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Tracing the Black Sun in the Derridean Khôral Mise en Abyme: elliptical reflections on the "word-space-flesh"*

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Abstract

This paper reflects the inversion between the discourse on the Good and that on the khôra in view of the deconstructionist paradigm of the khôral mise en abyme as portrayed by Jacques Derrida and later elaborated on by John D. Caputo. Iddo Dickmann, further describing this paradigm as "lacunal", schematically illustrates how it can create sameness in difference through reflective repetitions. This schema is used here in a Christian negative theological context and on the accounts of Incarnation and reincarnation to investigate the immanence khôra introduces into transcendence, rendering the Word/Logos as flesh. The present study takes a novel perspective in observing how this self-referential and meta-significatory paradigm can conversely render flesh as the Word, when flesh comes to reflect/interface the Good by negating itself ending up with the elliptical and creative contours that transcribe the Word, and outline a khôral negative-fleshly space that infinitely traces an abyssal "black sun".

Keywords: Word-space-flesh, khôral mise en abyme, ellipsis, trace, black sun, interface

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1. Introduction

The strange, monstrous and godlike nature of the "khôra" has baffled many philosophers and thinkers since Plato. What discipline could most appropriately address this pre-original proto-being? Ontology, theology, cosmology, …? (Manoussakis, 2002: 96). Perhaps the best way to study this bottomless abyss is by looking into the infinite reflections within its very "hyphenated" (to use Richard Kearney's term) (See: Ibid, 99) nature where the word reflects space/text/flesh. In the following sections of the introduction we will have a brief review on the development of the concept of "khôra" from Plato to Derrida, with particular attention to its deconstructionist and negative-theological significance.

1.1 The Lexicographical Origins of the Word "Khôra"

Khôra (*χώρα*), with the Latin spelling of *Chora*, has been used in the Greek language as a feminine common noun meaning "place", "a concrete district", "the lands surrounding the city" and also "interval". It also brings "dance" to mind, as it is cognate with the Greek word "Khoreia", meaning "dance".

The entry for "Χώρα" in *Thayers Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*[1] refers to three meanings:

1) The space lying between two places or limits;
2) A region or country, i.e. a tract of land;
3) Land which is plowed or cultivated.

The verb deriving from the same root carries these meanings:

1) To leave a space (which may be occupied or filled by another); to make room, give place, yield; to retire; to turn oneself;
2) To go forward, advance, proceed; to make progress, gain ground, succeed;
3) To have space or room for receiving or holding something; to receive with the mind, to understand; to be ready to receive, keep in mind, and practice: to receive one into one's heart, make room for one in one's heart.

Shades of all these meanings and interactions of them are reflected in the use of the term *khôra* by Plato and the Neo-Platonists, the Byzantine and mystical Christian cultures, and philosophers and thinkers such as: Alfred North Whitehead, Martin Heidegger, Julia Kristeva, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo, Gregory Ulmer, Nader El-Bizri and Richard Kearney, among others.

Many wordplays[2] and underlying paradoxical senses (such as: absence/presence, familiarity/strangeness, motherliness/neutrality[3], movement/stasis[4], etc.) are observable in the way the word has been applied by different thinkers and writers each having adapted and interwoven it into their own particular schemes.

The word has been adopted (from its common usage in the Greek language) by Plato in his dialogue the *Timaeus* (written about 360 BC). This dialogue which is largely a long monologue by Timaeus of Locri, the title character, deals basically with "creation", that of the universe and of man, as a process of transition, a becoming and movement into the image of Being(Hite, 2012)(See: *Timaeus*: 28b7; from 5a–c, and 4.).

1.2 Khôra: The Third Genus between Being and Becoming

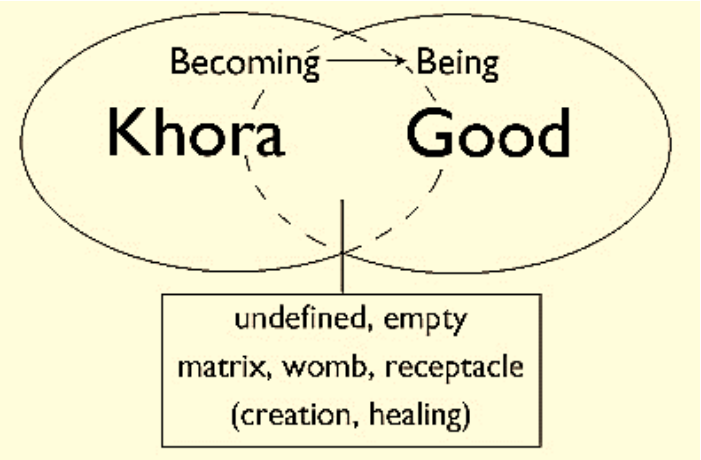
Plato's famous account of the nature and foundations of the Cosmos, as presented in the *Timaeus*, regards two distinct realms:

(1) The higher realm of the *eidos* or the eternal intelligible Forms and the unchanging perfection, understandable only through a rational account (28a1–2). The realm of invisible "Being", where nothing changes or becomes (27d6). From this realm the Sun of the Good shines on all beings.
(2) The lower realm of the imperfect but sensible and temporal copies of the Forms in the visible world of "becoming", grasped by opinion and unreasoning sense perception (28a2–3) where nothing actually "is" and everything only "becomes" (27d6–28a1).

However, Timaeus comes to the understanding that the above two realms would not suffice in demonstrating the actual order of the Cosmos, as without considering a third genus/kind (*triton genos* (Plato, *Timaeus*: 48e4, 52a – 52b.)) the realms of pure "being" and pure "becoming" would not be able to interact. Therefore, Plato, through the speaking voice of Timaeus, introduces the highly enigmatic and controversial concept of the "khôra" to mediate between the realm of "Being" and the realm of "becoming":

The Craftsman ("Demiurge" (*dêmiourgos*)) cannot - logically speaking- replicate the Living Thing (the Form) as such; he rather crafts/copies a visible and tangible image of it (28b7) which is three-dimensional and solid (32b1). Hence, it becomes necessary to imagine a three-dimensional field for the subsistence of the universe thus taken shape. Timaeus, first refers to this three-dimensional field as the "nurse/receptacle (hupodochê) of all becoming/change" (49a5–6)[δ] and later as the formless Matrix that receives the "traces" and impressions of everything or the thing in which things come to be. The name khôra/chôra meaning "the space that provides a stable situation for all that comes to be" is only later adopted (52a8, d3).[ε]

Consequently, khôra becomes a medium, a metaphysical condition, "the matrix of pure relationality" and "the territory where the 'process' of 'reality' goes on" (Mingarelli, 2015: 93)[ν]; through the khôra the Ideal Forms (the essences and real identities) are inscribed/impressed in sensible/phenomenological bodies (Ibid, 87). It is neither a thing nor nothing; rather, an enigmatic, abyssal space, and an aporetic and paradoxical void that is always already there, and within/from which sensible things emerge (Livingston, 2014: 21). Khôra is, accordingly, an empty "placeless place from which everything that is derives." (Kearney, 2003: 193). It is not a fullness of presence and light but a dark bottomless abyss (Ibid, 199). The Platonic Good ("Agathon", identified with the Christian God (Manoussakis, 2002: 95-96)), is its polar opposite, closely entangled with in in the process of "creation". Khôra and the Good together array the "procreative gap" Plato speaks of as existing between "Being" and "becoming" (Bigger, 2004).



Picture 1: Khôra and the Good together array the "procreative gap" Plato speaks of as existing between "Being" and "becoming" (Bigger, 2004). (Source: Hite, 2012.) The creative elliptical and interfacial space between khôra and the Good is a both material and immaterial space that is iconographically represented by the "vesica piscis" or the "mandorla", i. e., the almond-shaped liminal and transitional aura that enframes Christian icons in moments of transcendence. The "mandorla" will be viewed with more scrutiny about Picture 5.

For Plato, khôra is a placeless place from which arises all that "is". The Platonic khôra plays a significant role in the process of determining and identifying things. It is a "space" and interval between physical bodies and Ideas. It is neither sensible, nor eternal like the *eidos* (Ideas); however, it is indestructible. It provides room for everything that is created, and is only apprehensible through a sort of "bastard"/ "spurious" reasoning, a kind of "dream consciousness" (*Timaeus*, 52b). It challenges the logic of the *logos*[۸], and the common dichotomies of logical reasoning (i. e.: true/false polarities); the paradoxical khôra never stays the same in form, yet, it is immutable and permanent like the Ideas. Khôra is not perceptible with the senses for it is an invisible and formless kind (*Timaeus*, 51a).[۹] It has no particular shape, form, qualities, properties and character of its own and for this reason and because of its receptive nature can take any form and character, and any figure can appear in it.

In *Timaeus*, Plato uses different metaphors to describe the khôra: (wet) nurse, mother (in whom *eidos* fathers his children) (50d2-4, 51a4-5), perfume base (a completely scentless and neutral substance used for making various fragrances) (50e5-8), [formless] space (*chôra*) (52a8, d3), winnowing sieve (52e6) which separates the heavy from the light, a receptacle which is subject to forces (*dunamies*, 52e2), undergoes constant erratic motion and whose contents are mere "traces" (*ichnê*, 53b2), a plastic impassionate stuff (50c2-6, e7-51a1), and a lump of gold (50a4-b5) that can be molded and re-molded into different shapes, but cannot be defined as having any of those shapes.[۱۰] As space, it is also metaphysically comparable with the placeless place a mirror can provide for reflection, an "other" space in which Ideas can get reflected as sensible figures (Mingarelli, 2015: 85).[۱۱]

These titles are simply metaphors (See: Bigger, 2005) that together help us get overall insights on how khôra can behave, for the all-embracing khôra is itself

possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility, and is very difficult to grasp (Kearney, 2003: 194).[۱۲]

Whenever something enters the khôra, nothing else can take up its space, as khôra protects the spacing and bordering of matter (Mingarelli, 2015: 88). It is an extension of formless and indeterminate space that gives flesh/material/borders and difference to the changing qualities to make them appear. However, khôra itself is of no particular matter/substance, it is rather a sort of pre-matter/proto-matter, a primordial reality that gives matter the chance to appear. It is prior to every fundamental substantial element, and preparatory to the formation of any distinction between them.

Actually, khôra may be considered as the only ontological individuality that truly participates in the sensible world and everything is made of it. It concerns the possibility of referring to specific and determinate things and identities (Ibid: 85). It is what remains the same in the heart of ongoing and ceaseless change; and thus, provides the ground for the creation and appearance of identities in the sensible world (Ibid, 86-87). When we refer to a sensible body/an individual figure, we are in fact referring to the formed/shaped khôra, and the representation of the Idea in khôra. That is the reason khôra is important in the process of individuation. It is not the identity of the sensible individuals, and is not regarded as the "creator" of the identities in the sensible world, as that is supposed to be the task of the creator.

1.2 Khôra and the Deconstructionist "Trace"

As it was earlier mentioned, khôra is regarded as the formless Matrix that receives the "traces" and impressions of everything, itself being devoid of all character. This neither present nor absent, active nor passive, Godly nor evil, living nor nonliving, theomorphic nor anthropomorphic khôra, is of particular interest to deconstructionists, i. e. Jacques Derrida and his followers, according to whom it cannot properly be called a "mother" or receptacle, or any of the other things mentioned in the previous section as these titles carry with them characteristics into the understanding of khôra, whereas khôra lacks all characteristics, whatsoever.[۱۳]

In his article titled "Khôra: Being Serious with Plato" which appears as a chapter in the 1997 book, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, John D. Caputo, who is a contemporary deconstructionist theologian, has pointed out the reasons why the Platonic khôra has been of interest to Derrida, elaborating on Derrida's deconstructive approach to this concept.

Caputo holds that for Derrida, khôra is "the cousin of deconstruction", "the surname of différance" (Derrida, 1994: 126) (Caputo, 1997a: 96); a sort of analogy of it; closely entangled with repetition or rather reiteration (the difference between the two will be later discussed.), as it represents an impurity [and intractability (Caputo's word (Ibid, 75))] (Derrida, 1994: 126). Khôra withdraws and retreats from the grasp of logocentric philosophy and refers us to its limits (Caputo, 1997a: 75), or rather to the "margins of philosophy"[۱۴], tracing the spaces "betwixt and between"[۱۵] the word, the text and the flesh in the dark light of the "spurious" "khôragraphical thought".

"Khôragraphical thinking", an expression we have borrowed from Richard T. Livingston refers to the conquest of a new [/inverted] beginning, i. e., not in a downward Platonic tropics with the "Ideas" and the *logos* shedding the light of the Sun

of the Good on the world (as the discourse on the Good has it), but rather by following the reflective, "lacunal" "traces" left by the Good (God) in the margins/limits of the text (here the biblical text of the first eighteen verses of the Gospel of John dealing with the Word becoming flesh) and the flesh (here the liminal bodies of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary) that elucidate an elusive other way (See: Livingston, 2014: 3), that is the inverted tropics of the khôra. Following such tropics, this study is a deconstructive attempt to illustrate how the "begotten" son can give birth to the Father, and the way the black sun of the khôra (as the opposite of the Sun of the Good) can negatively and elliptically shine through the limits of the text and the flesh, to indicate the way "the non-origin [can become] the origin of the origin." (See: Derrida, 1997: 61)

2. Khôragraphical thinking: Khôra and the text

Derrida, in "Khôra" (1994) draws a distinction between the "philosophy" of Plato and its "text" (Caputo, 1997a: 82). To him, as Caputo discusses, the philosophy of Plato which comprises a series of philosophical concepts and claims can be viewed against the "text" of Plato, which is a series of textual events than can be freely interpreted even in disagreement with the philosophy that has generally controlled it. The priority given to the philosophy (of Plato) is what Derrida calls "logocenterism"; the centralization of the true/false, logocentric logic of the argument, and pushing everything else in the text to the margin. Deconstruction, on the other hand, is the minute studying of the text and all its textual qualities, to free the text from the hegemony of logocentric philosophy and challenge the "logic of the logos", the rule of binary oppositions and totalitarianism. That is the reason why Derrida, in between the Platonic higher realm of the certain *Logos* and lower realm of merely possible *doxa*, which can be regarded as a distinction between philosophy and metaphysics as well, is interested in the khôra as the mediator between the two, which is neither this nor that and both this and that. Khôra is the "tabula rasa" on which the Demiurge writes. It is not as eternal as the Forms, but it is always already there. It is neither born nor dies, and is beyond chronological temporality. It is neither intelligible Being, nor sensible becoming, but a little like both. It is neither the subject of a true *logos*, nor that of a proper *mythos* (Ibid, 84).

Derrida who prefers to leave the word "khôra" untranslated holds that it takes place in the middle of the *Timaeus* as a great abyss. As Derrida puts it, the overall structure of the *Timaeus* forms a complicated "mise en abyme" (/"mise en abîme"), like when an image is reflected innumerable times in facing mirrors (Ibid, 85). (This concept will be elaborated on in detail in the following sections.) Here different narratives reflect and receive each other to form a textual "mise en abyme" (Derrida, 1994: 116-117) of decentralized grafting, citationality, and différance.

Khôra, like the mise en abyme, is an abyss; a void, an empty space for the endless play of the reflections of paradigms into sensible things, and all these reflections are contained in the khôra (Caputo, 1997a: 88), yet the khôra remains unaffected by them, like a mirror whose reflected images do not change it (Derrida, 1994: 104). It is only the relation between the interval of spacing and what is received in that space to lodge there for a certain while (Ibid, 125). Khôra is pre-philosophical and stays outside philosophy, withdrawing from it. That is why philosophy and theology are inclined

toward the Father (*eidos*) and the cosmos as His [*begotten*] son (Caputo, 1997a: 92) ruling the mother, as a person, out of the trinity.

In part of the *Republic*, Plato describes the idea of the Good as "beyond being" (Bff509) in an excess of transcendence. To Plato, as Caputo analyzes, God is a high meta-reality who gives being to all and is beyond all being. However, as the son of God, the sensible world is "similar to" God/the Good/the Father, and correspondingly, the world of the sensible bodies is considered similar to the world of the intelligible Forms. Likewise, by way of analogy the Good will be comparable to the "Sun"; for, like the sun of the sensible world, the Good is neither seeing nor the visible, neither knowing, nor the intelligible, it is rather a third genus, i.e., "light", the cause and medium of all those (Caputo, 1997a: 93). And the sun can be regarded as the mediation between being and appearance.

Caputo argues that "the discourse on the khôra forms an inversion of the discourse on the Good. The discourse on the Good, according to Caputo, regards things as described from above, in a hyper tropics "beginning with the Good as the supremely real, hyper-essential, sur-real source of sensible things and the inextinguishable light in which they are seen to be the copies of their intelligible paradigms." Caputo finds that discourse an agreeable schema to Christian Neoplatonism, which used it as a way to articulate the "transcendence" of God, the hyper-essential sur-reality, the hyperbole and the excess of being, essence, and meaning for which words fail us, of which words fall short. In the discourse on the khôra, however, as Caputo holds, things are described from below, in a hypo trope beginning with khôra, the perfectly unintelligible or indeterminate non-origin, or pre-origin in which the original Ideas get inscribed. Khôra as the polar opposite of God is a hypo-essential sub-reality, an almost unreal, indeterminable indeterminacy, and a defection less than/below meaning, essence, and being which seems rather to fail words, to fall short of meaning (Ibid, 96).

The movement of hyper occurs as a transcendence/"trans-ascendance" (along a vertical axis, and across a border)/ekstasis (i. e., standing/being "outside"). The movement of hypo is realized as "immanence/hypostasis (i. e., standing/being "under/below/beneath") (Manoussakis, 2002: 98), or perhaps even as we will see in the following section an "anastasis", i.e., [to cause] resurrection/rebirth.

The discourse on the Good concerns a classic philosophical concept, yet the discourse on the khôra is of exorbitant textuality and "différance" (Caputo, 1997a: 96), forming "the space of de-construction" – an alternative to theology.

Khôra, as Derrida puts it, "eludes all anthropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, all truth" (Derrida, 1994: 124)

2.1 Khôra and the Paradigm of the Mise en Abyme

As mentioned in the previous section, the "mise en abyme", generally represented as the labyrinth effect created by two facing mirrors, is the paradigm through which Derrida reflects upon the concept of the khôra, and also on notions of "différance" and "repetition". His logic of supplementarity, as developed from the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is also rooted in this paradigm. The "mise en abyme" has been applied in literature, pictures, and music classically as a self-referential structure where a segment of the work is similar or identical to the embedding whole (Dickmann, 2017: 1-2).

"In the double mirror, where A reflects B and is simultaneously reflected by it, there exists no effective distinction between the reflecting frame and the content; the mirroring device and the image reflected; the pragmatic, "real world" from which one gazes at the mirror and the virtual one that the mirror brackets. One can gaze at the subject of mirroring and its object simultaneously." (Ibid, 4). This makes the mise en abyme a significant paradigm in deconstruction, as deconstruction for Derrida is always the affirmation of the other (Caputo, 1997a: 103), and différance is an absolutely neutral receptacle that suppresses nothing, and creates infinite possibilities by the "invention/and invocation of the other" (Ibid, 105).

The meta-significatory [and self-referential] (Dällenbach, 1989: 44) character of the "mise en abyme" invokes an "other in the text" (Carrard, 1984: 848), diversifying the discourse (Dickmann, 2017: 2). Still, as the "mise en abyme" is a self-referential paradigm, the "becoming different" occurs paradoxically at once with staying the same (Ibid, 3).

In order to challenge the "logic of the logos", Derrida introduced his infrastructural concepts of "trace", "différance", "supplement" and "iterability" into the "mise en abyme". The trace is "the opening of the first reflectional 'exteriority' [and the primary grafting vector] in general" (Derrida, 1997: 70) (Dickmann, 2017: 4) and khôra, the "Arche-trace" (Gasché, 1988: 188)/the "lacunal" mise en abyme, the bottomless abyss it leads to; the différance that enables the communicational deferral/movement of time (Dickmann, 2017: 4) and as it will be discussed in this paper also space. It incites the invention of an "other" within an origin through reiterated duplications.

The "lacunal" (as cognate with the word "lack") structure of the mise en abyme that Dickmann discovers in Derrida's articulation of it involves circles reproduced due to an innate lack/ absence. Dickmann schematizes the lacunal mise en abyme as "a setup consisting of shield A, in the middle of which is another shield, B, in the middle of which is an imaginary shield C" having the following dynamics resulting at the co-occurrence of sameness and difference (Ibid, 8):

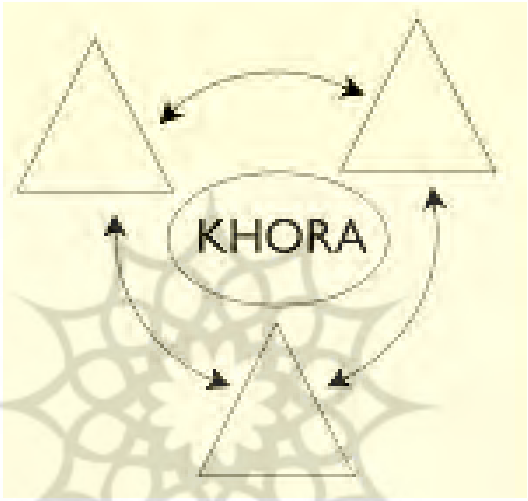
A's acceptance of the ability to be reproduced as B produces a *lacuna* (a hole/an absence) within its identity because the addition of B to A in fact subtracts from A[۱۶]; from then on the only way B can adequately represent A is itself to include a shield[/a khôral lacuna[۱۷]] (C). (Dällenbach, 1989: 111) (Dickmann, 2017: 8) We cannot know what is "behind" shield[/khôral lacuna] B, but we suppose it to be the continuation of A. This continuation is not contained in shield B, nor does shield B contain itself, since the influence of the lacuna keeps deferring the process, preventing it from reaching certain ends. In other words – as in Derrida's articulation of "iterability" (i. e., repetition with a difference (See: Caputo, 1997a: 101)), which leaves us "to mean something that is [always already] other than what we mean"– "when the point is reached at which the object would have to repeat itself, there is a switch to the next logical level, to an utterly different intention. Due to the thus described incompleteness of representation/signification, each act to intend and to refer to results is inherently in vain and stillborn, vanishing before fulfillment (Ibid, 15).

With the introduction of this "lacunal conception", Derrida dismisses the logocentricity of the classical emblem of "mise en abyme" as developed by poeticians, configuring a khôral pattern whose duplicative and heterogeneous circuits would not

only open an abyss, but prescribe a change of logic and direction/a completely different topic (Derrida, 1987: 291) (Dickmann, 2017: 14).

2.2 The Khôral Mise en Abyme in Christian Neo-Platonicism: The Text, the Space and the Body

The patristic idea of the Trinity as *perichoresis* [۱۸] imagines the three Persons (each of them representing all the three) in a sort of metaphorical dance around an empty/free feminine space (*khôra*) (Hite, 2012), without which the three persons would collapse into indifference/indifferentiation. This open space holds the three Persons in "chorus", together and apart at once (Kearney, 2006: 10).



Picture 2: The patristic idea of the Trinity as perichoresis [۱۹] imagines the three Persons (each of them representing all the three) in a sort of metaphorical dance around an empty/free feminine space (khôra) (Hite, 2012), without which the three persons would collapse into indifference/indifferentiation. This open space holds the three Persons in "chorus", together and apart at once (Kearney, 2006: 10). (Source: Hite, 2012.)

In deconstructionist theology the immanence of khôra is preferred over the unknowable and absolute transcendence of God, as emphasized in the apophatic theology (negative theology) of Gnostics such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite who infused Christian thought with Neo-platonic ideas (Hite, 2012).

Nevertheless, the writers of the New Testament scriptures and the early Church Fathers adopted/adapted Plato's juxtaposition of the "Good beyond being" and "*khôra* before being" in the Christian apophatic theologies respectively as the Transcendent, Unknowable God and the immanent, kenotic *khôra*.

3. The monastery of chora (Khôra): incarnation and god's creative space in the world

The iconographic program of the ancient Monastery of Chora ("khôra") outside the city of Istanbul includes depictions of Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ both bearing the inscription: "Η Χώρᾳ" ["The Khôra"]. The monastery, the Virgin and Christ are all Khôral spaces reflecting on the divine descent: "Incarnation," and God's space and His creative activity in the world. They are paradoxical spaces of simultaneous absence

and presence, self and other; the paradox that exists in the very nature of Incarnation, which is, according to Gregory of Nazianzus (4th century), the space *chôrêtò kaì achôrêtò*, meaning "that which occupies space, and does not occupy space," an apophatic (negative) and paradoxical space both visible and invisible, present and absent (Isar, 2009).[۲۰]

The Virgin and Christ, therefore, represent vessel-like bodies and hollowed out flesh with transcendental contours, "chrismated" by the Holy Spirit, however, in a virginal way about the Virgin.

3.1 Mary as Khôra

> *"And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. " (Luke 1:38)*

In the mosaic of the Virgin Mary, positioned at the entrance of the church, the inscription reads (as translated): "the khôra of the uncontainable" which indicates her instrumental role in the Incarnation during which, Mary, like the Platonic khôra, serves as the mediational *triton genos* between the human and the Divine; she is their meeting place, the hymen that hyphenates the duality, receiving the entire Deity within her body without appropriating it into herself. Thus, "the Virgin" becomes a paradoxical antinomy, the khôra of the a-khoron, a topos sustaining what is a-topos/u-topos: the receptacle of the unreceivable/container of the uncontainable (See: Manoussakis, 2002: 99). The khôra, as represented here, is the "Incarnate space; the space of the person that God enters and fills, rearranging human contours, making new things possible." (Hite, 2012)

The earliest designation of Mary as *khora akhoraton* can be traced to the anonymous 5th or 6th century *Akathistos Hymnos* in the Eastern Church. In this Byzantine icon bearing the inscription *ἡ Χώρα του Ἀχώρητου* Christ is portrayed as *contained* in an egg-shaped sphere standing for Mary's womb (Ibid).

Picture 3: A reproduction of a Khôral icon located in the monastery of Chora outside Istanbul/ Constantinople. The placement of the Virgin khôra mosaics in the space of the interior of the church creates a statement of the

theology of the Christian khôra. Mosaic icon by anonymous artist, c. 14th century. (Image, and caption source: Hite, 2012)

With the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, Mary becomes the "bearer of God," the "replication of the *khôra* in the body." (Isar, 2009: 40) God's space in the world becomes flesh.

3.2 Jesus as Khôra

> ***"****And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.****"***(John, 1: 14)

In the second plate, interestingly opposite and facing [٢١] the mosaic of the Virgin Mary in the Chora monastery, Jesus Christ is depicted with an inscription that runs in both sides and reads as follows (in translation): "The khôra (receptacle/dwelling place) of the Living" (Hite, 2012)

Christ is the receptacle of the Word, i. e. the only true existence, as represented by the book he is holding. He is the Word having become flesh and the flesh suffering on the cross to redeem mankind of their sins. He is the creative elliptical "interfacing" of the Word and flesh, the Good and human limits.

Picture 4: The Khôra, the receptacle and the dwelling place of the living: All humanity, all creation, and "the word", as here Saint Savior (Sanctus Salvator/Jesus Christ) is depicted holding a book in his left hand. Mosaic icon by anonymous artist, C. 14th century. Location: The Monastery of Chora, near Istanbul. (Image source: Hite, 2012)

Christ is the khôra receiving all humanity and creation without any confusion in His Incarnate person. He is the presence of God to us, neither solely God nor truly human, but both God and human; neither just the Word nor merely Flesh, but the Word who became Flesh; neither high in the heavens nor down on the earth, but the channel relating them [, even reaching down to the underworld and redeeming the

righteous earlier passed, including Adam and Eve]. He is in effect a trace (Manoussakis, 2002: 99-100) an "interface". This elliptical and hymenal notion of Christ might, therefore, point towards an "other" theology, the onto-cosmo-theology of the flesh, becoming space, becoming the word.

3.3 Anastasis, the Mandorla and the Tropics of the Cross

As the counterpart to the story of Incarnation, there is the account of *re*incarnation or "anastasis", i. e., the rising "up" "again". In accordance with biblical scriptures, after Christ's death on the cross (for our sins, as declared by Paul the Apostle (Corinthians 15: 3.)) on Good Friday and the following entombment, he rose again after three days on Easter Sunday and his tomb was found to be empty. On the Saturday between his death and rebirth, Christ is believed to have descended into hell to redeem the righteous, including Adam and Eve, and take them to heaven; an event commonly known as "The Harrowing of Hell": the "anastasis"/rebirth of Christ and the righteous.

The iconography on Christ's Harrowing of Hell predominantly portrays him before a "mandorla" (Italian word for "almond"), which is a layered almond-like shield/aura/aureola/frame enframing the entire figure rather than just the head (as is the case with a "halo"). The mandorla takes circular or "elliptical" forms and is usually in the geometrical shape of a vesica piscis. It surrounds the figures of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in traditional Christian art (See: Liungman, 1991: 287), such as the icons of the Eastern Orthodox Church, to depict the sacred moments these figures are believed to transcend time and space, such as the death (dormition) of the Virgin Mary, and particularly Christ's resurrection and transfiguration, or His "anastasis."

Picture 5: The Harrowing of Hell, a byzantine fresco of the anastasis (Greek: the Resurrection of Christ) is located at the end of the side chapel in the Monastery of Chora. Jesus Christ is depicted standing in the middle [and before His elliptical mandorla which represents Christ's creative khôral interfacing between opposites, e. g., life/death, the human/the Divine, etc.]. Christ has just broken down the gates of hell and is pulling Adam

and Eve out of their tombs[, giving them rebirth]. Behind Adam stand St. John the Baptist, King David and Solomon. Others are righteous kings. (Image and caption source (except the bracketed parts): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Anastasis_fresco_(Chora_Church))

The mandorla is regarded as representing the creative interface of the material (fleshly) and the immaterial (Devine). (See: Todorova, 2014: 80) (See: Picture 1) It resembles an egg (note: the Easter egg), for its oval shape, layered structure and life creating significations; or better yet, it appears like an open wound/vulva and this latter feminine character of it gives the impression that Christ is reborn out of the womb of the tomb and through his own wounds, giving *re*birth to himself and the righteous having passed even long before his time. The mandorla, as the shield/aura/frame bearing Christ's image, can symbolize the wounds he suffered from on the cross, which created his passage to death and the subsequent rebirth. It can therefore be interpreted as the "khôral lacuna" examined in the previous section; the "elliptical" interface that conjoins opposites creates sameness at once with difference, putting the flesh under erasure and rendering it as the Word. Through it, and through what is herewithin called "the tropics of the cross" - with both meanings of the word "cross" intended, as to what Jesus Christ was crucified on and His aforementioned passage and rebirth – flesh becomes the Word, death becomes birth, roles are exchanged, chronological orders are lost, and time, space and our perception of them lose their regular restraints. Christ's absence in his tomb becomes an exorbitant presence, a deathless birth for him and those he redeems through the anastasis.

3.4 Ellipsis [22]: The Khôral Presence

For Derrida who strongly resists the Platonic essentialism and the "metaphysics of presence" [۲۳], "presence" gives way to "ellipsis" and the center to the margin/limit/threshold. "Presence" as elliptically understood becomes the "lure" and the "effect" of the open, endless, unpredictable and unprogrammable interplay of "traces" and the reflective mark of representations.

The experience of presence in space as in the Monastery of Chora reinstates the paradoxical nature of khôra and its dependence on an "other" as to the logic of the supplement.[۲۴] Within this presence, there is an interval (our very own khôral/differential presence) separating the present from what it is not, in order for the present to be itself. It, by the same token, divides the present in and of itself (See: Derrida, 1982: 13), and switches on the pre-original khôral realm of possibility, the lacunal mise en abyme, renouncing all clear and fixed limits. Here, the non-present, the perpetual referral to an "other", insists within the always already hollowed out present, and the present already keeps within itself the mark of the non-presence of the "other" whose contours fit into his very mark of non-presence. This, as Derrida puts it, creates "an indefinitely multiplied structure – en abyme –". (Derrida, 1997: 163) However, the horizontality of this "supplementation"/"trace"/"différance" (that is: our presence in the Monastery), unlike the verticality of the Christian icons represented in the Monastery toward the Persons they stand for, prevents it from recalling a "transcendental signified".

4. The Khôral mise en abyme through john 1:1-18: the word (Logos)/flesh reflections

> *"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained [Him.]" (John, 1:18)*

According to Christian theology, the transcendent God, who cannot be approached, seen or comprehended in essence or being, becomes immanent primarily in the God-man Jesus the Christ (meaning: anointed (by the Holy Spirit)/ chrismated/ blessed/ consecrated/trace-bearing Messiah)[۳۵], who is the Incarnate Second Person of the Trinity. God the Father only reveals himself immanently vicariously through the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. The Divine Nature, "the Godhead"[۳۶] is wholly transcendent and unable to be comprehended.

The (only) begotten God, the only Son of God the Father, who is himself God, was thus reflected as a sensible, fleshly being, through the Virgin mother [virginally reflecting the Divinity as flesh] to be placed in the bosom of the Father as His reflected image, the "echo" of His Image, His supplementary presence in the visible world. (See the analogy given at the end of the previous section.) The begotten Son is the closest existence to God the Father, making the Father visible, by bearing His aura and being contained in His Image as reflected between the two mirrors of Mary as the bearing womb for the Holy birth and John the Baptist as the *"witness"*/the eye.

> *"6 There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but [came] that he might bear witness of the light. 9 There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."* (John, 1:6-9)

The aura of God the Father renders/reflects Jesus as God with a différance, and Jesus engenders/writes/inscribes the Father by bearing His aura, becoming His reflection and being placed in His bosom. Therefore, Jesus becomes/reflects Mary with a différance, as the bearer of the Aura/Image of the Father; he becomes the khôra, the hymenal existence, the bearing womb giving birth to the Image of the Father, not only through His birth, but through his death on the cross, and the following rebirth, and through the cross of his wounds that "trace" back and forth (through time and space), and above and below (between the Good and the khôra) the path of faith, nurturing mankind with the "light" of the Good and receiving their sins. Jesus Christ, hence, becomes the infinite "trace" of the "light", between the two mirrors of the *"witnessing"* eye of John, observing and reflecting out the khôral becoming; and the womb of his mother, the nurturing flesh/space for the initiation of the becoming. The translucent opening of the holy wounds through Christ's flesh speaks the Word/Logos, and nurtures mankind with the light of the Good to make the flesh put-under-erasure become the Word/Logos again … infinitely, in all directions, repetitively and differently, to convey that in the beginning was "trace", whose surname was "khôra", the non-origin that became the origin of the Origin (See: Derrida, 1997: 61). The flesh thus negated in order to speak the Word/Logos becomes an abyss that bears the light of the Good as its aura; an aura that infinitely defers/differs the flesh-Word interface, rendering the flesh as the black sun, the eclipsed/abyssal space of flesh-Word transition/interfacing.

5. Conclusion

The deconstructionist lacunal mise en abyme, being initiated by a lack within an origin, a lack that invites a supplementary "other" whose contours fit into the mark of the lack, was the paradigm through which this study explored the reflectional function of the khôra as an Arche-trace of differential reiterations leading to a bottomless abyss that can create a totally different narrative, even an opposite one, where "the non-origin becomes the origin of the Origin." This research, giving particular attention to the Christian biblical accounts of Incarnation and reincarnation, observed how there is a space of transition and an "interface" between the Word and flesh, and how through the bottom up tropics of the khôra, this interfacial space can be imagined into and through the flesh, tracing within to reach the contours/limits from which the light of the Good, the creator/birth giver shines inversely, negatively and "elliptically", as the abyssal "black sun" of the khôra through an infinity of traces.

Notes:

1 Thayer, J. H., Wilke, C. G., & Grimm, C. L. W., (1889). *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers.* Edited by: National Foundation for Christian Education. MA: Hendrickson Publishers. Citation source: Hite, 2012.

2 For example, Derrida refers to the initial letter "*X*" in the word *χώρα* to be indicative of the unidentifiablity of Khôra. (Derrida, 1994: 99)

3 Compare Derrida and Caputo's ideas about khôra with that of Plato in section 1.3 of this paper.

4 As Charles Bigger notes: static in the sense of one person being "in" the other, occupying the same space, filling the other with its presence, and dynamic in the sense of the interpenetration and permeation of one person with/in the other. (Bigger, 2004: 102.) Nicoletta Isar also argues that the presence of khôra might only be seen in its movement. (Isar, 2011: 39 – 50). See: Hite, 2012.
This study attempts to resolve this paradox by regarding khôra through the paradigm of the mise en abyme.

5 https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/index.html

6 Plato, *Complete Works*, 1251, 49a; 1253, 50b–c; 1255, 52b.

7 Mingarelli here refers to Alfred North Whitehead's magnum opus, *Process and Reality* (1929), where the foundations of Whitehead's thought on the khôra, or as he terms it "Plato's receptacle" can be traced. However, he makes no direct references to the term in this book and the expression appears only in a few paragraphs of his *Adventures of Ideas* (1933).
Whitehead, A. N., (1967 [1933]). *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Free Press. Chapter XI, Objects and Subjects, pp. 175-190, §19. Plato's receptacle p. 187.
Whitehead, A. N., (1978[1929]). *Process and Reality*. Corrected ed. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne. New York: Free Press.

8 See the deconstructionist criticism of this logic in the following section.

9 It is not perceptible as it is invisible, intangible and does not possess a body. (See: *Timaeus*, 28b8).

10 https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/index.html

11 Also see Foucault's analogy of the placeless place of a mirror reflection as a utopia/heterotopia: Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986: 24.

12 Kearney quotes *Plato in Timaeus,* 49-51.

13 Caputo, J. D., (1997b). Quoted by Kearney in "God or Khôra" p. 199. This is in complete opposition to the Christian view of khôra, where Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ are both regarded as khôra because, according to the Christian conception, Jesus is both divine and human and Mary, the nurturing mother of Jesus, is a "receptacle" or "container" of Divinity. (Hite, 2012)

14 Referring to Jacques Derrida's 1972 book of the same title.

15 Referring to Victor Turner's 1967 book of the same title.

16 Compare: the principle (law) of identity in logic.
17 Considering the functions of khôra thus far debated.
18 The concept of *perichoresis*, attributed to John of Damascus, was formed in the 7th and 8th centuries to explain the eternal dynamics between the three persons of the Trinity. (Hite, 2012)
19 The concept of *perichoresis*, attributed to John of Damascus, was formed in the 7th and 8th centuries to explain the eternal dynamics between the three persons of the Trinity. (Hite, 2012)
20 The Cappadocian Fathers have often applied a Platonic language in their treatment of Christian ideas. (Hite, 2012)
21 Emphasizing the Khôral space between the khôra and the Good, which displays the very character of the khôral mise en abyme.
22 The title of the final article in Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (2001 [1967]), pp. 371-378. In this article Derrida makes poetic references to the third volume of Edmond Jabès's *The Book of Questions*, to elaborate on the deconstructionist notions of "ellipsis", the "lure", the negation of the "center", and very briefly in only a single quote for each, "the black sun" and "interfacing". All of these notions have been referred to in this paper.
23 The concept of "the metaphysics of presence" and the criticism of it as having paralyzed the entire history of Western thought with the desire for immediate access to meaning is a prime concern in deconstruction.
24 "The supplement in Rousseau's text, apparently "exterior" and "super-added" to the Origin, is in fact "originarily" [and immanently] interlaced with the Origin." (Dickmann, 2017: 5)
25 The Gospel of Philip claims that: "Chrism is superior to baptism, for it is from the word "chrism" that we have been called "Christians", certainly not from the word "baptism". And it is from the "chrism" that the "Christ" has his name. For the Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. He who has been anointed possesses everything. He possesses the Resurrection, the Light, the Cross, the Holy Spirit. The Father gave him this in the bridal chamber; he merely accepted the gift. The Father was in the Son and the Son in the Father. This is the Kingdom of Heaven." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anointing) It is worth noting that the idea of "chrismation", with its double connotations of absence and presence, as discussed also in section 3 of the present paper, bears interesting semblances to Derrida's treatment of the "signature" in his *Limited inc*, 1988.
26 Godhead (or godhood) is the substantial impersonal being of the Christian God, as opposed to the individual persons of the Trinity.

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