzain argues, the iconoclast emperor wanted to become the absolute

⁵² M.-J. Mondzain, *Iconic Space and the Rule of Lands*, cit., p. 62.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, p. 65.

⁵⁵ *Ivi*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ivi*, p. 71.

master of the political, juridical, administrative, and military representation, and the only practitioner of the earthly *mimesis*.⁵⁸ The consistency of the Byzantine culture allows us to compare the disposition of the sacred space, sacred image and sacred text with typology, both typology and chiasmus being structured around a center.⁵⁹ Iconic vision, being and typology appears thus to be similarly structured, as a chiasmus. They were structured around the mid-point of a conical helix (the Incarnation), the moment when prophecy becomes revelation.⁶⁰ The sacred space thus created is a chiasmus in action. Its movement defined as *perichoresis* creates the dwelling space of the *chôra*, which permeates the whole creation, and it is reciprocated.

Yet chiasmus has continued to challenge one of the greatest thinkers of contemporary thought, like Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, reputed for his systematic deconstruction of the totality. In Derrida's *Archeology of the Frivolous*, «the chiasm folds itself with a supplementary flexion»,⁶¹ a supplementary fold, which is «neither constitutive nor simply disruptive of totality».⁶² The double movement that constitutes and deconstitutes the totality 'merely' shows it to its 'proper' place.⁶³ As a form of thought embedded in the imaginary, chiasmus may possibly show

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 70.

⁵⁹ C. Lock, *Some Words after Chiasmus, afterword*, in J. Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1994, p. 362.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ J. Derrida, *Archeology of the Frivolous*, trans. John P. Leavy, Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press 1980, p. 134.

⁶² R. Gasché, *Introduction to Andrzej Warminski, readings in interpretation. Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987, p. xix.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

once again its relevance in the contemporary – especially in our times of crisis facing severe challenges – as a strategy for convergence of ideas, and for an encounter between pluralities within a large intercultural chorological frame.

3. Encounter in the Interval – Tracing the Diaphaneity in the *chôra*

The medial position of the *chôra* proved to be crucial for Agamben in approaching the question of the possible, and its stakes in resisting realization. As he argues, the *chora* offers a common place and a focus to the two principles engaged in cosmogony, and inevitably, a response to their division (*chorismos*). In this sense, he claims, the *chôra* has the structure of a chiasmus.⁶⁴ Although Agamben does not develop further the implication of the chiasmic disposition of the terms for his own theory, his introduction of chiasmus as the fourth term in the discussion is crucial as a term rooted in the *chôra*. I would like to explore further the nature of chiasmus and its instrumentality in chorology; how this (inter)mediality could be retrieved? The medial nature of the *chôra* has been already presented in the Platonic dialogue, endowing it with an aesthetic value and the vocation of the 'bond', 'cord' or 'fettters' (Greek *desmon*) that unites the other two terms in creation. It reads: «For two elements to be together in a beautiful way, it is not possible that there is not a third (*tritou koris*): for it is necessary that in the middle (*en mesoi*) of them a bond (*desmon*) be produced that holds them together» (Tim 31b). I postulate that the chiasmic coincidence between the intelligible and the sensible detected by

⁶⁴ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 111.

Agamben could be imagined as a point of intersection and, I argue, as a transparent interval or interface in the chiasmus between Being and Becoming. Anca Vasiliu imagined the middle point of the figure of chiasmus or the center of the letter X (chi) as «an encounter in the interval»,⁶⁵ underlining the medial character of the *chôra*. She writes: «The third kind (that is, that into which it becomes, *to d'en hoi gignetai*) is in a median position with respect to the other two kinds: that which becomes (*tò mén gignómenon*), and that in the likeness of which that which becomes is born (*tò d'other aphomoioúmenon phyýetai to gignómenon*) (Tim 50c7-d2)». ⁶⁶ Vasiliu claims that chiasmus can be regarded as a double event that marks at once the birth of the World Soul, and the birth of the visible.⁶⁷ The birth of the visible refers to the emergence of the cosmos as pure visibility, where the condition of visibility is light that acts upon the medium, according to Aristotle's theory of the *diaphane* that Vasiliu closely follows in her book. This idea is almost an aphorism in Aristotle's *Peri Psyche* or *De anima* (On the Soul): «There is, to be sure, the diaphane (*esti dê ti diaphanès*)» (*De anima*, 418b, 4). «Light is the actuality of this transparency as transparency/the act (*Enérgeia*) of operation of the *diaphane* as *diaphane* *Phôs dé estin hé toútou enérgeia tou diaphanous hé diaphanés* (Aristotle, *De anima* 418b 9-10)». What makes it what it is, is light, its own act that is *Enérgeia*. Vasiliu's concept of the interval, which I want to take further, is entirely consistent with Agamben's objectless mediality of the *chôra* that knows only its own receptivity, its proper *anestesia*.⁶⁸ Pure mediality without an object (and no

⁶⁵ A. Vasiliu, *Du diaphane*, cit., p. 225.

⁶⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 231-232

⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 225.

⁶⁸ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzbaile*, cit., p. 107.

opacity), entitles us to address the mediality of the *chôra* in terms of transparency or diaphaneity in the chiasmic interval of the chorology. Yet the two events to which Vasiliu refers, although so strikingly similar, are distinct beyond any metaphorical move. We find ourselves facing the same question Sallis confronted when he inquired into the vision of the sun in Rep. 516b. He questioned the possibility of translating the vision of the perceptible (the sun) over into the intellection or hyperintellection of the good (the *chôra*). He asked: What happens to the *chôra* in this translation? Can there be a metaphorizing of the *chôra*? What kind of translation could make this reading possible? We seem to be circling around the same questions and ask again: how is the *chôra* to be perceived? «The *chôra* is to be apprehended in a dream. Or as in a dream».⁶⁹ But dream and dreaming is problematic, as in the dream one is caught up with images without distinguishing them from the original, which leaves us for the moment without any proper answer as yet.⁷⁰ The objectless receptivity of the *chôra* knows only the pure power of knowability that dream can accommodate – «*una pura potenza di conoscere, una pura conoscibilità*».⁷¹

What is important in *Timaeus*, argues Agamben, is the mode in which we know the *chôra*, and this is what Agamben provides, a modal ontology, which intends being in its 'how', which is always «a medial ontology» (Agamben 2014, p. 215).⁷² Drawing on the analogies between *Timaeus* and the

⁶⁹ J. Sallis, *Daydream*, in «Revue Internationale de Philosophie», 52, 205 (1998), p. 406.

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 407-408.

⁷¹ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 107.

⁷² L. Pezzoli, *La potenza di Agamben L'irrealizzabile. Per una politica dell'ontologia di Giorgio Agamben*, Book review, in «Fata Morgana web», 21 feb. 2022.

Platonic tradition of Oxford and Cambridge (Henry More, Isaak Newton), Agamben affirms in his fourth chapter *Sensorium Dei* that the reality of this space of infinite extension has an affinity with the *chôra*, but is not something that we can know by the free exercise of the faculty of thinking or imagining. Rather, this is something we cannot « not to imagine» (*disimmaginare*).⁷³ What is the status of imagination that would correspond to a «non-power not to imagine » (*un non potere non immaginare*)? Here, answers Agamben, imagination and thought follow the bastard reasoning of the *chôra* perceived «with nonsensation (*con un'anestesia*) (*met'anaestusias*)».⁷⁴ Imagination and thought do not practically perceive an external object, but their own inability to stop imagining, before or in the absence of bodies or entities to perceive.⁷⁵ The imagination that cannot free itself from imagination, says Agamben, «imagines Space, imagines a pure opening» – «an *infinite extension* that surrounds finite matter on all sides».⁷⁶ Like the *chôra*, this opening is not a thing, but «a pure emanative effect of existence», «the pure donation of the world as a sensible God».⁷⁷ To a space which is pure self-affection of substance corresponds a «not being able to unimagine» (*un non poter disimmaginare*) which is a « pure self-affection of imagination».⁷⁸ As Agamben has all the way advocated, the

⁷³ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 142. Agamben cites More arguing that «we cannot in our imagination unimagine space because it is this "inevitable imagination of the necessity of infinite space"».

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *Ivi*, p. 142, citing H. More, *Enchiridion Metaphysicum sive de rebus incorporeis per H. More Cantabrigiensem*, E. Flesher, Londres 1671, p. 43.

⁷⁷ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 142.

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 142-143.

paradigm that holds together the idea and the sensible thing in the *chôra* is pure mediality. In this interval, the intelligible is touched by *anestesia* and the sensible thought by a bastard reasoning. It is this mediality, this pure knowability, whether intelligible or sensible, that the *chora* is about.⁷⁹ This is not a question of the relationship between two entities of the world, between a knowing subject and a known object, but between an entity, and what could be called, *spatium da patere*, an opening.⁸⁰ This openness is itself not a substance but a pure modality (*un puro modo*), not a *quid* or a what, but simply a *how*.⁸¹ Could we speak of the diaphaneity of the *chôra* as pure modality of its manifestation? This is to say, to speak of the manifestation of the chorological diaphaneity of the coincidence of impossibilities.

Here, I take Marie-José Mondzain's view of image traced back to the historical ground where the image was constituted as a question both philosophical and political.⁸² She argues that image, in its Greek form as *eikon*, designated for Plato and the Church Fathers a *mode* of appearance in the field of the visible, not a thing properly, because *eikon* in Greek is analogous to the verbal form of the present participle.⁸³ This is because, Mondzain argues, Greek distinguishes the status of the thing from the action that brings it to existence. Thus, *eikon* is a verbal derivation in the feminine and active form of the present participle, its literal translation being seeming, it belongs to the regime of

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, p. 113.

⁸⁰ *Ivi*, p. 147.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² M.-J. Mondzain, *Image, subject, power: interview with Marie-José Mondzain*. Translated by Briankle G. Chang & Nefeli Forni Zervoudaki, in «Inter-Asia Cultural Studies», 22,1 (2021), p. 88.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

semblance. Likewise, *poiésis* is the action that brings the thing to existence, it is the gesture of creating; *poiéma* is the poem.⁸⁴ Although Platonism rejected the images, in *Timaeus*, the image serves in the cosmological vision of the world, because this semblance poses an ontological problem to philosophy. As a relation, *eikon* expresses its mode of being as a being of «in-between». At the end of his dialogue (*Tim* 92c), Plato reveals the accomplishment of the discourse and the cosmogony, when a vision is disclosed: «this cosmos has taken the living mortal and immortal together and has reached its fullness».⁸⁵ Plato reveals it in the figure of «a sensible god (*theos aisthetos*) the image of the intelligible, the greatest, the most beautiful and the most perfect, a single monogenital heaven» (92c).⁸⁶ Finally, the passage from *Rep* 516b evoking the ascent of the liberated prisoner who can at last turn his vision upward to the diurnal heaven to look upon the sun itself – a vision strikingly similar to the one at the end of *Timaeus*' first discourse as if closing philosophy, but which instead opens towards the *chôra*.⁸⁷ This vision is not only the most intriguing perspective in the cosmic drama,⁸⁸ but it is the most tempting in our quest to unveil the diaphaneity of the *chôra*. Sallis clarifies that only in its *chôra* does the sun come to be beheld properly, as itself and by itself.⁸⁹ When one no longer sees its phantoms, then one could properly see the sun – it is then that one could see it in its own *chôra*. At this moment, the truth is revealed, albeit not as an image (a sensible thing), but as truth itself in its own place (cf. *Rep*.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 123.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ J. Sallis, *The Place of the Good*, cit., p. 44.

⁸⁸ J. Sallis, *Daydream*, cit., p. 404.

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, p. 405.

533a). This ultimate vision is nothing else than the *chôra* in which the paradigm breaks, at once revealing and concealing the epiphanic vision. We could perhaps evoke here the icon as symptomatic, or better say, the Greek word for icon, *eikon*, that is, «the first born of the supreme source of light, [by which] images animate the things we see».⁹⁰ This is a kind of «crack in being», a locus that marks the unreality of presence.⁹¹ Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy sees the pure image as «an earthquake in being» that opens the chasm of presence, in which «being is torn away from being». In this appearing, «it is the image that tears away itself».⁹² Looking at the last things might be possible but only for a momentary glance, just as one would look at the sun, since it deflects vision and temporarily injects blindness to it.⁹³ At this moment, truth is revealed, albeit not as a thing, neither as a clear image, but in its diaphaneity, the truth itself in its own place (*Rep.* 533a).

I propose the reading of this dazzling vision as a moment of diaphaneity of the *chôra*, a vision of ‘coincidence’ and self-abolition that reveals and hides at the same time. Touching upon the *diaphane* in Plato’s *Timaeus*, Vasiliu terms it as «the effective transparency» of the invisible vision; the paradox of similitude which renders in fact – in the limit case of identity – all the vision impossible.⁹⁴ She perceives it

⁹⁰ M.-J. Mondzain, *Image, subject, power: interview with Marie-José Mondzain*, cit., p. 84.

⁹¹ M.-J. Mondzain, *What is an Image?: An Interview with Marie-José Mondzain*. Translated by Briankle G. Chang, in «Inter-Asia Cultural Studies», 20, 3, (2019), p. 484. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, subject, power*, cit., p. 84.

⁹² J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of Image*, Fordham University Press 2005, pp. 25-26. Apud. M.-J. Mondzain, *Image, subject, power*, cit., p. 98.

⁹³ J. Sallis, *The Place of the Good*, cit., p. 51.

⁹⁴ A. Vasiliu, *Du diaphane*, cit. p. 239.

as the effect of mediation (*l'effet médiateur*) of the third genre.⁹⁵ Furthermore, she argues that due to its participatory status as a receptacle lacking a clear boundary that would delimit the agent of form and the fugitive traces that traverse it, *chôra* becomes luminous (*lumineuse*).⁹⁶ Its luminous nature endures, «as if to consecrate in this way the inexplicable participation of the third genre in the intelligible which determines it».⁹⁷ This interval within the *chôra* in which the sensible and its aesthetic phenomenality evolve, reminds her structurally of the *diaphane* as Aristotle defines.⁹⁸ I cannot disagree with Vasiliu's assertion. What does one see or sense while glancing at such scarce vision? The answer could be grasped in the term itself, «scarce», proposed by Sallis, which translates the Greek adverb *mógis* used by Plato to describe the perception that requires «toil and trouble».⁹⁹ Looking at the last things might be thus a troublesome affair. At this point, the soul is at a loss (*aporeô*), thrown into *aporia*.¹⁰⁰ Reflecting on those who go over to the opposite perception, Socrates describes them in such a way as if, for them, «the perception doesn't reveal one thing any more than its opposite» (*Rep.* 523c). Sensation, like language, is at loss. One moves decisively beyond senses. Agamben's term «nonsensation» (*met'anaistesiás*) seems here appropriate.

For a hypothetical staging of chorology, I am inspired by a line from Plato's *Republic* (518c). Plato states that to reach «the brightest region of being» (*tou ontos tó*

⁹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 240.

⁹⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 239-240.

⁹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 239.

⁹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 240.

⁹⁹ J. Sallis, *The Place of the Good*, cit. p. 46.

¹⁰⁰ *Ivi*, p. 49.

phanótaton (518c), which we have just grasped in the luminous *chôra*), it is necessary to acquire, what he calls, the «art of shifting (*tês periagôgês téchne*) or conversion of the soul» (518d). The ancient dramatic tradition provides the analogy of the scenographic device «like the scene-shifting periaet (*periaktéon*)¹⁰¹ in the theatre»¹⁰² (518c). Following Plato's line of thinking, this would mean that to attain the ultimate vision one must first possess the skill of performing the scene-shifting *periaet*, that is, the art of the conversion of the soul. Therefore, I ask. If the greatest knowledge is not properly the knowledge of something but a pure 'knowability', as Agamben advised us all through this analysis, we may perhaps include this tropism of the soul in the range of pure knowability? A hidden knowledge though, enacting the conversion of the soul, a form of manifestation and revelation in the *chôra* – una *choreographia*.¹⁰³ Is it perhaps why Gregory Nyssa (echoing Plotinus) once stated: God makes a person dizzy (that is, subject to vertigo (*iliggos*)? Overcome with dizziness, one finds oneself stumbling all over the place because one's mind cannot lay hold of that reality.

¹⁰¹ *Periaktéon* is probably a reference to the *periaktoi* or triangular prisms on each side of the stage. They revolved on an axis and had different scenes painted on their three faces. Cf. O. Navarre in Daremberg-Saglio s.v. Machine, p. 1469.

¹⁰² «Even so this organ of knowledge must be turned around from the world of becoming together with the entire soul, like the scene-shifting periaet in the theatre, until the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being» (518c).

¹⁰³ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 126.

4. Chorological Encounter as Enactment: Between Hermetism, Initiatory Dream, and *mundus imaginabilis*

Reaching this point in the analysis it becomes inevitable and perhaps imperative to add few thoughts to the clarification of the abscond 'reality' of the chorological staging that made *chôra* appear as a place full of paradoxes and aporias. Agamben challenged the very phenomenological faculty and imagination with his notion *un pote de disimmaginare*. I further attempt a brief historical review of its enactments in hermetism, initiatory dream that leads us to a contemporary vision of chorology as *mundus imaginabilis*. As L. Landrum stated in her article *Chôra before Plato: Architecture, Drama and Receptivity*, our crucial and timely task remains to re-engaging the basic troubled grounds of the *chôra* in its full geopolitical, cultural, legal and mythopoetic scopes.¹⁰⁴ We need to show not only the origins of Plato's notion of the *chôra*, but also how chorology remains relevant today as a space of mediality for an encounter in the interval.

I will start the brief note of chorological forms of enactment with the opening words of Derrida's *Tense* where citing himself, Derrida calls upon us: «Let us imagine. Let us imagine that we are dreaming».¹⁰⁵ This is to say, we are imagining that we are dreaming. It is what Plato himself says of *chôra* that we perceive it as in a dream (Tim. 52b-c). «The

¹⁰⁴ L. Landrum, *Chôra before Plato: Architecture, Drama and Receptivity*, in A. Pérez-Gómez, S. Parcell (eds), *Chora 7: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston 2016, p. 345.

¹⁰⁵ J. Derrida, *Tense*, trans. D.F. Krell, in K. Maly (ed.), *The Path of Archaic Thinking: Unfolding the Work of John Sallis*, University of New York Press, Albany State 1995, p. 73.

chôra is to be apprehended in a dream. Or, as in a dream». ¹⁰⁶ Derrida notes that this apprehension linked to a dream, is exposed to two contrary effects: it «could just as well deprive it of lucidity as confer upon it a power of divination». ¹⁰⁷ As Sallis notes, the reference to the dream comes in a passage at the center of the *Timaeus*, the passage in which the third kind finally is called *chôra*. He calls this passage (Tim. 52a-d) *chorology*. ¹⁰⁸ It is where *Timaeus* tells that the *chôra* is «to be apprehended with nonsensation [*met' anaisthêsas*], by a sort of bastard reckoning [*logismô tini nóthô*» (Tim. 52b). In a dream we are deprived of lucidity, ¹⁰⁹ «[b]ut in the dream something is received, as if conferred by power of divination». ¹¹⁰ Later in the dialogue, points out Sallis, ¹¹¹ *Timaeus* speaks of the liver as a kind of reproduction of the *chôra* within the human body. The power of thought is reflected as in the mirror on the smooth and bright surface of the liver receiving visual impressions (Tim. 71b). But there is a part of the soul planted around the liver occupied with divination (71d), and the organ of divination might in some degree lay hold on truth (71e). The gift of divination [*manteía*], since it does not partake of *lógos* and *phrónêsis* (Tim. 71d), is given only when one's intellect fettered in sleep or distraught by disease or by divine inspiration.

The association between dream, imagination, and divination must be read as modes of overcoming the 'illegitimate' kind of reasoning in the myth of creation of the world and of mankind, which has been seriously taken by the

¹⁰⁶ J. Sallis, *Daydream*, cit., p. 406.

¹⁰⁷ *Ivi*, p. 406, referring to Derrida, *Khôra*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ *Ivi*, p. 407.

¹⁰⁹ *Ivi*, p. 408.

¹¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 409.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

later Platonists in their rituals to embody the gods. Sallis' reference to the Platonic replication of the *chôra* in the human body may be read from this perspective. The demiurgy that the Neoplatonists called *theurgy* was the embodiment of *manteia*, carrying on the older rites of the Egyptian priests in which not thinking, but the catharsis of not-knowing, was praised and performed. The contribution of John Sallis to rediscover a more authentic reading of *Timaeus* is invaluable. In his essay *The Chôra of the Timaeus and Iamblichean Theurgy*, Gregory Shaw points out to « the initiatory role » that the *chôra* plays in Sallis' chorology. He highlights «the Egyptian dimension of Platonism, the non-discursive and paradoxical—even hieratic—source in which the tradition is rooted». ¹¹² As Shaw argues, John Sallis leads us back to the abyss and paradox of the *chôra* and even if he does not explore its mystagogic appropriation of the Neoplatonists Platonists, «he moves in a theurgic direction by suggesting that the *chôra* might be better imagined as activity than as place». ¹¹³

[S]uppose the *chôra* of the *Timaeus* were not taken simply as the place where all sensible things are and must be in order to be at all [. . .]. Suppose, then, that one were to distinguish the *chôra* from place [*topos*] by *thinking of it as an instituting operation*, as the operation by which something like a place would first open up; in this guise it would be a happening, an occurrence, not something done, for instance, by a subject. ¹¹⁴

¹¹² G. Shaw, *The Chôra of the Timaeus and Iamblichean Theurgy*, cit., p. 109.

¹¹³ *Ivi*, p. 112.

¹¹⁴ J. Sallis, *Last Words: Generosity and Reserve*, cit., p. 107 (Shaw's italics).

As Gregory Shaw points out in his text on *chôra* and Iamblicus's theurgy,¹¹⁵ Plato's *Timaeus* provided for the Neoplatonists the cosmological and mythical frame in which they could contain their paradoxes and became gods.¹¹⁶ Theurgy was a divine activity that «imitates the nature of the universe and the demiurgic power of the gods».¹¹⁷ As Shaw states: «The will of the gods is to reveal themselves (*ekphainesthai*) in human soul [...] to appear bodily [...] in the pure and faultless lives of souls».¹¹⁸ As a hieratic discipline, theurgy was an initiatory institution, an act of initiation and a practice to build a subtle body and a pure soul, a spherical and luminous vehicle capable to receive the demiurge. It was the art of learning to discover the *chôra* hidden in oneself. The aim and the strive (*pothos*) of man was to participate in what Sallis calls the « instituting operation » of the *chôra*, revealing in oneself the creative powers of the demiurge. to make one's own body a receptacle of the divine in one's own soul, eventually to embody the gods – to become receptacle (*chôra*) of the gods, to embody them demiurgically. The Neoplatonist Denys the Areopagite, one of the founders of Byzantine liturgy, has shown in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, conceived as a theurgic operation, how the shadowed and unshaped minds are filled with the divine light to reach

¹¹⁵ The word *theourgia* is a Greek word coined in the circles that produced the Chaldean Oracles at the end of the second century AD. It was also a practice in relation with the divine, and an ontological mode of being cultivated among some circles of Platonists and Neoplatonists in which union with the Demiurge was the goal.

¹¹⁶ G. Shaw, *The Chôra of the Timaeus and Iamblican Theurgy*, cit., p. 106.

¹¹⁷ Iamblicus DM 249.11-250.1, apud. G. Shaw, *The Chôra of the Timaeus and Iamblican Theurgy*, cit., p. 118, note 68.

¹¹⁸ Iamblichus, *De anima* 54.20-26, apud. G. Shaw, *The Chôra of the Timaeus and Iamblican Theurgy*, cit., p. 105.

theosis (deification), and man is delivered in the dwelling place of the soul (*psyches oikêterion*) (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 11. 441B). To become temples of god means to become receptacles of the divine, the receptacles (*hupodochê*) of the *chôra* that is the prime matrix (*ekmageion*) out of which the universe was created. All these initiatory practices engaging the chorology are consistent with *Timaeus*' view of the *chôra* as a hospitable interstice where she receives within itself the species of the sensible, as well as participates in the intelligible in the most impermeable (*aporotata*) and impregnable (*dysalototaton*) way (51a-b). As a «realm of between or *metaxy*», the soul has the function of connecting «the human with the non-human world or, in the terms of the later Heidegger, to integrate earth and sky, the gods and mortals». ¹¹⁹

Concluding remarks

This paper set in dialogue John Sallis's chorology and Giorgio Agamben's latest research engaging the Platonic *chôra* in his book *Irrealizzabile*, with the aim to discard a ground that would be auspicious for a chorological encounter in what I call 'cultural intersectionality', and possibly in legal chorology. At the end of this inquiry into the chiasmic chorology, few ideas and principles came out with clarity. Chorology allows Agamben to identify a place where the intelligible and the sensible coincide, an interface of heuristic transparency that reflects on the possibility of coincidence of such split terms, as philosophy and politics, potentiality and act. Agamben admits that the politics [...] cannot be anything

¹¹⁹ R. Avens, *Heidegger and Archetypal Psychology*, in «International Philosophical Quarterly», 22 (1982), p.185.

other than a chorology.¹²⁰ The coincidence of terms points back to Plato's philosopher-king paradigm exposed in his *Letter VII*, where a coincidence between philosophy and politics takes place in a time of crisis. Based on the ontological argument of the existence of God, the terms come to coincide: «the possibility of philosophy and that of politics coincide, "by a divine fate", in a single subject».¹²¹ This paper brings along a comparative example of coincidence of powers occurred in the history of the Byzantine culture after the iconoclastic crisis, in which the Church performs an uninterrupted alliance of sovereign and sacred offices with economic offices.¹²² The shared temporal power of the emperor and the symbolic hegemony of the Church assuming the power of God on earth is established on the principle of *diarchy*, sustained by an exorbitant representational apparatus (*dispositive*) defined by Mondzain as *iconocracy*. Properly, this *iconocracy* was a «theocracy of the visible» in which the intelligible intermingles with the visible world in a kind of «empire of gaze»,¹²³ and projects a 'reality' constituted by a sophisticated treatment of the space that creates a hieratic chorological society. Drawing its model from Plato's *Timaeus*¹²⁴ that puts the cosmology in the service of the politics as a new framework of political ideology to replace Homer's era, Byzantine theocracy remains paradigmatic for all power and authority, both speculative and strategic,

¹²⁰ L. Pezzoli, *La potenza di Agamben L'irrealizzabile*, cit.

¹²¹ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, op. cit., p. 12.

¹²² M.-J. Mondzain, *Iconic Space and the Rule of Lands*, in «*Hypatia*», Contemporary French Women Philosophers, 15, 4, (2000), p. 71.

¹²³ *Ivi*, p. 59.

¹²⁴ Timaeus is described in the dialogue as the one who « not only has he occupied the highest offices and posts of honor in his State, but he has also attained, in my opinion, the very summit of eminence in all branches of philosophy » (*Tim.* 20a2).

uniquely composed as a fascinating iconic interface of heuristic transparency.

At his turn, dwelling on the mediality of the Platonic *chôra* as the third gender of being between the intelligible and the sensible, Agamben demonstrates that the *chôra* does not only connects the two terms, but reveals a *tertium* as a specific spatial modality of *how* and where the terms relate to each other. Following Agamben, they relate according to their distinct modes of 'knowability': «the *chôra* contracts the two modes of knowledge onto one another and perceives itself, so to speak, with an absence of sensation».¹²⁵ «The knowledge of the *chôra* is bastard, because it experiences not an intelligible reality nor a sensible object, but its own receptivity, it suffers its own anesthesia».¹²⁶ Agamben's fourth term in the modal relationship between the terms helps refine our reading of the specificity of the 'coincidence' between the apparently split categories. The fourth emerges in the Platonic figure of the sensible god, or «the sensible intelligible and the sensible intelligible, that is, the thing in the medium of its knowability».¹²⁷ This makes Agamben claim: «The sensible god is the sensible intelligible, that is to say, the thing in the middle of its knowability: the sun - the idea of the good - in its *chôra*. True philosophy, like true politics, is a chorology».¹²⁸ It is this mediality of the *chôra*, the place of coincidence between the intelligible and the sensible that allows Agamben not only to define the possible, but also to admit that politics cannot be anything other than chorology. Yet as Agamben argues: «Philosophy must not try to realize itself in politics: if it wants the two powers to coincide

¹²⁵ G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 107

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 123.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

(*coincidano*) and the king to become a philosopher, it must, on the contrary, become *the guardian (custode) of its own unrealizability (irrealizzabilità) each time*».¹²⁹ On the other hand, the *chôra* offers a common place and a focus to the two principles engaged in the cosmogony, and inevitably, argues Agamben, a response to their division (*chorismos*). In this sense, he claims, the *chôra* has the structure of a *chiasmus*.¹³⁰ However, Agamben does not address the implications of this chiastic disposition in chorology.

The contribution of this paper resides in that it takes further to explore the *chiasmus* in chorology as a generative dynamic principle imagined in the form of the middle point or the center of the letter X (chi), the intersection between Being and Becoming, between the model and the world which defines the space of «an encounter in the interval».¹³¹ As a form of thought embedded in the imaginary, *chiasmus* is proposed to provide a strategy in searching for a place of encounter and convergence within a large intercultural chorological frame, showing the relevance of chorology today. The chiastic intersection of chorological ‘coincidence’ helped me also retrieve something from the diaphaneity of the *chôra*, and the transparency of the chorological discourse and vision. This ineffable mediality of the *chôra* akin to Henry Corbin’s *mundus imaginalis* operates as a *tertium* between unconscious and consciousness, between the person and the world – an affective relation (*anima mundi*) that Plato envisioned as the World Soul. The encounter in the interval prefigures the potentiality of a dialogue and convergence in the hospitable *chôra* that could bring together a world of

¹²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 12.

¹³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 111.

¹³¹ A. Vasiliu, *Du diaphane*, cit., p. 225.

division and create a bridge for tolerance and reconciliation. *Chôra* could play that role of the meeting ground for solutions through its transparency of discourse and specific 'knowability' to reveal things «in their own *chôra*».¹³² In his *Heuretics*, Ulmer has shown that with hypermedia as the technology of new creation, a «choreography» is staged comprising «the institutional practice for augmenting the intuitions of inference, for writing with the logic of the unconscious».¹³³ He recounts the demiurge's work in *Timaeus* who refit the chiasmus X from two strands of plasma folded as colures of a sphere that becomes the globe and the presence of the self as an unknown (x) inferred (in I, or *ich*). This idea opens to a mutually transforming circuit between judgment and theory and affects not only institutional practices [. . .] but human subjectivation as well.¹³⁴ *Heuretics* offers a scheme for creating an interface that is «both creative and critical, and infinitely generative».¹³⁵

In an interview with Richard Kearney just before his death, Derrida specifically compared *chôra* to Europe, and its potent mediating role it might play in the post-9/11 conflict.¹³⁶ He acknowledged the regional and reconciliatory possibilities of the *chôra* by expressing a hope that «some *chôra* (like Europe) – by its peculiar mutability, heterogeneity, and mediating agency – might enable what remains of a divided

¹³² G. Agamben, *Irrealizzabile*, cit., p. 119.

¹³³ G. Ulmer, *Heuretics*, cit., p. 224.

¹³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 202.

¹³⁵ T. Conley, *Heuretics Logic of Invention* (book review), in «Philosophy and Literature», 19, 1 (1995), The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 148.

¹³⁶ L. Landrum, *Chôra before Plato*, cit., note 69.

and increasingly polarized humanity to imagine, nurture, and sustain a situation of tolerance and reconciliation».¹³⁷

In our world aggravated by conflicts and wars – fundamentally, a time of crisis, the time of *chôra* par excellence – the wish for reconciliation remains as urgent as ever, it is a call for an encounter in the hospitality of the *chôra* toward convergence. Pointing out to the universal ground of the *chôra* as eminently a space of creation in the making and in participation, not as a given static category, A. Pérez-Gómez evokes a meaningful idea from E. Voegelin's *The Ecumenical Era*.¹³⁸ In Voegelin's words, the experience of human existence is that of the «In-Between» – «*the metaxy of Plato, which is neither time nor eternity*»:

We remain in the «In-Between» in a temporal flow of experience in which eternity is nevertheless present [...]. [Human existence is thus] a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfillment, and ultimately of life and death.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ J. P. Manoussakis, *Thinking at the Limits: Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion in Dialogue with Richard Kearney*, in «Philosophy Today» 48 (2004), pp. 3-11, esp. 11. Apud. Landrum, *Chôra before Plato*, cit., p. 345.

¹³⁸ A. Pérez-Gómez, *Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation*, in «Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture», *Chora* volume One, McGill University Press, Montreal 1994, p. 14.

¹³⁹ E. Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, LA 1974, ch. 3.