The Space of Χώρα:
A Perspective on Contemporary Art

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Cecilia Jonsson, *HAEM Blood Bound*, 2016

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Introduction

The present thesis proposes a perspective to contemporary visual arts through the viewpoint of Plato's notion of χώρα (*chôra*). The first encounter with the concept of χώρα takes place in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, where it is 'defined' as a third kind of being, and is designated as a space between the World of Being and the World of Becoming, necessary for the world to originate and become manifested. Χώρα's main characteristics – the crucial aspects of ontology, motility and 'in-betweenness' form its position as a space that precedes and simultaneously exceeds the organisation of the world, which unveils a different viewpoint – a stance beyond, yet concurrently underpinning the oppositional relationships of dual structures (idea/copy, visibility/invisibility, mythos/logos, intelligible/sensible) and socio-political configurations. This particular situation of the choral space is of decisive significance for the proposal of the current research – a suggestion for a possible perception of contemporary visual art from the perspective of the notion of χώρα, with the aim of creating, in offering in this manner a different approach towards art, a prospect for widening its understanding, which, in turn, would allow examining its role in current society and disclosing what it can contribute to the societal issues of the present-day world.

For this purpose, it is necessary to clarify that in the course of the following text, art will be considered equal to χώρα, as (it will be argued) approaching the main features of Plato's receptacle as art characteristics can enable a rediscovery of the layers of meaning in art practices and the significance of the messages it implies for contemporary society. The standpoint of considering art identical to χώρα presupposes the recognition of its importance – in Plato's account, χώρα is the key for any revelation of ideal form, i.e., the trigger for everything to occur in the world. Thus, the potentiality of the ideal form to inscribe into visibility, provided by this space, makes it possible for the world to 'become', issues to be addressed, a reflection to have its impact, a change to be realised. Considering art from such a perspective does not define it as an ontological truth or a blueprint of socio-political relations, but, on the one hand, as the precondition for commencement of the world, an understanding present in Plato's historical concern with the origination of the universe; and, on the other hand, in the contemporary philosophical perception, as an initiation of a new beginning within the current order, thus a generation of a process of transformation.

Plato's concept of χώρα implies a space that transcends dialectical modalities of structuration and fixed configurations, necessary for the disclosure of a different entry point to hegemonic postulations and dual operations. In this manner, χώρα keeps the Platonic

dialectic open, as its functioning negates fixity, and encompasses receptivity and openness. Hence, Plato's idea, understood in contemporary thought as heterogeneous and therefore subversive to the homogenised and authoritative order, refers to a possible interpretation of contemporary art in relation to the recognition of these features as art's own 'power' and potential. Being within and beyond oppositional relations, χώρα/art enables the possibility of reworking the dominant order on a different level since, as a third kind of being, it engenders a different response, a process of thinking differently, in which another modality of existence is at stake. Additionally, being visible only when in motion, it presupposes the presence of a process – a process of unfolding, reworking, transformation.

The research will be conducted following the methodological line of applying the theoretical propositions of the notion of χώρα by the contemporary philosophers Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva to two distinct yet simultaneously interconnected artworks – *HAEM Blood Bound* (2016) by Cecilia Jonsson and *Cracks in Time* (2009) by Michal Rovner.

For that purpose, the text is developed in three chapters, which engage respectively with the idea of χώρα in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, the understanding of the concept in contemporary thought in the work of Derrida and Kristeva, and an interpretation of the above-mentioned artworks through the viewpoint of χώρα.

The opening chapter investigates the conception of χώρα in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, where it first takes place. In order to propose a better understanding of the term with its layers of meaning and various connotations in contemporary philosophical thought, which, in turn, relates to the perception of art that the current research aims to put forward, it is necessary to examine the notion of the choral space in antiquity, i.e., in Plato's dialogue. In short, the chapter frames the perspective of present-day theoretical proposals by explaining Plato's idea of χώρα. This section, accordingly, focuses on different aspects of Plato's space – motility, formlessness, 'agency', non-teleological constructions, the oppositions of visibility/invisibility, sensible/intelligible, mythos/logos[1]. In studying its features, the text intends to unveil the crucial significance of its essence and purpose in relation to Plato's philosophical enterprise, and to argue that it forms the core of his philosophical dualism,

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[1] Another very important aspect of the choral space is its political dimension, which will not be specifically examined in the current research owing to the limited space for developing this extensive characteristic of χώρα. However, it should be noted that a layer implying the political aspect of Plato's receptacle underpins *Timaeus*, the theories of Kristeva and Derrida, as well as the presented artworks. Already in Plato the term acquires political connotations, as one of the meanings of χώρα in ancient Greek involves significations of 'land; country; territory' – in: Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940, URL: http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgibin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.82:6:150.LSJ (04 April 2017).

since χώρα itself calls Platonic 'binarism' into question as, in preceding and exceeding the Platonic 'polarity', it opens up a perspective of the world beyond its binary structures that allow a different access to its operations.

The second chapter explores the concept of χώρα in contemporary thought – the 'semiotic' *chôra*[2] of Julia Kristeva and the 'deconstructive' *khôra* of Jacques Derrida. Its contemporary 'origin' in the realm of literary studies will be investigated in regards to a possible redirection towards the visual domain. The concept of χώρα in critical theory refers to a process of deconstruction of hegemonic discourses in which χώρα reveals a different logic of existence that allows a view beyond, and at the same time within, their dialectical form, i.e., a reconfiguration of static fixities towards a motility that uncovers a processual attitude towards art, which in turn enables another kind of activity and response.

The ideas of Julia Kristeva regarding the concept of 'semiotic' *chôra*, as exposed in her seminal work, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, will be taken into consideration, remarking on her closer engagement with the role of arts and its process of the 'undoing' of static foundations. The notion of *khôra* in the view of Derrida, on the other hand, is examined in relation to his project of *différance* and deconstruction,[3] emphasising the centrality of Plato's idea for his concept, as *khôra* embodies the Derridean notions that encompasses the differential relationships in language, exceeding the boundaries of socio-political organisation by 'disrupting' hegemonic discourse.

The third chapter examines the above-mentioned artworks – *HAEM Blood Bound* (2016) by Cecilia Jonsson and *Cracks in Time* (2009) by Michal Rovner, through the view of χώρα. The works have been deliberately chosen owing to their different 'nature', medium and perspective, which challenge consideration of a common ground, such as χώρα; the different layers of meanings implicated within the two projects, which enables a wider space for investigation; and, finally, their reference to the choral space of Plato, which, it will be argued, opens up a space for reflection.

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[2] The notion of χώρα is denoted as *chôra* in Kristeva and *khôra* in Derrida. For these reasons, they are maintained as used in their respective philosophical texts. In the current thesis, the Greek term χώρα refers to the general notion of χώρα, and specifically to Plato's work.

[3] The reference of *khôra* to the Derridean project of *différance* is an idea of the philosopher John Caputo in his book *Deconstruction in a Nutshell. A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. I would add that *khôra* also relates to the Derridean concept of 'spectrality', as some resemblances can be traced between the two notions: like *khôra* as another *ontos*, the spectre does not come from one ontological categorisation; like the position of *khôra* as exceeding antagonistic oppositions, spectrality concerns 'the other' of oppositional pairs such as past/present, present/future, actuality/potentiality. The relationship between the Derridean concept of 'spectrality' and Plato's idea of χώρα will not be developed in the current research but remains a basis for further investigation.

The bio-art project, *HAEM Blood Bound*, consists of a needle constructed of iron extracted from human placentas – the first interdependent contact between mother and child where the process of articulation of subjectivity originates. The placenta contains iron, investigated in this project as a carrier of identity, aiming at the exploration of the process of transformation of maternal resources into valuable personal processes. In this way, the artwork engages with issues such as individual orientation, articulation of subjectivity, and raises an awareness of human nature and the culture of interconnectedness, as individuals emerge in their relationships, constantly reconfiguring themselves and life through their interactions. The second work, *Cracks in Time,* is a video projection in which innumerable human figures are moving in opposite directions, constructing an endless chain of motion. Performing a repetitive passage, in which they create a mythological expression of the work of forces and counter-powers – a collision between desires, religions or ideologies and their oppositions – creates cracks in time. History seems to be represented as a break that disturbs temporal linearity and suggests that an end would encourage a new beginning – creation, deconstruction and reconstruction. Both works engage from different perspectives with origination and interconnectedness, which, in relation to the concept of χώρα, opens up a space for questioning and reflection.

The current research proposes a perspective of perceiving contemporary visual art in which questions such as dynamics and ontological 'initiation' become visible. Looking at art as χώρα allows a possible conception of art as a dynamic force that is able to reconfigure the very structures of the initial conditions of order and, in this manner, to resist hegemonic narratives. Seeing art as a space of dynamic ontology presupposes its engagement with the question of processes and transformation; consequently, it could reveal itself as a different functioning, a different modality of existence, a different *ontos* that enables the positing of the issue of transition and opening up of the space for reflection and movement towards change.

1. Defining Χώρα

In order to propose a potential widening of the understanding of visual art, it is first necessary to uncover the meaning and functionality of the concept of *chôra* (χώρα) from its very origin – its emergence in Plato's dialogue, *Timaeus*. A point of departure for tracing the presence of χώρα is the investigation of the significance of its essence and purpose à propos of Plato's philosophical project, which would enable the possibility of deepening the apprehension of its further reception and development in contemporaneity, and ultimately to recognise what a perception of art through the view of χώρα would contribute to revealing its significance, as well as to an understanding of its role in the current world.

The present chapter attempts to define χώρα precisely, to endeavour a determination of something indefinable, as χώρα by its nature cannot take on any designation since it partakes neither that of the paradigm, nor that of the copy. The impossibility of establishment of meaning per se is embedded within the different significations of the word in ancient Greek, of which one is of particular interest in the current text: "space or room in which a thing is, defined as partly occupied space."[4]

For that purpose, the chapter will touch upon different aspects of the concept of χώρα, with the aim of grasping its crucial significance for Plato's binary system, arguing that it shapes the core of his 'polarity', as in the *Timaeus* account χώρα is not an oppositional entity, reproducing the binary logic of antagonistic opposites, but a space that calls into question the fixed notions of Plato's philosophical dualism.

In defining χώρα, it is first necessary to trace its origin by 'situating' it within the cosmological account wherein it appears, which itself demands a brief examination of the concepts of the world of Being and the world of Becoming. The attempt to recognise its essential 'materiality' would lead us to the conclusion of its being motile – a significant feature of this 'characterless' space that unpacks stable notions and fixed articulations, opening up instead the fluid dimension of interconnectedness. Additionally, setting in motion conveys an act of unsettling, which evokes the possibility of transforming attitudes towards χώρα, and consequently art, here assumed to be equal to χώρα. The constant fluidity of the choral space 'defines' its amorphous character, as it does not have a form of its own, but possesses a shape that is caused by the particulars partaking of its space. This, in turn, defines

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[4] Other meanings involve significations of 'place; position; land; country; territory' – in: Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940, URL: http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.82:6:150.LSJ (04 April 2017).

its particular agency, which is of interest to this investigation with respect to the recognition of χώρα as art, as it relates to the specific position and 'functionality' of art practices.[5] The examination of the agency of χώρα comes to be defined by the act of 'giving room,' which implies the preceding existence of the space in reference to what comes into it. Thus, the ontological position of χώρα will be considered in relation to its temporality, which does not obey the logic of teleological constructions. Further, the temporally framed discourse of *Timaeus* will be explored in relation to the binary organisation of Platonism, which becomes disrupted by a third kind of 'being', different logic of operation – χώρα.

In Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, the ancient philosopher outlines an elaborate account of the creation of the universe.[6] The formation of the world is a result of the work of a divine craftsman – the Demiurge, who 'manufactures' or 'gives birth'[7] to the cosmos, following an eternal and unchanging model of existence, an imitation that generates the ordered universe. The nature of the figure of the supreme Craftsman is rational, allowing him to encounter the chaotic flux from which to instantiate the world, thereby reproducing the eternal paradigm of the world. The discourse of the dialogue develops in three sections – the first contains the workings of Reason (νοῦς), which manifests an intelligent and intelligible model that the Demiurge follows in order to initiate the structure and organised motion of the world's Soul and Body; the second recounts the effects of Necessity (ἀνάγκη), and includes the introduction of the concept of the receptacle (χώρα) – the focus of the current research – the necessary condition in which the universe unfolds; and the third reveals the interrelation and cooperation between Intellect and Necessity in producing the constitution of human and non-human beings.

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[5] Philosophical concerns of art's role in current society that propose situating it on a different level from the power-dominated narratives and their counter-power responses are suggested in: Chantal Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', *Art and Research*, 1:2 (2007), URL: http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/pdfs/mouffe.pdf (15 October 2017); K. Ziarek, *The Force of Art*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

[6] A short introduction to the ideas in Plato's *Timaeus* can be found in: D. Zeyl, 'Plato's *Timaeus'*, in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/ (11 January 2017); extensive researches on Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*: J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999; F. Macdonald, *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997; R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009.

[7] The issue of the definition that Plato uses for explaining the figuration of the Demiurge – who is entitled 'maker' (ποιητής) as well as 'father' (πατήρ), is considered in the book by John Sallis: J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 52.

1.1. The World of Being and the World of Becoming

In attempting to acquire clarity on what Plato's concept of χώρα implies, it is first necessary briefly to examine the ideas of the world of Being and the world of Becoming in Plato's cosmology, which, along with the notion of receptacle constitute the three factors for the concealment of the universe in Plato's dialogue. *Timaeus* differentiates between '*what always is and never becomes* and *what becomes and never is.*'[8] The first, the world of Being, is perceived by understanding, determined by a rational account (λόγος) and the second, as the world of Becoming, grasped by impression, which involves sensible perception.'[9] Thus, Being in Plato's *Timaeus* is the domain of unchangeable and eternal existence, embedded within the Platonic Forms, whereas the realm of Becoming contains that which is always becoming, changing, disappearing, and never a real being.

The notion of becoming is implicated within the process of volatility, complicated by the suggestion that such a perpetual becoming would need a cause that would endure the course of becoming within indefinite temporal delimitations, which positions the model as contrasting with that which is always begetting, but never has a real being.[10] The assumption, however, is that the world has become and has its origin of existence in time, as it is visible, tangible, sensible, and bodily; all characteristics relevant to the realm of Becoming; and that it is following the model of the Platonic Ideas. The Platonic Forms are eternal, non-material, epistemological entities, paradigms for the moral organisation of the manifested universe – human concepts of moral and aesthetic notions, ideas of relationships, and conceptions of natural kinds, and – most importantly – the cause of the existing beings in the world. Their exemplarity is deployed by the Craftsman, who creates the universe as a rational living creature – a World Soul in the World Body[11] – the originary design for the circuits of the human souls, permitting a correct and moral life in the world.

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[8] Following the citation in: D. Zeyl, 'Plato's *Timaeus*', in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/ (11 January 2017).

[9] Donald Zeyl focuses on the semantic issue of the verb 'to be' (εἶναι) and notes that the question with which *Timaeus* begins the dialogue: "What is that which always is and never becomes?" can be interpreted in two ways – emphasising the role of the entities that always are and never become, the Platonic Forms, or the question of what it is for an entity to always be and never become, its being as intelligible and unchanging – in: D. Zeyl, op. cit.

[10] Francis Macdonald explores the issue of the temporality of the world of Being and Becoming – in: F. Macdonald, *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, pp. 25 – 26.

[11] R. Mohr, 'Plato's Cosmic Manual: Introduction', in: R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009, p. 7.

The real model entitled 'Living Thing (Itself)'[12] is a form or constellation of forms that exist as an ideal cosmos and that differentiate themselves by their nature from the created universe. According to Donald Zeyl, the issue the Craftsman encounters is not the work of copying the eternal paradigm but rather the assignment of producing an image, in pursuing the model that postulates, in contrast to the infinite original, its own visibility and tangibility. The Demiurge then follows a schema or pattern that is "the intelligible, non-material and non-spatial model that prescribes the features of the structure to be built";[13] but it is not the configuration itself, as it differs from what it has become. Thus, in order to allow the formation to take place and the embodiment of the world's characteristics to occur, it becomes vital for Plato to introduce a third kind of 'being' – 'the receptacle of all becoming' or 'space', one that enables an understanding of the universe and its perceptibility as an 'imitation' of its model.

To summarise: in Plato's cosmology, the three factors needed for the concealment of the universe are Being, Becoming and Space, where the realm of Platonic Ideas is the archetype, their visible materialisation – the world, and the 'medium' – the receptacle of all-becoming. Additionally, according to Plato's view, the eternal model cannot become inscribed within the visible without the presence of the Forms, which perform their movement in this peculiar space "as if the Forms themselves could be credited with the power to beget Becoming in the womb of Space, or to cast their reflections on that medium."[14] Hence, the 'medium', necessary for the inauguration of the creation, is the third kind of 'being', the space where everything takes place and comes into existence – χώρα.

1.2. The Receptacle of All Being – Χώρα

"Moreover, a third kind is that of the chôra, everlasting, not admitting destruction, granting an abode to all things having generation, itself to be apprehended with non-sensation, by a sort of bastard reckoning, hardly trustworthy" (Tim., 52A-D).

Chôra (Χώρα) is a third kind of 'being,' which is "neither an intelligible being nor a sensible being…a sense of being that is beyond being."[15] It comes to be depicted as all-receiving,

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[12] D. Zeyl, 'Plato's Timaeus', in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/ (11 January 2017).
[13] *Ibidem*.
[14] F. Macdonald, Op. cit., p. 28.
[15] J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 113.

the receptacle of all generation, in which and from which origination occurs. Zina Giannopoulou systemises the 'metaphors' that *Timaeus* employs in describing this particular space: images of containment – "imprint-bearer" (50C2; cf. 50E8–9), "container" (50D3; 53A3, 57C3), "winnowing basket" (52E6), "receptacle" (49A6; 51A5), "all-recipient" (51A7; cf. 50B6); functional depiction – a "nurse" (49A6; 52D5, 88D6), a "foster mother" (88D6), and a "mother" (50D3; 51A5); as location – "space" (52A8; 52D3; 53A6) and a "place for sitting" (52B1); perceived as a mirror, which holds the images of the creation.[16] It is also described as a matrix – gold – that could be modelled and remodelled according to the features of the entities that visit the space. The multiple significations that refer to the notion of χώρα make evident the difficulty in articulating its peculiar character and providing a stable definition of its essence. It has been theoretically demonstrated that it does not refer to a classical meaning of place but, rather, either indicates space or remains untranslatable.[17] Thus, along with the Platonic Forms and their imitations, the receptacle as a third kind (τρίτον γένος) is the space, independent of the Demiurge. Pre-existing all his 'crafting' work and organisational performance, it is a necessary condition of the production of the visible order, which is submitted to Reason (νοῦς), itself implying the actuality of the World's Soul and Body due to Necessity (ἀνάγκη).

As all-receiving space, χώρα comes to be defined in relation to the bodies that visit the receptacle – it is not that "'out of which' things are made; it is that 'in which' qualities appear, as fleeting images are seen in a mirror."[18] This statement poses the question of the essence of χώρα, its consistency, from which or in which, phenomena come to be signified and to acquire meaning, as well as to disperse themselves in the choral flux of motion. It is generally accepted that the receptacle is not that out of which entities are formed, but rather that in which they become constructed.[19] Asking the question: "Is there a way of construing the receptacle as simultaneously the spatial matrix for all becoming and the material "filling"

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[16] Z. Giannopoulou, 'Derrida's *Khōra*, or Unnaming the Timaean Receptacle', in: R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009, p. 168.

[17] John Sallis notes the impossibility of translating the notion of χώρα, as it does not indicate the isotropic space of post-Cartesian physics, neither it is an empty space – a focus of discussion in ancient Greek atomism – in: J. Sallis, op. cit., p. 115. The reception of the concept of χώρα in the theoretical developments of Jacques Derrida, examined in the second chapter, shows χώρα in relation to the act of 'unnaming', rather than determining – in: Derrida, *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

[18] Macdonald, op. cit. p. 103.

[19] This statement appears in the books by John Sallis and Francis Macdonald: J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999; F. Macdonald, *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

of that matrix?"[20] Donald Zeyl is inclined to accept the formulation of χώρα, not as a container circumscribing the process of articulation of the forms, but rather as the substratum, along with the participation of the moving bodies that reveal their presence and partake of the choral dimension, i.e., that contained in the space. He concludes that, as it is itself filled with the phenomena moving throughout the space, the receptacle appears as a three-dimensional field in which the characterless, unarticulated and malleable matter, the particulars, are not the constitution of the space, but rather that its essence lies within the fluidity of matter: "the continuity of a configuration in the succession of filled places within the field that the particular occupies."[21] The spatial phenomena are neither the matter, which designates the χώρα, nor the non-material substratum of the choral space. Instead, χώρα is "individuated by the continuity of the constellation of characteristics manifested in a contiguous series of 'places' that it occupies over the course of its existence."[22] Therefore, χώρα comes to be identified, not only as a space-in-between, since it enters both the intelligible world of Being and simultaneously engages with the entities that visit it, with the realisation of the Platonic Forms – the world of Becoming, but also as a 'space-in-the making'[23] as it constitutes from moving bodies, and is composed by the 'series of places' generated by phenomena's motion. Motility then becomes a significant aspect of the choral nature that is also revealed as a condition for the presence of χώρα, for it allows its appearance.

Χώρα itself becomes visible occasionally only when the bodies partake of it, at the moment of the holding of these entities within the space, thus only in the movement that is enclosed solely by the traces of motion, within which entities inscribe into visibility, letting their footprints remain and therefore coming into being. The appearing trace (ἴχνος) – the particle of the Platonic space – is volatile, and its motility, manifested by the divergence in powers within χώρα, defines the receptacle:

> …the Nurse of Becoming, being liquefied and ignified are receiving also the forms
> of earth and of air, and submitting to all the other affections which accompany these,
> exhibits every variety of appearance; but owing to being filled with potencies that are
> neither similar nor balanced, in no part of herself is she equally balanced, but sways

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[20] D. Zeyl, 'Visualizing Platonic Space', in: R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009, p. 119.
[21] D. Zeyl, op. cit., p. 122.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 123.
[23] The term is used by Nicoletta Isar –in: N. Isar, '*Chorography* – A space for choreographic inscription', Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, 2:51 (2009), p. 265.

> unevenly in every part, and is herself shaken by these forms and shakes them in turn
>
> as she is moved. (Tim, 52D–52E)[24]

The connection between the receptacle and the movement of bodies, which characterises it, is implied within the terminology deployed in the dialogue of Plato – the term *chôra* (χώρα), signifying 'space,' is related to the notion of *chorós* (χορός), meaning 'a circular motion'. Space and movement acquire meaning according to the connotations of the verb – *chôréô* (χωρέω), which implies the awareness of movement, and designates two significations: to withdraw, while inscribing the space in its withdrawal, and to go forward, to be in motion or in flux.[25] In both senses – either to go forward or to retreat, depending on the context, the verb χωρέω suggests meanings of a process of generating a peculiar kind of space – activity, which will be examined further in the current text. Additionally, the movement is specifically circular – deriving from the word *choreúô* (χορεύω) – to dance in a choir or in a circular manner, and the word *chorós* (χορός), which conveys the concept of a collective and organised, circular motion, an orderly circular movement.[26] In assuming the forms and the flux of particulars, and in the process of withdrawing, χώρα thereby comes to inscribe itself within its own dynamics of recession.

The rich vocabulary designating the notion of χώρα once more marks the complexity of its registration and translation, and shows that χώρα is more than solely a space – it is a fluid matter, a dance, a presence, an absence, a 'spectral' motion. The motility of χώρα is a vital feature for an understanding of its nature and its importance to Plato, as well as to the proposal of this text, since the very aspect of being volatile suggests a distinct acknowledgment that the dynamics of the receptacle demands. Such a different response towards χώρα's 'presence' – a view that will approach it as a processual space rather than

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[24] The citation of *Timaeus* is after Nicoletta Isar: N. Isar, Chorography (*Chôra, Chorós*) – 'A performative paradigm of creation of sacred space in Byzantium', in A. Lidov (ed.) *Hierotopy: Studies in the Making of Sacred Space.* Radunitsa, p. 62.

[25] The verb χωρέω, meaning 'to go forward, to be in motion or in flux', is contextualised with reference to the statement of Heraclitus that nothing in the world can remain still as everything moves (πάντα χωρεῖ) – in: N. Isar, op. cit., p. 60.

[26] Nicoletta Isar refers to more meanings of the words χορός and χορεύω: *chorós* (χορός) is also designated as the dancing space, a term derived from the place, where the choir (*chorós*, χορός) danced and the verb *choreúô* (χορεύω) refers to a dance in a choir, or one in a circular manner. Thus, the word *chorós* (χορός) acquires different meanings according to the context: either as "to dance around", or as "the choir of dance", or just as "the choir" – in: N. Isar, op. cit., pp. 60 – 61.

fixed reality[27], creates another awareness of χώρα, and accordingly enclose a processual attitude towards art, according to the proposed perception of art as equal to χώρα.

On that account, through the motion of all the particulars it receives, which defines its nature as motile, χώρα emerges, and becomes inscribed in the visible realm of the sensible. However, even in the process of coming into exposure, the difficulty of being caught, defined, articulated, remains. Its simultaneous presence and absence appear to be part of its essence: "But if we call it an invisible εἶδος, formless, all-receiving, and, in a most perplexing way, partaking of the intelligible and most difficult to catch, we will not be speaking falsely (51A–B)."[28] Since χώρα assumes the shapes of all the configurations it receives, it cannot be in possession of any form by and of itself: "It can itself receive, be stamped or impregnated by, all those kinds called paradigms or intelligible εἴδη, but it is not *itself* determined by any of them, cannot itself have any of these determinations, cannot have them as determinations of itself."[29] The amorphous quality of the third kind reaffirms its 'invisibility,' as being unformed also presupposes its existence as *invisible εἶδος*: "Whereas the invisibility of the intelligible is, in the end, just the other side of another visibility—that is, its invisibility to the senses is just the other side of its visibility to νοῦς — the invisibility of the third kind is a more insistent invisibility."[30] Unlike the logic of the intelligible or the sensible, the invisible *εἶδος* of χώρα also becomes manifested, as it discloses itself wherever it holds a trace of the phenomena, appearing as a certain entity and never as itself. Its essence does not imply the image of itself,[31] but rather reveals the possibility of the doubling of being in an image. The receptacle possesses a unique 'existential identity'[32] that is in relation to its being as characterless personification, present solely in the encounter with the diversity of circulating entities' features. This does not indicate its absence of qualities, as its permanent traits, such as malleability, adaptability, and durability allow the possibility of the shaping of χώρα according to the visiting bodies. Thus, in its manifestation as never as itself, χώρα as all-receiving gives room to forms in order to enable their 'incarnation' into being; in this manner

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[27] The motility of χώρα is of great importance in the theoretical development of Plato's concept in Julia Kristeva's work, presented in the second chapter of the current text, which engages with an idea of subjectivity that alludes to an understanding of the articulation of the subject in motion – in: J. Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in: Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 90 –136.

[28] Citation is after John Sallis: J. Sallis, op. cit., p. 110.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 111.

[30] J. Sallis, op. cit., p. 111.

[31] John Sallis makes the remark about not conflating χώρα with its image, referring to a citation from Plato's *Republic*: "Doesn't dreaming, whether one is asleep or awake, consist in believing a likeness of something to be not a likeness but rather the thing itself to which it is like?" (Rep. 476c) – in: J. Sallis, op. cit., p. 121.

[32] Z. Giannopoulou, op. cit., p. 178.

it differs from the logic of appearance of the dualistic fixities of the sensible and intelligible, and proposes a third kind of 'existence' simultaneously and between the visible and invisible.

Along with the consideration of the receptacle as a matter that shapes according to different entities, from which they acquire various characteristics coming into being in forms, *Timaeus* ascribes to this 'material' substratum spatial dimensions. When naming it χώρα (space), he assigns it the functionality of a seat – *hedra* (ἕδρα) – emphasising its role to grant a spatial locus that implies its purpose of 'giving room' to the particulars that move throughout the receptacle. This activity designates its particular agency – on the one hand there stands its active offering of itself, and on the other, its lack of subjecthood, revealed in its passive role of receiving the bodies that penetrate the space – a process it affords while simultaneously not holding the phenomena as its own.[33] *Timaeus'* comparison of χώρα with mother and nurse additionally draws attention towards its passivity, as the receptacle enables the activity of other bodies without participating in it but by temporarily occupying them. According to Zina Giannopoulou, choral activity does not necessarily relate to the notion of 'giving,' as χώρα "does not act on something external to itself by positioning it in space,"[34] since it is itself a space. The agency of the receptacle is therefore a specific kind of agency, as the active offering of itself as such is suggested by its passive functioning as a recipient of all things – a process in which self-giving and receiving interrelate reciprocally. The 'in-betweenness' of the choral space is once more reaffirmed, also given that its agency exceeds any binary logic, suggesting an activity that cannot fall into the categories of action or counter-action, but itself acts in a different manner, submitted to the logic of 'bastard reckoning.' Moreover, in this process, χώρα expresses and is determined by features of malleability and adaptability, and in this manner becomes qualified as permanent, which suggests its temporal qualification: it is a "malleable, adaptable, and enduring, an all-receiving entity that becomes temporarily qualified, as particulars go in and out of existence, while itself remaining permanent (non temporal)."[35]

Significantly, the perpetual nature of χώρα refers to a kind of ontological constancy that it possesses as, even though it is a space in which various entities take place, and whose characteristics are assumed, the role of the receptacle remains the same: it enables the bodies' participation in the Platonic Forms, it enables the manifestation of the universe. Its nature resides within an ontological stability and does not resist a possible determination of its

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[33] Z. Giannopoulou, op. cit., p. 175.
[34] *Ibidem*, p. 175.
[35] *Ibidem*, p. 176.

identity as itself. Additionally, the primary bodies themselves maintain ontological qualities as their existence as not completely formed bodies is present in the pre-cosmos – they possess traces of their nature before the Demiurge intervenes in order to follow his operations in crafting the world. These traces assimilate and precede the perfect instantiations of the Platonic Forms and exist in their geometrised form in the pre-cosmos, which is determined by order – a precondition of disorder, 'inhabiting' the flux of the phenomena. Hence, the Demiurge does not impose a form on characterless matter but rather inherits the pre-cosmic proportions[36] and measures of the forms, the features of their traces, which emerge in the spatial location of χώρα.

As the ontological space of χώρα allows the instantiation of the world, it should be added that, by imposing form and order on the heavenly bodies in his activity, the Demiurge sets the heavenly bodies into systematically repeating circuits in a process that enables time to emerge. The heavenly bodies become models of time, and transform the temporal measurement into an entry point for the world/copy to the ideal form as time allows the entry to the intelligence of the Demiurge and intelligibility of the Forms. According to Robert Mohr, "The core project of the Demiurge is to create two earthly standards—the rational World Soul as conveyed by the World Body and time viewed as a cluster of clocks."[37] Plato's idea of the creation of time differs from the concept of space, despite their being intrinsically interconnected, as Becoming is occurring in both conditions. In contrast to the receptacle, time comes to be produced by 'the celestial revolutions,'[38] which are a result of the Demiurge's crafting, whereas χώρα is the necessary space, independent of the divine Craftsman and a condition for his workings. Χώρα is the third factor of the creation, existing due to Necessity and not to Reason, and a condition necessary for Reason to produce the visible order; whereas time is a product of that order, intrinsic to its rational structure. Furthermore, as is the case with space (which, according to Nicoletta Isar, unfolds in a circular motion), the temporal flux is circular;[39] and, filled in with movement it corresponds to the motions of entities within the dimensions of χώρα.

Different temporal layers are also present on a discursive level in the account of *Timaeus*, as he depicts events of the past, while simultaneously building the image

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[36] R, Mohr, op. cit., p. 12.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 9.

[38] F. Macdonald, op. cit., p. 102.

[39] Plato relates time to the number three, as it symbolises the flow of life, based on the principle of the cycle of all things that come into being and pass away. In his book, Macdonald refers to the cycle of life, in which the wheel of becoming – birth, growth, maturity, decay, death and rebirth – joins the end to the beginning – in: F. Macdonald, op. cit., p. 103.

of the Ideal eternal existence.[40] In this perspective, it is notable that Plato fabricates two corresponding hierarchies – an ontological hierarchy of Forms and copies, and copies of copies; and on the other hand, the hierarchy of the discourse, which refers to the world of Being, the world of Becoming and, in third place – the traditional narratives of poetry,[41] which positions the dialogue itself within the domain of Becoming. In this narrative schema, it should be emphasised that the first topic of *Timaeus'* discourse is the temporal beginning of the world:

> As regards the whole universe – or world or whatever other name it might
> appropriately receive, let us name it that – we must first consider that subject which
> must always arise at the beginning of everything, namely, whether it always was,
> and had no beginning of becoming, or whether it came into being, having begun
> from some beginning. (Tim, 28B)[42]

The creation of time is contemporaneous to the instantiation of the universe, as both come into existence and perish together. Therefore, time comes to designate the temporal structure of the world produced by the Demiurge and, in contrast to the World Soul and Body, the Craftsman and χώρα, is transient and will come to an end. The receptacle, on the other hand, precedes time as it is always already there "beyond temporal coming-to-be and passing away."[43] Its atemporality reveals another, – non-teleological, logic of existence, which is of interest in the current text, as it indicates other from the linear, mode of 'representation' and perception.

The cosmological account of *Timaeus*, the beginning of the universe itself, is interrupted by a 'break' – a 'new beginning': the narrative about χώρα, which starts in the middle of the dialogue and becomes the 'new beginning' of the discourse: "Then it would become decisive that the χώρα in fact becomes manifest—if it can be said at all to become manifest in the *Timaeus* —not at the beginning of the dialogue but near the middle."[44]

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[40] In her article, Catherine Osborne engages with the presence of past and present in Plato's *Timaeus*, i.e., the retelling of the narrative, which opens the question of whether the story reveals genuine historical facts, and to what extent the language expresses the reality–in: C. Osborne, 'Space, Time, Shape, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the *Timaeus'*, in: C. Gill, M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 179 – 213.

[41] C. Osborne, op. cit., p. 187.

[42] Citation is after C. Osborne, op. cit., p. 194.

[43] J. D. Caputo, '*Khôra:* Being Serious with Plato', in: John D. Caputo (ed.), *Deconstruction in a Nutshell. A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, p. 84.

[44] The aspect of a 'new beginning' at the middle of the narrative of *Timaeus* is analysed in John Sallis' work: J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999; J. Sallis,

Starting in the middle is explicitly one of those aspects that reveal a turning point in approaching the choral space, as a nonlinear narrative provokes a different recognition. Moreover, such a discontinuity marks a suggestion for a constant returning to the beginning[45] – the text itself has been identified as a 'mirroring' χώρα[46] that requires a specific act of unfolding/deconstructing – any text "would always be structured, 'constructed' of layer upon layer, fold upon fold, ply upon ply, so that to read a 'text' is always to un-fold, de-construct, what is going on."[47] Thus, a beginning in the middle requires moving away from foundational fixity, allowing the discovery of conditions that enable a different organisation, which opens up other experiences.

Along with the temporary framing of the dialogue and the different organisation of the narrative, the discourse also reveals another level of ambiguity – the opposition of *mythos* (μῦθος)/*logos* (λόγος). The *Timaeus* discourse is itself temporally framed,[48] and in accordance with Plato's concept of dualism, the existence of world of Being and world of Becoming, on a discursive level it lies within the binaries of μῦθος and λόγος, in which χώρα preserves its central place. According to Zina Giannopoulou, the receptacle encompasses Plato's opposition of Being and Becoming/μῦθος and λόγος,[49] as the mythic discourse improves through ambiguities and embraces contradictions, whereas the λόγος dismisses a compromise between discrepancies: "within the confines of *Timaeus*, the permeability of the seemingly well-defined borders between these two notions is evident."[50] That there is no strongly demarcated opposition between εἰκὼς μῦθος and εἰκὼς λόγος in *Timaeus*' account, is a statement put forward by Gabor Betegh, who defines the concept

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'A politics of the Χώρα', in: R. Lilly (ed.), *The Ancients and the Moderns*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, pp. 59 – 71. The citation is from: J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 4.

[45] According to Osborne, the structure of the dialogue presupposes the constant returning to the beginning as if Timaeus were taking different paths as circular orbits that return him to the starting point, i.e., to the beginning. These routes in the voyage of Timaeus that trace different ways but intersect at the initial point are defined as a 'wandering cause', and follow: first, the creation of the universal cosmos; second, the introduction of necessity as another principle along with reason on which the creation is based – in: C. Osborne, op. cit., p. 198.

[46] The discourse of *Timaeus* is perceived by the philosopher Jacques Derrida as an enacting of χώρα, as its structure mirrors the choral 'organisation,' i.e., it contains a narrative of myths that contain myths, which resembles a principle of the vast receptacle that contains all – in: J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 116.

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 116.

[48] The temporal direction followed in the descriptive discourse of *Timaeus* assimilates the circular movement of the heavenly orbits – a path that traces different trajectories, which intersect at a certain point, implying continuous and recurrent return to the origin, and in this manner corresponding in spatial structures to the organisation of the circles from which the Demiurge constructs the World-Soul –in: C. Osborne, op. cit., p. 198.

[49] According to Zina Giannopoulou, the receptacle not only does not disassemble Plato's opposition of μῦθος and λόγος but, on the contrary, its construction is encouraged by the presence of χώρα. The scholar disagrees with the statement of Jacques Derrida, examined in the second chapter, who argues that χώρα, positioned between intelligible and perceptible worlds, dismantles their construction, since it refuses to identify with them, and by non-identification it deconstructs Plato's dualism – in: Z. Giannopoulou, op. cit., p. 170.

[50] Z. Giannopoulou, op. cit., p. 170.

of λόγος as a general idea that encloses mythical accounts.[51] On the other hand, the importance of the *Timaeus* cosmological myth[52] – "the disorderly initial situation, which is a privation of the explanandum, the divine intention to install the best possible state of affairs, the limiting conditions set by the nature of the material,"[53] refers to the creation of a "new philosophical myth" – a myth that comes to sustain the ancient philosopher's attempt to eliminate the sacrificial foundation of the tragic logic of representation by founding a myth, which does not necessitate a catharsis.[54] Therefore, Plato offers a new paradigmatic fiction or a new model of representation – a philosophical and logical myth, directed against tragic *mythopoiesis*, against the μῦθος as fiction, and thus against the μῦθος as an opposition to λόγος. In this perspective, the new μῦθος encloses the conflict between tragic μῦθος and λόγος, and χώρα becomes the circumscription of the space of discordance. Within the possibilities of this creation, χώρα becomes once again the space, which embraces or exceeds the divergence of powers in the deployment of a cosmological principle of the inauguration of the world. Consequently, *Timaeus* becomes a narrative that makes evident its own ambiguity and indeterminacy as the dualism of μῦθος and λόγος is both constructed and undermined; χώρα belongs to both/neither, and in this manner opens up a space that underlies/surpasses the opposition, calling this opposition into question. On the other hand, it is also a 'pre-narrative' – ontological space that makes the construction of both μῦθος and λόγος possible.

In conclusion, the receptacle in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus* works on various levels, as a malleable and fluid matter, including the discursive layers of representation in which χώρα appears as the space that underlies the binary organisation of Platonic Forms and phenomena and reveals the ontological interrelation between Being and Becoming in the entanglement of particulars – which exist due to the Forms – and χώρα, which exists in order for the particulars to come into being. The contribution of the concept of χώρα to an understanding of the revelation of the universe is embedded within the simultaneous presence and activity of controversies, which imply a critical potency by disavowing a consonant

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[51] Gabor Betegh argues that, in *Timaeus*, λόγος is used as general term for discourses, and λόγοι can be perceived as engaged with entities from the ontological realm, as well as being able to indicate both νόησις (knowledge) and δόξα (opinion) from the original epistemological distinction – in: G. Betegh, 'What Makes a Myth *eikos*? Remarks Inspired by Myles Burnyeat's EIKOS MYTHOS', in: R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009, p. 222.

[52] In *Timaeus'* account, the narration becomes a μῦθος when the coming into being is a responsibility of a divine or nonhuman agent, and renders visible the origin of phenomena, referring to an unspecified moment in the past – in: G. Betegh, op. cit., p. 222.

[53] G. Betegh, op. cit., p. 223.

[54] B. Manchev, *Logics of the Political*. Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2012, p. 63.

ground. Χώρα comes to disclose a crucial 'otherness' in the Platonic text as it cannot be submitted to the logic of intelligible or sensible but precedes/exceeds this opposition, therefore, resisting any assimilation into philosophical tradition. The 'in-betweenness' of χώρα regarding the dual forms – intelligible/sensible, μῦθος/λόγος, active/passive, beginning/ending – as well as its space in-the-making, its fluid matter, disrupt the dialectic operations of tradition, proposing new organisations that demand different responses.

2. 'Becoming' of Χώρα in Contemporary Thought

In order to examine the role of contemporary visual arts in current society, with the attempt to enlighten its purpose and involvement in present-day operations of orderly structures by introducing the view of χώρα, and by doing so, to enable the possibility for a different approach towards arts, it is important to investigate the trajectory of the significance of the notion of χώρα in contemporary thought, and thus its adoption and development in recent philosophical theories. With the examination of two important theoretical developments of the concept of χώρα – the 'semiotic' *chôra* of the literary critic, philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and the 'deconstructive' *khôra* of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, the current chapter aims to create an intersection between antiquity and contemporaneity. On the other hand, the adoption of the notion of Plato's χώρα in the formulation of the concepts of *chôra/khôra* in the contemporary work of Kristeva and Derrida has been performed within the realm of language, i.e., the domain of literary studies. Nonetheless, its dimensions comprise a wider view and concern issues belonging to interdisciplinary fields that open promises of its employment and relevance within the province of artistic practice. Thus, departing from linguistics and language, the current thesis will aim to redirect the conception of Plato's receptacle towards the visual vocabulary of contemporary arts, as developed in the last chapter.

Of interest in the present text is how χώρα, which belongs to the Platonic view of perceiving the world in antiquity, can contribute to the understanding of contemporary issues implied within artistic practices. As the question of originating, of genesis, of beginning is one that has not yet been responded to, it is no surprise that Plato's idea continues its path towards contemporary thought. However, deploying the concept of χώρα in contemporary philosophy does not designate an answer to a cosmological enquiry but rather a manner in which the present-day structures of the world's order come to be 'decoded' – a process of disfiguration of fashioned authorities and hegemonic discourses, in which the peculiar choral space becomes the 'third kind', a possible way of 'exiting' from the dialectical form of current political and social fabric. In the complexity of this movement of disassembling, art plays a significant role, and by relating the notion of χώρα to the artistic realm, the current thesis attempts to shed light on the significance of artwork in current society. Thus, engaging with *Timaeus* by 'situating' the notion of the receptacle within the artistic realm accommodates a possible processual approach towards an artwork that could transform one's senses of beginnings, creation, meaning and value by 'placing/or displacing' them.

By focusing on χώρα, contemporary philosophers aim to touch upon the issue, discussed in Plato's work, of how to perform a turn from static fixations to vital motion, or, in other words, how to understand the world outside of its structures, or to apprehend the processual aspects of its configurations from a position of a third kind, of χώρα, of art, which stands beside and within the dialectics of discursive hegemony and its opposition, and by giving a different (third) perspective enables another type of activity. The view of χώρα brought up in contemporaneity allows reconfiguration of our understanding of the current socio-political order, and perceiving it as art would provide a possible intelligibility of the role of arts and its 'doing/redoing' of static foundations or hegemonies, and furthermore of the origination of subjectivity that plays a crucial role in socio-political reality.

Firstly, the theory of subjectivity of the Bulgarian-French literary scholar, psychoanalyst and feminist Julia Kristeva will be examined. The scholar develops her thesis on subjectivity introducing the concept of the semiotic *chôra* in her doctoral thesis *Revolution in Poetic Language*.[55] Even though her ideas about the 'revolution' of art and literature had undergone some transformations, visible in her later work, the focus of this text will be on the first appearance of the notion of *chôra* in her thought, and the later understandings of the role of art and 'poetic language' will be mentioned briefly, given the significance of a change in the position of art – departing from revolution and developing towards 'revolt.'

Subsequently, the text will investigate the adoption of the idea of χώρα in Jacques Derrida's philosophical thought, with an emphasis on the centrality of Plato's idea for his project of *différance* and deconstruction, as *khôra* becomes the space that embodies the Derridean notion of 'text' – this 'in-betweenness' that reveals the differential relationships in language and transgresses the socio-political boundaries by introducing its heterogeneous forces into the authoritative discourse. Thus, the chapter will engage with Derrida's thesis of *khôra*, as developed in his book, *On the Name*.[56]

2.1. The Semiotic *Chôra*: Julia Kristeva's Subject-in-process

In her seminal work, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, first published in 1974, engaging with the process of articulation of the subject, Julia Kristeva proposes a new

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[55] J. Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in: Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 90 –136.

[56] Derrida's writing devoted to the concept of *khôra* in its English version is to be found in: J. Derrida, *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 87 – 128.

perspective on the formation of identity. Here she develops the foundational for her work categories of the semiotic and symbolic – modalities that involve new dimensions of meaning and subjectivity. In the historical context of the writing of *Revolution in Poetic Language*,[57] literature and art were perceived as the practice, and psychoanalytical thought was considered the theory, for introducing new ways of 'revolting' against the socio-political order. In her text, Kristeva displaces the potential 'source' for political revolution from social practice to the domain of avant-garde literature, i.e., the 'poetic language,' delegating it the role that might engender political transformation. In her view, this transformation can occur only if the loss of dialectics (the dialectical materialism of modes of production) to which it is owned, comes to be retrieved. She thereby proposes a path towards its recovery by inducing the concept of the process of the subject developed in psychoanalysis,[58] relying on the Freudian theory of the drive and discovery of the unconscious, which becomes the basis for her notion of the subject-in-process that is performed by poetic language: "The theory of the unconscious seeks the very thing that poetic language practices within and against the social order: the ultimate means of its transformation or subversion, the precondition of its survival and revolution."[59]

According to Kristeva, the bourgeois social order restraints its dependence on *signifiance* – understood as the 'signifying process' that encloses the configuration of the subject and meaning, on which the social structures (the symbolic order) depend and which they deny – as it integrates the discrepancies into the unity of the subject/state. In this regard, the psychoanalytic theory proposes a recovery and realignment of the nature of the signifying process, whose crucial aspect is the theory of the drives, and of the process of absorption, focused on the narcissistic fixation as a model of the integration of the signifying process to the unity of the subject – the bourgeois state.[60] Psychoanalysis allows the understanding of the rigidity of the bourgeois state (the narcissistic fixation) but it demands a practice, necessary for subversion and transformation of meaning and the subject, i.e., the poetic language:

> Capitalism leaves the subject the right to revolt, preserving for itself the right to
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> suppress that revolt. The ideological systems capitalism proposes, however, subdue,

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[57] More about this period in Kristeva's professional development and the impact of Marxism and Maoism in her work – in: J. Brandt, 'Julia Kristeva and the Revolutionary Politics of *Tel Quel*', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 21 – 37.

[58] S. Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 40.

[59] The citation from *Revolution in Poetic Language* (p. 81) is quoted from S. Beardsworth, op. cit., p. 40

[60] *Ibidem*, pp. 40 – 41.

unify, and consolidate that revolt, bringing it back within the field of unity (that of the subject and the State). When objective conditions were not such that this state of tension could be resolved through revolution, rejection became symbolized in the avant-garde texts of the nineteenth century where the repressed truth of a shattered subject was then confined.[61]

Following that logic, Kristeva argues that art can become a site of confrontation against the suppression that sustains bourgeois ideology, proposing that it is the functioning that should be addressed in this contest, rather than the already fixated meaning and values of the bourgeois ideology circumscribed within capitalist society.[62] Thus, art and literature play a significant role in Kristeva's theory as they are delegated the responsibility of assuming political function: "Rather than wanting to formulate a theory of aesthetics and situating it in a political context, the project has consisted of a systematic displacement of politics from the public to the intimate domain of signification."[63] This approach opens up a possibility for articulation of another kind of meaning (than the one of homogeneity) that contains the ability of resistance of submitting to symbolic (socio-political) authority; and in the process of creating this meaning it is only the practices, i.e., art and literature, that could engender the flexibility of the subject, recognising its heterogeneity. According to Cecilia Sjöholm, for Kristeva politics, psychoanalysis and practice – art and literature, are interconnected categories, which supports her argument that Julia Kristeva's theory has always been developed in relation to the political, and involves the assumption of the continuity between her earlier and later writings.[64] Moreover, Sjöholm puts emphasis on the 'radical negativity'[65], which maintains the conditions for the subject being in process and enables the displacement of politics from the domain of the public towards the 'intimate.'[66] Thus, displacing the political towards the avant-garde practices reveals the 'force' of literary

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[61] J. Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in: Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 210 – 211.

[62] Additionally, literature and art are considered to focus on the production of meaning, and not on meaning as object, as they are irreducible to metaphysical principles of meaning, being perceived as transformational signifying practices – in: S. Beardsworth, op. cit., p. 41; C. Sjöholm, *Kristeva and The Political*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 9.

[63] C. Sjöholm, op. cit., p. 2.

[64] According to Birgit Schippers, such a statement, supported by Cecilia Sjöholm, impedes a view concerning a turn in Kristeva's later work – in: B. Schippers, 'Kristeva's Time?' *Feminist Theory,* 11:1 (2010), p. 92.

[65] C. Sjöholm, op. cit., p. 10.

[66] More about the concept of intimate revolt in Kristeva's work and the turn from public towards intimate domain can be found in: K. Oliver, 'Revolt and Forgiveness', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 77 – 93.

discourse and art practice as a 'source' for political transformation. In the context of this argument, the way in which subjectivity becomes formed in relation to the affirmation of the workings of the unconscious should be examined.

In her book *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva develops a theory of the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic, in which the semiotic assigns to "pre- and transverbal inscriptions and modes of communication, whilst the symbolic signifies the order of law, meaning and structure."[67] The semiotic is delegated a subversive and transformative capacity that, within the interdependent semiotic-symbolic relationship, allows the creation of meaning and language by sustaining it through its drive energy. In this correlation, built upon an antagonistic or 'reciprocally deconstructive'[68] relationship,[69] the semiotic and the symbolic are also intrinsically connected and auxiliary. Drawing upon the Lacanian theory of the symbolic, Kristeva affirms that the semiotic cannot be studied without the symbolic: "Assuming the entrance into language, semiotic functioning is in excess of symbolic functioning, and heterogeneous to it, so that neither the semiotic nor the symbolic can fully overcome or subsume the other."[70] In comparison to Lacan, Kristeva establishes the symbolic in a different manner by arguing that subjectivity lies within the work of negativity, and the symbolic is entangled to the semiotic: "While the symbolic refers to the underlying structures and laws of language and society, the semiotic refers to the layers of signification that are irreducible to those laws: phenomena such as rhythm and sound-patterns."[71] Additionally, in order to unveil the operations underlying the process of subjectivity, Kristeva turns to the Freudian theory of drives, as the notion of the unconscious plays a significant role in the organisation of language, and language, in turn, is deposited by facets of the unconscious that intervene the laws of signification. The subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, and the signifying process in which it is incorporated cannot rupture them by being submitted to one or to the other. In this process: "Rather than placing itself under the constraints of the law and the Oedipal structure of social life, the subject-in-process of the semiotic is always up and against such a law and such a structure."[72] Thus, in

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[67] B. Schippers, op. cit., p. 86.

[68] *Ibidem*, p. 86.

[69] The impact on Kristeva for developing a dialectical relationship of the semiotic and symbolic is examined in: J. Brandt, 'Julia Kristeva and the Revolutionary Politics of *Tel Quel*', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 21 – 37.

[70] Citation from *Revolution in Poetic Language* (p.) is quoted in: S. Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 42.

[71] C. Sjöholm, op. cit., p. 14.

[72] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

Kristeva's view, the pre-Oedipal realm introduces another aspect of subjectivity, which precedes (not in term of temporality) the establishment of the symbolic, unlike the Lacanian understanding in which no subjectivity can be structured prior to Oedipalisation. Moreover, in order to investigate the formation of the subject and acknowledge its irreducibility to language in its richness of layers of signification, Kristeva turns towards a direction of identifying the subject as corporeal by introducing the body in the process of signification.[73] For that purpose, she develops the thesis of the subject-in-process, drawing on the Freudian theory of the drive – a boundary concept of soma and psyche, which, in her view, is the corporeal dimension, circumscribed by the symbolic that precedes the linguistic articulation of subject-object relation, and unlike the Lacanian perspective of the subject as the structure of language,[74] it posits the subject as a subject-in-process.

The drive is outside the symbolic functioning, i.e., outside structures of meaning, constituting not an 'other' to the symbolic order but a motion/process that is not yet symbolised. It embodies the motility in which the confrontation with the symbolic is performed by the 'pre-verbal' semiotic, which, in turn, is dependent on the symbolic. Kristeva explains this motion with the notion of the 'semiotic *chôra*': "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases."[75] Thus, for Kristeva, the semiotic *chôra* refers to the oppositional relationship between, on the one hand, discourse, i.e., a field permeated by the distinction of symbolic-real, and, on the other hand, the dimension of what is 'not yet symbolized,' which is embedded within the 'not yet established' subject-object boundary: "The *chôra* is a modality of *signifiance* in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic."[76] Therefore, what *chôra* 'produces' is not a subject of the law, but a subject-in-process, as it articulates itself as an object, simultaneously and in accordance to the constitution of the subject, and in a process in which signification itself appears as the boundary and not the origination: "Our discourse—all discourse—moves with and against the *chôra* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it.

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[73] Sjöholm investigates the notion of the body in Kristeva's theory in relation to the political – in: C. Sjöholm, op. cit., p. 14; Further examination of the corporeal in politics in terms of Julia Kristeva's work can be found in: Sarah Ahmed, 'The Skin of the Community: Affect and Boundary Formation', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 95 – 113; Noëlle McAfee, 'Bearing Witness in the *Polis*: Kristeva, Arendt, and the Space of Appearance', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 113 – 127.

[74] S. Beardsworth, op. cit., p. 42.

[75] J. Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in: Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 93.

[76] *Ibidem*, p. 94.

Although the *chôra* can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited: as a result one can situate the *chora* and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form."[77] *Chôra* refers to a stage in the process of signification, which Kristeva names the *thetic* phase – a moment in which the object comes to be separated from the subject, as all language comes into being, incorporating the coming into being of subject and object. Moreover, the postulating of the object requires the drive energy, as "the process of signification is continuously traversed by extra-linguistic layers of signification."[78] *Chôra* is the space outside any 'axiomatic form', which posits its heterogeneous relation to the symbolic and allows it to engender mobility and therefore transformation. Furthermore, it is perceived as an excess – a "principle of production and motility, rather than stasis: the very engendering of representation that cannot itself be represented, the space preceding the actual space of representation."[79] Thus, *chôra* is perceived as a space beyond representation, suggesting a similar perception of art – an understanding of contemporary art that encloses its mobile 'nature' and divergent functionality, and which is able to recognise the 'force' of its workings within the world system of postulational functionality.

As mentioned, following the Freudian concept of the drive, Kristeva shapes *chôra* as a space of energies, drives and investments that allow the corporeal body to identify in the sphere of symbolisation:

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chôra*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.[80]

Thus, *chôra* is associated with the model of Freud's primary process that explains the energies moving between symbolisation and the realm of the drive for it is the process in

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[77] J. Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in: Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 94.
[78] The proposal that in Kristeva's theory the language implies extra layers of signification alludes to the association with Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, where Plato explains the movement and transformation outside the form of the original and the copy with the concept of χώρα.
[79] C. Sjöholm, op. cit., p. 17.
[80] J. Kristeva, op. cit., p. 93.

which the unconscious assures, through displacement and condensation, a repression of the psychic investments that, dominated by affect, pass from one component to another.[81] As it is in control of affect, the primary process appears as a menace for the functioning of the secondary process. In the same manner, the drive theory articulates the preverbal potential of the semiotic, being not yet symbolised, to 'struggle' with the impact of the symbolic, and reaffirms the nature of *chôra* as a motility that cannot establish fixed positions, which is owned to the destructive wave of the drive[82]. Freudian theory enables Kristeva to shape a motility of the semiotic, a 'mode of repetition,'[83] which allows a different entry to the symbolic order, and which implies a potential transformation of its (the symbolic) organisation, of the principle of tis operations, to which the semiotic is submitted. Thus, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the aim of motility of the semiotic is the subversion and consequently a transformation of meaning, subject, state; and *chôra* is this motion that involves the potentiality of subversion of the symbolic, i.e., it is *chôra* that could allow a symbolic renewal, a transformation of meaning and subject.

Kristeva's later work, as noted by some scholars,[84] shifts from the idea of subversion and 'revolution' towards the notion of 'revolt'. In her later writings, she argues that "the culture of revolt not only has to de-centre but also to renew the psychic life and social bonds through symbolic rearticulation, which leads to the institution of new forms of social relations, collective identifications, and representations."[85] The shift in Kristeva's thinking regards the relationship between semiotic and symbolic, in which the symbolic comes to be

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[81] Freud develops the drive theory in *Psychology of the Dream-Processes* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*).
[82] The destructive drive makes the choral motility a wave motion that involves a pressure of 'excitation', owned to dissatisfaction, and which involves limitation that break the wave, leaving a mark. The mark, in turn, reactivates the motion, allowing the destructive wave to divide or displace the mark Additionally, even though the logic of the drives is 'mysterious', its purpose is to convey a kind of repetition on the border of soma and psyche that is 'animated' by the symbolic but submits to another mode of operation – at the border of soma and psyche -in: S. Beardsworth, op. cit., p. 46.
[83] *Ibidem*, p. 45.
[84] S. Beardsworth, 'From Revolution to Revolt Culture', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 37 – 57; K. Oliver, 'Revolt and Forgiveness', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 77-93; J. Brandt, 'Julia Kristeva and the Revolutionary Politics of *Tel Quel*', in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 21 – 37.
[85] For that purpose, two paths, which question the possibility of drawing a non-Oedipal, nondialectical notion of revolt, come to be outstretched – the feminine perspective of the ironisation of the phallic logic of revolt, and the role of the pre-Oedipal loving father as a support for revolt and forgiveness – in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, Introduction, p. 3.

inserted into the semiotic,[86] and to be perceived as 'always already undermined'.[87] The concept of revolt, on the other hand, responds to the altered socio-political conditions, which differ from a repressive capitalist system, and it elicits from contemporary crisis in identity. As a result of these new realities, Kristeva integrates the rivalry nature of the 'revolt' in *Revolution in Poetic Language,* negating its dialectical pattern. The impossibility of revolt in its sense of rebellion comes to be defined by the fragmentation of the authoritative structures, which have lost their ability of power execution, creating a 'power vacuum' that dismantles the constituted stable centre.[88] As a resolution to the crisis of contemporaneity, Julia Kristeva proposes the Freudian notion of "re-volte," which comes to be understood not as a transgression but as a movement towards the past "that repeats, interrogates and re-elaborates the most archaic, intimate phases of psychic development."[89] Thus, a dialectical model of revolt that she develops in her earlier work comes to be called into question in her later writings. The relationship between semiotic and symbolic in the motility of *chôra* acquires new shape and remains the crucial point for the understanding of arts' ability to transform current dominant realities.

2.2. The Deconstructive Χώρα: Jacques Derrida's *Khôra*

"Who are you, *Khôra*?"[90]

The focus of this part of the chapter will be on the theory developed in the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's essay *Khōra*,[91] where the scholar engages with Plato's

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[86] Brandt suggests that the individual's libidinal impulses are no longer a form of abjection that has been cast aside; they remain instead an integral, unrepressed part of the symbolic itself – in: J. Brandt, op. cit., p. 33.

[87] It is the very insufficiency of the symbolic dimension that becomes an important issue for Kristeva in her work of the mid to late 1990s, beginning with *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000) and continuing through *Intimate Revolt* (1997) – in: J. Brandt, op. cit., p. 33.

[88] This in turn delimitates the capacity for revolt as there is no authority against which to revolt, issue, examined in: J. Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000; This question in relation to Kristeva's theory is examined also in K. Oliver, 'Revolt and Forgiveness' in: Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds.), *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 77 – 93; The issue of revolt and lack of centralised authority against which the individual need to resist is also examined in: K. Ziarek, *The Force of Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

[89] J. Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 64 – 65; In comparison to the concept of revolt in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, where the subversive abilities of the 'unconscious' semiotic, depend on a transgressive, dialectical concept of the semiotic/symbolic relationship, the revolt in *Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* she offers a concept of the subject that emphasises not the undermining of the symbolic by the inclusion of semiotic motion, but rather subject's rebellion which incorporates features of both categories.

[90] J. Derrida, *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 111.

dialogue *Timaeus* and the idea of χώρα – a concept, it will be argued, of crucial importance to the Derridean project.[92]

The question of naming χώρα[93] as an obscure concept, which ambiguity engenders the impossibility of defining, and therefore naming it, refers to the key issue of poststructuralist theory – the enquiry of the correspondence of the name and what is named (signifier/signified). According to John Sallis, Plato's notion is untranslatable (despite the general acceptance of its translation as a 'space')[94] – a sentiment shared by Derrida's approach towards the choral space. For that purpose, he 'names' χώρα '*Khōra*', i.e., assigning it a proper name, which challenges the relation between a signifier and its referent. Thus, *khōra* questions the very limits of naming, as it goes beyond the categorical oppositions that allow it to be approached in the first place: "And when a name comes, it immediately says more than the name: the other of the name and quite simply the other, whose irruption the name announces."[95] This difficulty of 'naming', and therefore understanding, *khōra*, Derrida considers a constitutional aspect of Plato's thought itself: "he cannot 'not speak' of it – yet he does not know to 'not speak' of it, that is, to respect its negativity."[96] The discourse about *khōra* involves the complication of defining the 'unknowable', i.e., the unaccountable, which cannot partake of any 'signification,' since it is not intelligible or sensible, and thus, not submitted to the logic of the model, nor to that of the copy. Interpretations of what it is, according to Derrida, are later analyses that incorporate the illusion of what *khōra* is or is not. However, in response to the need of a way

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[91] The first elaboration on Plato's philosophy by Derrida is drawn in 1968 with the article "Plato's Pharmacy" (1968), published in *Dissemination*. He later expresses his interest in Plato in two essays "How Not to Speak: Denials" (1985) and "*Khôra*" (1987), whose translation into English is published in "*On the Name*" (1995), referred to in the current text. The notion of *khôra* is investigated also in 'Chora L Works,' co-written with the architect Peter Eisenman.

[92] Such an argument is supported by Paul Allen Miller, John D. Caputo, Thomas J. Rickert – in: Paul Allen Miller, 'The Platonic Remainder. Derrida's *Khôra* and the *Corpus Platonicum*', in: Miriam Leonard (ed.), *Derrida and Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Oxford Scholarship Online, Sep. 2010, URL: http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199545544.001.0001/acprof-9780199545544-chapter-13 (14 April 2017); John D. Caputo, '*Khôra*: Being Serious with Plato', in: John D. Caputo (ed.), *Deconstruction in a Nutshell. A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, pp. 71 – 106; Thomas J. Rickert, 'Toward the *Chōra*: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 40: 3 (2007), pp. 251 – 273, URL: http://muse.jhu.edu/article/220271 (13 April 2017).

[93] John Sallis engages with the issue of reduction of χώρα by defining it: "The enforcement of the reduction of the χώρα has no meaning, and to translate it, to submit it to eidetic determination, is to appropriate it to an economy of meaning, to violate it. Can it be that the entire history of the reading of the *Timaeus* has been haunted by this specter of violence?" – in: John Sallis, 'A politics of the Χώρα', in: R. Lilly (ed.), *The Ancients and the Moderns*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 63.

[94] J. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, pp. 91–146.

[95] J. Derrida, *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 89.

[96] J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 85.

of approaching it, Derrida proposes the capitalized proper name *Khōra*, as every singularity carries a proper name, even though it does not have an essential propriety[97] and shapes according to the form inhabiting it.

As Plato indicates and the Derridean view follows, *Khōra* belongs to a third kind that is neither sensible, nor intelligible, but, on the other hand, is also both of them – it is foreign to the order of the paradigm; however, it 'participates' in the intelligible, and in this manner, it falls outside the distinction of verity and falsity, clarity and obscurity, being neither and both.

As a third kind, not partaking either of the world of Being, or of the world of Becoming, *khōra* comes to be submitted to a third kind of reasoning – a bastard reckoning, which generates the understanding of the notion by the mind, since it cannot be perceived by the senses, but which, however, does not make it an intelligible object of the mind – therefore, *khōra* is a matter of neither *mythos* (μῦθος), nor *logos* (λόγος). Both concepts are examined by the French classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant,[98] who posits them in a fundamental opposition in which λόγος comes to be perceived as a non-contradictory discourse, establishing the logic of metaphysics; and where μῦθος, on the other hand, is considered as an ambiguous and indeterminate narration: "Thus myth puts into play a form of logic which could be called—in contrast to the logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers—a logic of the ambiguous, of the equivocal, of polarity."[99] Thus, assuming that the logic of λόγος is one of philosophy, and that of μῦθος is ambiguous and equivocal, in Plato's view and in Derridean perspective, *khōra* as a third term lies outside this opposition – being obscure itself, it cannot be part of the 'regularity' of λόγος, and, on the other hand, it does not belong to μῦθος. Furthermore, the discourse of *Timaeus* is itself individuated in some parts as μῦθος, and in others as λόγος, which reveals the interest in such a position from the post-structuralist Jacques Derrida, as it is a stand that opens up a discourse in which binarity is both constructed and undermined. Nonetheless, the antagonistic postulation of both terms is "the first step in what Derrida claims as Plato's deconstruction of Vernant, because it is precisely

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[97] Zina Giannopoulos develops an argument in discordance with the statement that *chōra* is not in possession of essential propriety: in – Z. Giannopoulos, 'Derrida's *Khôra*, or Unarming the Tomean Receptacle', in: R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timeous Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009, pp. 165 – 179.

[98] The original version of the essay *Khôra* published in homage to Jean-Pierre Verdant in French in 1993: J. Derrida, *Khôra*. Paris: Éditions Galilee, 1993.

[99] Citation of Jean Pierre Verdant, quoted in: Paul Allen Miller, 'The Platonic Remainder. Derrida's *Khôra* and the *Corpus Plutonium*', in: Miriam Leonard (ed.), *Derrida and Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Oxford Scholarship Online, Sep. 2010, p. 6. URL:http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199545544.001.0001/acprof-9780199545544-chapter-13 (14 April 2017).

the *Timaeus'* formulation of the *khôra* that will ultimately call this opposition into question."[100]

In the context of the mythical dimension of the *Timaeus* discourse, a definition of abyss, which appear as a mythic layer of the dialogue, is presented in the Derridean discourse on *khōra*:

> And yet, half-way through the cycle, won't the discourse on *khōra* have opened, between the sensible and the intelligible, belonging neither to one nor to the other, hence neither to the cosmos as sensible god nor to the intelligible god, an apparently empty space – even though it is no doubt not *emptiness?* Didn't it name a gaping opening, an abyss or a chasm?[101]

Derrida thus expresses an understanding of *khōra* as an abyss – the void in the middle of the book, which counteracts the usual logocentric dispositions of philosophical arguments, and demands a different response, an altered entry into the worldly order. The perception of it as an empty space, filled with sensible things that mirror the paradigm, enables a vision of the discourse of *Timaeus* as a 'mirror' play, and therefore as a choral space – as Plato notes, χώρα is featured by the ability to reflect the sensible entities partaking of its space.[102] Thus, the consideration of *khōra* as an abyss is performed in the discourse by *"a reflection without limit, without bottom or ground, of 'khōral' images, by a play of reflections that induces in us, the readers of Plato, a sense of dizziness and vertigo as before an abyss."*[103] The idea of the abyss in Derrida's essay refers to the rhetorical trope of *mise en abyme*, suggesting that the structure of Plato's text is reflected within itself, which puts forward the idea of the function of *Timaeus* as an enactment of the meaning of *khōra.* The philosopher John Caputo distinguishes several examples of *abyss* (*mises en abyme*) in the discourse of *Timaeus,* namely: temporality, implicated in the preface of the discourse; the role of Socrates

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[100] Paul Allen Miller, op. cit., p. 6.
[101] J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 103.
[102] Derrida also states the capacity of reflecting the sensible things without being altered by the images it reflects, relating this ability to the notions of abyss and *miser en abyme*: If there is indeed a chasm in the middle of the book, a sort of abyss "in" which there is an attempt to think or *say* this abyssal chasm which would be *chôra,* the opening of a place "in" which everything would, at the same time, come to take *place* and *be reflected* (for these are images which are inscribed there), is it insignificant that a *mise en abyme* regulates a certain order of composition of the discourse? – in: J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 104.
[103] J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 86.

as a choral figure; the text of *Timaeus* having a choral structure itself; and, most importantly
– *khōra*'s reflection of Derrida's concept of *différance*.[104]

Of particular interest in the current chapter is the proposal that *khōra* reflects
Derrida's conceptualisation of *différance*:

> Derrida is interested in *khōra* for family reasons, not because *khōra* is a mother or a
> wet nurse, but because she/it is a cousin (cousin/cousine) of deconstruction, a kin of
> the kin-less, of the same non-kind as what he calls *différance*. If *différance* is what
> deconstruction is all about, in a nutshell, then '*khōra* is its sur-name.'[105]

The notion of *différance* is a central concept in Derrida's deconstruction, which
suggests an opening up of a space for 'other significations, 'not yet symbolised' in an
encounter with the 'dominant', canonical writings. Following this logic of thinking
in the context of the engagement with Plato's *Timaeus*, it presupposes a process of building
upon the basis of the philosophical canon, i.e., Platonism, rather than negating it, while
'deconstructing' it, in order to find a "way to read 'otherwise' (*autrement*), in the name
of the incoming of the other (*l'invention de l'autre*)."[106] Thereby, a deconstructive reading
produces an opening between the author's intention of investment of meaning, i.e., what is
aimed to be transmitted, which is submitted to the 'demand' of the writer, and, on the other
hand, what is in fact occurring within the text itself – which, in turn, appropriates the author's
objective, exceeding the value that initially performs the role of 'authoritative' truth. Thus,
the 'excessive' methodology of Derrida incorporates the presence of tradition, in order to
enable the possibility of the transgression of its 'hegemonic' structuration. Furthermore,
the horizon of the reader is entangled within a variety of frameworks, involving socio-
political, linguistic, artistic realms, determining the 'contextual existence' of the individuals
and expressing assumptions other than the author's presuppositions, discerned from the
creator's perception. Naming these aspects of contextual conditions a 'text', 'archi-text' or
'textuality,'[107] Derrida argues that there is no pure transcendental signified; thus, that there is

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[104] J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 86.
[105] *Ibidem*, p. 96; The definition of *khōra* as *différance's surname*: "The bold stroke consists here in going back
behind and below the origin, or also the birth, toward a *necessity* which is neither generative nor engendered and
which carries philosophy, "precedes" (prior to the time that passes or the eternal time before history) and
"receives" the effect, here the image of oppositions (intelligible and sensible): philosophy. This necessity *(khōra*
is its sur-name) seems so virginal that it does not even have the figure of a virgin any longer." Can be found in:
J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 126.
[106] J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 76
[107] *Ibidem*, p. 78

no reference without difference.

Therefore, reference, in Derrida's view, is the function of *différance* – a space between what is encoded within language, i.e., the 'traces', constituting certain arbitrary entities of meaning that are engendered by an exterior sign but that do not correspond solely to one signification, and the articulated meaning, i.e., the 'transcendental signified'. Derridean theory, thus, implies a perception of language that is not a closed system of meanings and values, but rather an open-ended dimension in which different internal relationships of words take place. Moreover, these differences are not prescribed and predicted: "It is always possible, in principle, as a 'structural' matter, to repeat differently; that is built right into the very idea of 'iterability' or 'repetition.'"[108] Additionally, the appearance of non-predicted repetition of these interrelations of 'traces' precedes their effects and, in this manner, constitutes "a quasi-*arche* 'before' the archical law the rules would impose."[109] Meaning and reference come to be perceived as αρχή, reflected in the acknowledgement of a necessity that precedes all oppositions, including the establishment of a metaphysical principle and its antithetic presence.

Following the theoretical proposal of Derrida, the significance of the notion of *khōra* for his philosophical enterprise becomes evident, for it is perceived as the generative opening of the function of language – if any determination of *khōra* is possible, it is defined by Derrida as "the relation of the interval or the spacing to what is lodged in it to be received in it."[110] Therefore, *différance* as *khōra* enables the potentiality of preceding and simultaneously exceeding the two kinds of being, releasing a new entry into language, network, institutions, order, structure, 'other'. The 'unknowability' of the notion of *khōra* and its functioning as a recession from philosophy itself in Plato's work, which embodies the paradigm of metaphysics, alludes to the boundaries of philosophy, i.e., it refers to the core of Derridean deconstruction.

Khōra, according to Derrida, is the space where the dialectical modes of constitution of configuration and deconstruction simultaneously take place, as, being a receptacle, it goes beyond their establishment – a process necessary for the unveiling of a different entry point to 'verity,' authority, order. Thus, Derrida puts forward a concept, which, like the philosopher's theoretical notion of 'text', makes evident its heterogeneity and disrupts the

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[108] J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 101.
[109] *Ibidem*, pp. 101 – 2.
[110] John Caputo notes that 'to speak darkly and through a veil' is engendered by and is a characteristic of, *différance, and khōra* corresponds to that necessity – in: J. D. Caputo, op. cit., p. 101.

dominant articulations, i.e., intelligible and sensible, paradigm and copy, authority and opposition. By focusing on *khōra*, Derrida elucidates the 'force' of the text/*khōra*/art, a power that, as the 'periphery' constituted within the dominant narrative, enables the possibility of reworking the discourse or of remaking the world on a level on which the ontic itself comes into being.

In conclusion, in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, χώρα is the notion that maintains Plato's dialectic open, and this function of 'openness', receptivity and process of unfolding of firm principles, which characterise the receptacle, appear to be inherited in the reworking of the concept in the critical thought of Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida. Χώρα's existence cannot be defined as it precedes and exceeds the boundaries of existence itself, for its nature constitutes a different level of *ontos*. Thus, χώρα as a third kind of being, and consequently art as an embodiment of χώρα, engender a process of thinking differently – focusing on the mode of existence rather than the legitimation; and, transcending postulation and its negation, open the world towards questioning and transformation.

3. Art as an Embodiment of the Space of Χώρα

The current chapter analyses two contemporary artworks – *HAEM Blood Bound* (2016) by Cecilia Jonsson and *Cracks in Time* (2009) by Michal Rovner, from a perspective that encourages their perceptibility as identical to the notion of χώρα, as examined in previous sections. The investigation of these two artworks was initiated in the belief that the works engage on different levels with the conceptualisation of art as a choral space and that their differences – accounting for the medium, visual expression and viewpoint, along with their completeness, which involves different layers of meaning – constitute a compound 'object' of examination.

In the analysis of the *HAEM Blood Bound* project, the text will focus on the conceptual core of the artwork – the use of the placenta, which symbolically establishes the individual's relationship with the maternal realm that produces the environment and defines the conditions for the constitution of the subject. By concentrating on the process of signification – the motile appearance of the subject – the artwork reveals its own quality as a dynamic space in which the materialisation of constantly negotiated categories takes place, and a different kind of subjectivity emerges. The notion of the subject-in-process, proposed in Julia Kristeva's theory, and represented in the concept of semiotic *chôra*, articulated as a space of the pre-condition of signification and timeless renewal of the signifying process, refers to a different modality of significance – the process of configuration and reconfiguration of the individual as exemplified in the *HAEM* project. By disclosing the motile space of 'altered subjectivity', which possesses the 'power' of subversion of hegemonic discourse, the art installation reflects upon the possibilities of alterations, disruptions and deconstructions. Additionally, it will be argued that, by encompassing elements that reflect the choral space, the artwork enacts the functionality of χώρα on several levels, emphasising its aspect of potentiality.

The video work, *Cracks in Time*, by Michal Rovner is examined in relation to Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*, here assumed as the reverse side of the notion of *khôra*.[111] In the artwork, the rows of video projected human forms within a continual sequence create chains of interrelations that inscribe themselves within a repetitive 'ritual' of temporalisation. The opposing directions of concatenations of human figures, the large silhouettes emerging behind them, and their 'dialectical' relationship, engender the appearance of cracks

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[111] As mentioned earlier in this text, the idea of a direct connection between the two notions – *différance* and *khôra* in Jacques Derrida's work is proposed by the philosopher John Caputo.

and fractions (in, and of, time). The abyssal space of the crack appears as a 'spacing' –
the interval, which is not only situated 'in-between', but is, rather, the movement, the process
of the unsettling of fixed constructions, and moreover, the generative force of the choral
space, i.e., of the artwork. It becomes the operation in which the interrelation of traces
of reference and difference exceeds the categorical oppositions of presence and absence,
visibility and invisibility, presence and temporality. In creating cracks by the continual
renewal and negotiation of dominant postulations, the motional presence/absence of human
figures transforms the artwork into the space of *khôra,* endlessly reworking and unfolding
dominant narratives of history, and in the repetitious motility enables the ending from which
a new beginning originates, initiating a process of change.

3.1. The *HAEM* project

"For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything
you gain, you lose something else." – Ralph W. Emerson[112]

HAEM Blood Bound[113] (fig. 1) is a bio-art project by the artist Cecilia Jonsson and scientist
Rodrigo Leite de Oliveira.[114] Incorporating the competencies of different fields – arts, life
sciences, and metallurgy – the project focuses on the essential role of iron in human life.
The iron used as the physical basis of the artwork is extracted from the blood protein
haemoglobin of postpartum human placentas[115] – the transitional organ, which provides
a direct connection and the first point of encounter between mother and developing child.
Through a metallurgical process, the mineral is transformed into metal in the form of
a magnetised compass needle, floating in the middle of a slowly rotating glass bowl filled
with water, whose pattern is inspired by the labyrinthine form of blood vessels within the
central region of the human placenta (figs. 2, 3, 4). The artwork engages with the idea of the
placenta as a space where, despite the complexity of the labyrinth-like structure, where one

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[112] The quote is essential to the project and is cited on its website:
https://www.haemproject.com/haem (01 June 2017).
[113] The work is realised in partnership with the Netherlands Cancer Institute and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek
hospital.
[114] The artwork consists of an installation, sound composition by Marcello Sodano and a HD Video by Signe
Tørå Karsrud and Sergio Cuervo Gonzalez, and was presented at MU Eindhoven as part of the exhibition *Fluid
Matters* (December 2016 – February 2017), focused on the concept of fluidity and different types of
interconnected liquids. Video teaser of the project and the video, which was part of the exhibition, can be found
here: https://vimeo.com/203739981; https://vimeo.com/195481116 (01 June 2017).
[115] For the *HAEM* project 69 donated placentas were used, from which a compass needle weighing 3,5 grams
was created. The placentas were collected on a voluntary basis.

traditionally experiences one's loss and finds oneself again, the first connection between mother and child is formed. The material of the magnetised needle – iron – is also relevant to this maternal-infantile relationship as, by transferring oxygen from the mother to the foetus, it ensures the interaction between them through the network of blood vessels, and becomes of essential significance to human beings. To symbolise that directed movement, the compass needle is shown as a guide that suggests the idea of shaping one's autonomy from the resources provided by one's mother, instead of assigning her the role of guidance in life. The labyrinth itself is invested with the meaning of the challenge of finding one's path, and the recognition of one's position in society, which shapes the matrix of social relations of individuals. According to the artist, the project reflects on "the transformation of maternal resources into valuable personal processes, and on their power to direct us throughout life in the decisions we make, and directions we take, ultimately shaping who we are and the world we live in."[116] Taking further this statement, the *HAEM* project could be thought of as an investigation of issues such as the process of articulation of subjectivity, and therefore meaning; individual orientation, and consequently social interconnectedness – as individuals emerge in their relationships, constantly reshaping themselves through their interactions; and ultimately addresses the questions of social existence and significance.

In exploring the flow of configuration of subjectivity in the developmental process of distinguishing the subject from its maternal space, the *HAEM* project focuses on, and symbolically makes evident, the passage towards selfhood, unveiling the motile organising of singularity and disclosing a phase of 'pre-subjectivity'. This phase, in which the subject and object are not yet signified and the modality of meaning-production differs from linguistic signification as the distinction between real and symbolic, reveals the dynamics of the semiotic *chôra*,[117] examined in Julia Kristeva's work in relation to her psychoanalytical theory of infantile development. In Kristeva's proposal, the pre-linguistic realm of not-yet-meaning – the concept of the semiotic – which consequently comes to be organised and submitted to the societal rules of the symbolic order, is identified with the infant's relation to the mother's body.[118]

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[116] This statement by the artist can be found on the website: https://www.haemproject.com/ (01 June 2017).

[117] The concept of *chôra* in Kristeva's work is considered in the second chapter and for this reason will not be examined anew.

[118] According to Kristeva this stage refers to the connection of mother and child while in the womb as well as after birth, when there is not yet an awareness of a separate self, and the access to language and social order is not yet organised. This aspect of Julia Kristeva's theory is examined in – R. West-Pavlov, Space in Theory. Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze. Amsterdam - New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2009, p. 38.

At this moment of the child's development – which the scholar names *thetic*[119] – the pre-verbal capacities of meaning are embedded within the segmentary presence of the linguistic regime of colours, sounds, sensations and movement, and suggest the infant's situation in which the child has not-yet accessed the symbolic functioning, not-yet entered the order of language and discovered the notion of the lacked object: the articulation of singularity and affirmation of independence from the mother. Thus, the *thetic* stage encloses the significance of the role of the maternal body, which enables a corporeal exchange between mother and child, implying "social imperatives to the body of a subject, where neither the body nor the subject is constituted as such,"[120] and mediates the functioning of semiotic and symbolic, creating the pre-condition of signification, for subjectivity comes to be produced within the encounter between semiotic and symbolic disposition.

Furthermore, the source of the drive that stands at the core of this process, at the core of Kriseva's notion of semiotic *chôra*, "works to articulate *preverbal capacities* to struggle with an absolutely unmasterable otherness that is not (yet) 'outside'."[121] The biological inscription of the symbolic – the corporeal presence of the mother's body (the placenta), encompasses the subversive 'power' of the semiotic, for it is engendered by the drive that originates within the corporeal element. In this manner, the conditioning of subject formation in the *HAEM* project – the use of maternal placenta as a basis and a point of departure and its transformation into a mechanism for development and autonomy – unveils the 'semiotic capacities' of the foetus, which entangles itself in a struggle when in an encounter with the realms of the symbolic, being not yet inscribed within the regulations of the symbolic disposition. The organic form, the 'placental' iron needle within the liquefied environment in the labyrinth-patterned bowl, may then be perceived as a 'symbolisation' of a heterogeneous entry of the semiotic into the symbolic realm, as precisely the 'bodily' inscription of the constitution of the subject emphasises the potentiality of the subversive dimensions of the semiotic, for it relies on "an exposure to otherness that brings about nonsignifying *alterations* in subjectivity at the level of the body."[122] In this way, the artistic space of *HAEM*

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[119] Kriseva refers the *thetic* phase to a stage in the process of signification in which the dynamics of the semiotic *chôra* engenders the emergence of the 'subject-in-process,' as it articulates itself as an object simultaneously with the constitution of the subject. Additionally, in her theory of the semiotic *chôra*, she refers to Plato's χώρα's qualities of maternal and nourishing matrix.

[120] S. Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 45.

[121] *Ibidem*, p. 45.

[122] S. Beardsworth, op. cit., p. 44; According to Kristeva the space of negotiation and articulation of subject-object distinction manifests in art, as well as maternity: "The speaker reaches this limit (of the symbolic)…only by virtue of a particular, discursive practice called 'art'. A woman also attains it…through the strange form of

as a dynamic model of the emergence of singularity reveals the subversive potentiality of the infant in its transformation into the individual, which integrates itself in the fabric of social relations. Thereupon, the conceptual idea of the artwork can be seen as the pre-subjective space of *chôra*, which may consequently be considered as the condition of social space – the pre-subjective spatiality in which the process of constituting the necessary substructure that underpins and motivates the subversive potential of all signification takes place. In this manner, the *HAEM* project creates a space in which the dynamics of individual 'evolvement' constantly negotiates the process of ontological formation and consequently conditions its potentiality of 'disrupting' the symbolic operations, while reflecting on the attempt of actualisation of a different mode of social existence, one that discomposes socio-political hegemonic constructions.

By addressing the labyrinthine structure of the human placenta as a challenge in the process of self-identification and individual development, the work of Cecilia Jonsson approaches the necessity of recognition of one's own position and the shaping of the social realm by leaving the maternal body. The artist intends to expose the challenge to the "classical notion of protective motherhood",[123] suggesting that, on the one hand, the placenta labyrinth is a vital source of life, on which the survival of a foetus depends, and, on the other, it reveals itself as probation for the individual, engendering its abilities of self-orientation and constitution. Taking this examination further, it should be noted that in engaging with the idea of parental protection, the artwork, perceived as a choral space, surpasses physical dimensions by entering into the operations of the social realm. The decisive removal from the maternal space is motivated by Kristeva by the risk of exclusion from socio-political and linguistic processes: "We need to recognize that an identification which is supposedly masculine and paternal in character, because it is the basic for symbolization and for temporality, is necessary, because it allows one to have a voice in the congregation of political and historical participation."[124] In Kristeva's terms, in order for the 'subject-in-process' to enter the normativity of Oedipal functioning, so that it can subvert the social praxis, the act of leaving the maternal body becomes urgent: the articulation of meaning occurs in the process of "becoming this 'I' by breaking away from instinctual, biological

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split symbolization (threshold of language and instinctual drive, of the 'symbolic' and the 'semiotic') of which the act of giving birth consists." – in: J. Kristeva, *Desire in language. A semiotic approach to literature and art*, L.S. Roudiez (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 240 – 241.
[123] The citation is from the statement of the artist on the project website: https://www.haemproject.com/haem (01 June 2017).
[124] Cited in: R. West-Pavlov, op. cit., p. 51.

(and also maternal) dependence."[125] The *HAEM* project, thus, 'encourages'
the transformation of the symbolic, allowing the constitution of the individual by negotiating
its relationships with the maternal body within a space where the generative 'force' of the
somatic produces the dimensions of social 'spatiality.' In this process of constant
construction and re-composition of human articulation, the space itself (the artwork) becomes
a generative condition of social significance, reflecting the very fabric of social
interconnection and environments:[126] "It is in those spatial processes of configuration and
re-configuration that human life takes place and unfolds its unceasing dynamic."[127]

Following this logic, the social spatiality reflected in the artwork may be recognised
as an abyss – a 'void' space that does not appear as a vacuum but rather 'contains' the
perpetual motion of open-ended series of articulations and situations.[128] As mentioned in
the previous section, in relation to the structure of Plato's *Timaeus*, Jacques Derrida refers
to the concept of *khōra* as an abyss:

> If there is indeed a chasm in the middle of the book, a sort of abyss 'in' which there is
> an attempt to think or say this abyssal chasm which would be *khōra,* the opening
> of a place 'in' which everything would, at the same time, come to take *place* and *be*
> *reflected* (for these are images which are inscribed there), is it insignificant that
> a *mise en abyme* regulates a certain order of composition of the discourse?[129]

This understanding is embedded within a perception of the discourse of *Timaeus* as a 'mirror
play', suggesting that the structure of Plato's text is reflected within itself; thus, it becomes
the enactment of the meaning of *khōra*. In this sense, along with the already examined
suggestions of John Caputo in his work on Derridean thought – the presence of several *mises
en abyme* in Plato's discourse, from which the most significant noted has been the choral
reflection of Derrida's concept of *différance* – the idea that the *HAEM* project is another
self-reflection of the choral space is proposed. The artwork itself makes evident several
replications of *khōra – mises en abyme*: the motility of a process of signification,

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[125] J. Kristeva, op. cit., p. 225.
[126] Russell West-Pavlov proposes an understanding of space as a dimension, which is the medium of its own productive agency, and is negotiated by human action – in: R. West-Pavlov, op. cit., pp. 19 – 21.
[127] R. West-Pavlov, op. cit., p. 25.
[128] As mentioned in the first chapter of the current research, the material substratum of Plato's χώρα is understood by some scholars as a series of flows that constantly reconfigure the space of the receptacle – in: D. Zeyl, 'Visualizing Platonic Space', in: R. Mohr, K. Sanders and B. Sattler (eds.), *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2009, pp. 117 – 131.
[129] J. Derrida, *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 104.

i.e., articulation of selfhood, 'symbolised' by the movement of the installation itself; the 'functionality' of placenta, which takes the place of a conceptual core of the work; and the suggestive meaning of the labyrinthine structure of the human placenta, referred to the struggle in the experience towards autonomy and self-identification. The circular motion of the main part of the installation could be associated with the developmental process of constructing and perpetual reworking of a 'different kind' of subjectivity, since by its movement this process releases the stable ground of dominant existence, and disrupts the authoritative foundation of 'Oedipal' subjectivity. Additionally, by focusing on the functionality of placenta, which is a transitional organ that appears and disappears in the maternal body during a human's life, the artwork implies within itself a logic of operations, immanent to the functionality of *khōra*[130] – its heterogeneity, its 'seat' within the oppositional relationship of presence/absence, visibility/invisibility and, therefore, its 'in-betweenness'. The labyrinthine form of the placenta, in turn, accommodates an understanding that implicates another enactment of *khōra* – the 'new beginning' in the middle: "Then it seemed like falling into a labyrinth: we thought we were at the finish, but our way bent round and we found ourselves as it were back at the beginning..."[131] This conceptualisation of the labyrinth[132] unveils the idea of commencement in the middle, a feature of the text of *Timaeus*, which performs the choral space, and enables the identification of the artwork's realisation of *khōra* with the aperture 'in-between' the oppositional modes of composing of the dialectical structures, suggesting another logic of operation – one that initiates alteration.

By reflecting upon the constitution of an individual, reconfiguring oneself in its relationships with others, the artwork raises the question of social interrelations that establish the social existence, and on the role of humans in this process of socio-political structuration. The mobile developmental process of individual's emergence produces a constant motion that has the capacity of disrupting the dominant fixity of 'Oedipalisation'. Consequently, the dynamics of this origination motivates a different ontology – the not-yet-symbolised subject that has the potentiality of subversion of the dominant discourse by 'inserting' itself within. Therefore, the *HAEM* project encloses the qualities of dynamics, different modality

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[130] An explanation of the physiology of the placenta can be found in the videowork accompanying the installation of the *HAEM* project: https://vimeo.com/195481116 (01 June 2017).

[131] These are words of Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Euthydemus*. The full text of the dialogue can be found here: http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthydemus.html (07 June 2017).

[132] Additionally, the experiencing of the labyrinth refers to the experience of timelessness, as when one moves though it, one loses the sense of time and space. The metaphorical meaning of the concept of the labyrinth is examined in: P. Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth: From Classical Antiquity Through the Middle Ages*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1992.

of existence and 'in-betweenness' – features of the notion of χώρα, enabling through them a reconsideration of current structurations.

3.2. *Cracks in Time*

The artwork, *Cracks in Time* (2009),[133] is a video projection by the visual artist Michal Rovner, who, engaging with different media – film, sculpture, and installation – addresses issues of remembrance, history and politics in her work. *Cracks in Time* is a site-specific video installation that creates a dialogue between the architectural context of its exposition – a space of inherited memory, and contemporary situations in human life.[134] The work is part of an ongoing project of the artist, which employs the idea of the crack (as an aperture) and the process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction.

Cracks in Time (figs. 5, 6, 7) is a video projection on a wall, in which innumerable human figures reduced to the size of a letter are moving in opposing directions, constructing endless chains of motion while, simultaneously, large forms of human bodies are emerging behind them (figs. 5, 6). These large-scale silhouettes interact with the fluctuating shapes as if antagonistic forces of power encountered each other and, in their contestation, created breaks and fractions. On the other hand, embracing one another in an extended continuity, the flow of minuscule human forms initiates the mythological expression of the work, in which an exposition of the collision of dominant powers and counter-forces takes place, positioning the interconnected 'brotherhood'[135] within a repetitive passage, evoking the feeling of a discerned temporal dimension. This temporal linearity becomes disrupted by the constantly emerging breaks (in time) that inscribe historicity within a process of ceaseless continuation of creation, deconstruction and reconstruction. Further, the miniature human configurations do not have a point of departure, as they are continuously moving in time and space while

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[133] Short video teaser of the work produced by the Multimedia Art Museum Moscow MAMM: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsj85DBp9Co (01 June 2017). It was created for Michal Rovner's exhibition *Dislocations* there in 2015: http://www.mamm-mdf.ru/en/exhibitions/mr/?sphrase_id=55265 (01 June 2017).

[134] As an enormous video projection on the walls of the building in which it is exhibited, the artwork is intended as an interaction between the space of its exposition and its viewers. In their article 'Re-Imagining the Border: Border Art as a Space of Critical Imagination and Creative Resistance', Giudice and Giubilaro investigate the phenomenological aspect of arts engaged with issues of political boundaries, and refer to the exhibiting of *Cracks in Time* in Castello di Rivoli, emphasising the interaction between classic Italian frescos and the responses of the viewer to contemporary visual work – in: C. Giudice, C. Giubilaro, 'Re-Imagining the Border: Border Art as a Space of Critical Imagination and Creative Resistance', *Geopolitics*, 20:1 (2014), p. 84.

[135] According to the authors, the cracks in time are generated by the fluctuations of people: "Rovner describes humans being bound in a chain of brotherhood (or sisterhood?), all equal, but able, unfortunately, to create breaks and deep cracks, as scars, dramatically interrupting the never-ending flow and movement of life." – in: C. Giudice, C. Giubilaro, op. cit., p. 84.

unfolding the dimension of the artwork as a completed whole rather than a fixed locus, where traditionally something – being, existence, entities – begins and ends.

Along with the preoccupation with the idea of internal structure of time and the role of historicity embedded within hegemonic narratives, by transcending the specificity of a categorical site of demarcation and delimitation, the artist raises the question of political separateness and addresses the notion of borderline. While engaging with the concept of boundary that marks the constitution of the discrepant mode of existence within the socio-political habitat of the current world, and transgressing the restrictions of power registration of the border, Michal Rovner focuses on the reflection of its meanings as a potent and motile field:[136] "Borders are dynamic not only because of their internal dynamics, but also because they are perpetually signified and negotiated by moving bodies…Borders are spaces of interaction, where meanings are continuously performed through the bodies of those who cross them."[137] By exceeding the notion of boundaries and their obstructions, the interaction of different, hostile realities becomes visible at the site of the borderline where the process of its surmounting takes place.

Reality is the starting point for the work of Michal Rovner as she records real objects, which she subsequently modifies, erasing identifying details and context and, in this manner, displacing the essence from 'representation' towards another dimension – the space of 'non-place'. For *Cracks in Time*, three groups of fifty people all aged fifty, from Russia, Romania, and Israel, were recorded, and their images were then reduced to silhouettes of persons of the size of a text in perpetual movement – "the unresolved text about humanity."[138] The creation of a flow of human forms could be perceived as a fluctuation of any substance in nature, or a metaphor for ideology and politics: "My work is never directly political but there is almost always some kind of political undercurrent or a little reminder."[139] According to the artist, the movement is not specifically political connotated, but the pattern of dynamics – the dynamics of people interacting in distinct situations – relates to the contemporary oscillations of different tensions, ideologies, desires or interests, producing frictions and temporal disjunctions. In blurring the boundaries between reality and memory, presence

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[136] C. Giudice, C. Giubilaro, op. cit., p. 80

[137] *Ibidem*, p. 82

[138] A lecture by Michal Rovner where she uses that phrase is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x_Nb88OJpc (05 June 2017). In this context, the artist shares in an interview: "I wanted to stretch the timeline to the beginning of text, to have a dialogue on the notion of permanent and temporary, and to use human figures as notations" http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/michal-rovner-pace-gallery/ (05 June 2017).

[139] Interview with Michal Rovner at Ruhrtriennale, 2012: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc3m5sRRnq0 (05 June 2017).

and absence, permanence and temporality, Rovner rejects the recognition of borders, creating a vigourous space in which all things are inserted, rather than designing a gap of separation and political segregation. In this 'abyss', the chain of human figures becomes the carrier of the idea of notations, of letters, manifesting the 'text' of human condition, and unfolding the temporality of the mobile and internal relationships within which human beings are interwoven.

Exposing the motility of the flows of configurations that unsettles the dominant stability of authoritative discourse – as the act of mobility creates temporal interruptions and historical gaps – the artist encourages a reconsideration of the notion of the crack, allowing its perception as an aperture, as a 'spacing' that could generate the origination of a new beginning and inaugurate a process of renewal and change. Such acknowledgment of the 'functionality' of the concept of the 'break' relates to the idea of 'spacing', employed with the meaning of origination, of a realm of ontological propulsion – a concept offered and investigated in Jacques Derrida's theoretical proposal of the notion of *différance*:

>…spacing is a concept which … carries the meaning of a productive, positive, generative force. Like *dissemination*, like *différance*, it carries along with it a genetic motif: it is not only the interval, the space constituted between two things (which is the usual sense of spacing), but also spacing, the operation, or in any event, the movement of setting aside.[140]

The 'crack' becomes the presence of a space, which in Derrida's theory relates to the idea of an entity, accounted as extraneous to the text that cannot be assigned a place within the system of signification of the text itself. It does not possess meaning and values reducible to the regime of representation, but plays a crucial role and is indispensable to its functioning. Moreover, within this dimension, various entities are entangled in a process of constituting different internal relationships that imply the presence/absence of the elements: "The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself."[141] According to Derrida, within discourse (whether visual or linguistic), no entity can exist without being in relation to another body, which surmises its visibility – it becomes a trace, present and absent at the same time: "Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is

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[140] The quote by Jacques Derrida is cited in: R. West-Pavlov, op. cit., p. 17
[141] J. Derrida, *Positions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 24

anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces."[142] *Cracks in Time* as a projection of human forms – 'traces' of people,[143] as they exist between reality and the realm of imagination and are not impersonated by specific individuals, twists between presence and absence, conditioning structures that cannot be understood in terms of the opposition visible/invisible, and within which elements inscribe their interconnections and distinctions. These traces of differences, of spacing, cannot be submitted to either of the terms – presence or absence – and enable the potentiality of preceding and exceeding the two kinds of designation, supporting a new entry into signification, order, structure. In this manner, the artwork implicates the functionality of Derrida's *différance* and *khōra* (being its reflection), as, by opening the space of the crack, which negotiates the interrelations of reference and difference, it disrupts the structures of ruling discourse, going beyond the boundaries of the limitations of the dialectical modes of configuration and deconstruction. The moving images in the artwork become inscribed within "a becoming-space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from one to the other,"[144] or the space of *khōra*, which as a generative force and an open-ended fluidity destabilises the static structure of signification and enables an altered functionality of order.

Additionally, there is no subject before signification: the interrelations of 'traces' precede the law of dialectical existence, recognising the necessity that anticipates the oppositional organisation and, through repetition that implies the presence of non-predicted differences, opens up the possibility of new beginnings. Similarly, depicted through repetition of the sequence constituting a cycle of simultaneous beginnings and endings, the endless moving human 'traces' become the flowing of time. For Rovner, the movement of the figures corresponds with the repetitive pattern in history: "For me the history is a timeline of cracks, of collisions, breaks. After every break there is a new beginning."[145] The artwork then implies a space in which the association with a present reality is always altering, affirming that after every crack there is a new beginning, distinct from the previous. Moreover, the identification of *Cracks in Time* with the choral space unveils that the 'crack' is not only a marker of a new beginning, but, rather, an opening, a generative 'energy', which produces new modality of existence – different subjectivity that can recompose the

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[142] J. Derrida, *Positions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 26.

[143] 'Reality' is held by the projected images as a mirror holds a reflection, which Plato defines as action of the choral space.

[144] J. Derrida, op. cit., p. 27

[145] The quote is from aa lecture by Michal Rovner that can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x_Nb88OJpc (05 June 2017).

postulations of the existing order. Thus, it reveals an ontological inauguration within different kind of temporalisation that makes possible the articulation of subversive singularity,[146] and by its motility, providing an 'aperture', it reconsiders the organisation and operations of the current world. In an 'archaeological' way, by creating cracks, the narration of figures manifests the potentiality of 'undoing' of the authoritative narratives that could allow a symbolic renewal of meaning, values and the world, circumscribed by the perpetual process of creation and configuration.

Furthermore, the notion of potentiality addressed by *Cracks in Time* relates to its occurrence within the dynamics of movement and emergence, deploying the idea that the actuality of potential is motion.[147] It is defined as a capacity, a source of movement and change that, as an act that has the capacity to be a source of both, performs an activity – it sets in motion, which is already an act – the act of resistance against actualisation. The resistibility, as an intrinsic feature of potentiality, is defined by the dynamic category of active potentiality or "potentiality in action... an act-potentiality."[148] Therefore, the act of potentiality of the artwork unveils the ontological dynamics of action that can address the possibility of subversion and resistance, and elicit the renewal of imperative presuppositions. By the uninterrupted passage of movement, the cracks, i.e., the opening of temporal space creates the possibility of revision and modification, and hence the potential inauguration of transformation.

The analysed artworks – *HAEM Blood Bound* (2016) by Cecilia Jonsson, and *Cracks in Time* (2009) by Michal Rovner – propose a reflection upon the present-day society and current socio-political narratives by engaging with the ideas of motion, origination and creation. By addressing notions of motility, which set the disruptive processes of unfolding and reconfiguration of power-dominated structures, the artworks suggest the idea of creation and renewal in which the genesis of a new modality of existence takes place. Unraveling a different functioning, Jonsson's work and Rovner's video installation unveil themselves as an enactment of the choral space, which is featured by the capacity of restructuring of what it precedes/exceeds, and therefore, of transition and transformation.

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[146] According to Julia Kristeva the cyclical temporality creates another subjectivity – in: J. Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7:1 (1981), pp. 13 – 35.

[147] In his article Boyan Manchev refers to Aristotle's Metaphysics: 'I call the actuality of the potential as such, movement' [Aristotle, 1984a, Book XI, 9, 1065b16]) - in: B. Manchev, 'Potentiality, Exploitation and Resistance of Bodies-Subjects. For a Persistent Transformation', *Critique & Humanism*, 40 (2012), URL: http://boyanmanchev.net/en/books-and-essays/philosophy/potentiality.html (06 June 2017).

[148] B. Manchev, op. cit. URL: http://boyanmanchev.net/en/books-and-essays/philosophy/potentiality.html (06 June 2017).

Conclusion

By putting forward Plato's notion of χώρα, a distinct interpretation and perception of contemporary visual arts has been attempted in the present work. The analysis of the art projects *HAEM* by Cecilia Jonsson and *Cracks in Time* by Michal Rovner, entitled here to embody choral space, aims to demonstrate that both artworks reveal deeper layers of meaning, apparent only when presupposing the implication of χώρα.

The *HAEM* project investigates the fluidity of life processes within the perpetual interactions of liquid environments, aiming at a consideration of the dimensions of malleability as a symbolisation of personal identity. The work specifically engages with the relationship between mother and child, and addresses the issues of preconditions and the circumstances of human life – challenges and choices in the existence of an individual. The stated concern of the artwork is expressed by the creation of an installation, a sound composition, and a video work, displayed in a dark room. Entering the exhibition space, one encounters the compass' central position and its illumination in the dark environment, alluding to the association with a relic, with the idea of life as a sacred dimension. This view evokes the question of what human existence is, and inscribes the embodied presence of the artwork into a conception of a space of reconsideration and rearticulation of life itself. Such a perception engenders the need for further investigation, which could possibly unveil the societal significance of this, at first glance, 'commentary' on being. The need for theoretical framing becomes the necessary condition for a possible disclosure of the artwork's 'force', and makes the preoccupation with the concept of χώρα essential, as only through identification of the artwork with the choral space does the exposure of its engagement with the structurations of societal relations in the present-day world become visible.

The *HAEM* project's dynamics and ontological aspect are features of χώρα that create the grounds for considering subjectivity beyond the personal level of an individual's development, but rather and more importantly as part of a larger space – the matrix of social relationality, which identifies the urgency of awareness of the crucial role of the human within socio-political interrelations and the process of establishment of social existence. Recognising this artwork's qualities as the features of the receptacle unravels an interpretation that exceeds the initial implication of the 'manipulation' of life and organic fluidity, and acknowledges the potential of art to uncover a different subjectivity that articulates the significance of the reconfiguration of dominant socio-political narratives. Thinking of the *HAEM* project as a space of dynamic ontology raises awareness of the

emergence of the individual within the constant fluidity of interconnections, in this manner allowing the work to express its social relevance. Thus, further than perceiving the project as a concept that works with organic materials and engages with narratives about challenges and difficult choices in life, the perspective of χώρα proposes its understanding as a space, containing the potential form of social transformation, engendered by the idea of its realisation as a different mode of existence, which reveals its being as an altered subjectivity. In this way, the investigation of the artwork traces the involvement of another level of singularity within the social matrix of relations, with regard to biological fluidity, and focuses on the exposure of the workings of the 'subject-in-process', implicated in, and resistant to, dominant constructions necessary for their re-annunciation.

Michal Rovner's *Cracks in Time* makes evident the repetitive motion of time: on the one hand, the movement of innumerable human figures and their interaction with each other; and on the other, their encounter with the large-scale figures appearing in the background that symbolise the dominant 'forces' and impose their modelling on the constant flow of existence. The simultaneous reciprocity of forces and counter-powers generates breaks in time – breaks that disrupt the temporal linearity of historicity, inscribing it within a process of an unceasing continuity of creation, deconstruction and reconstruction. The sensation generated in the artwork by the emergence of the 'cracks in time', which constantly enlarge in the course of the motion of the currents of human configurations, suggests the feelings of suspense and instability, and involves the bodily senses of the viewer. The spectator's position in the surrounding space creates the feeling of immersion in the images around one's gaze, and consequently one's involvement in the narratives within the space, thereby enabling entry into a particular temporality produced by Rovner's work.

In perceiving *Cracks in Time* as an embodiment of χώρα, the temporality suggested by the video installation not only differs from the idea of a teleological evolvement, of a linear and developmental unfolding, but moreover makes visible the functioning of Plato's 'third kind', which implies a peculiar time that generates a distinct subjectivity.[149] This singularity has the capacity to create new discourses 'subverting' the dominant narratives, and allows the insertion into history and simultaneously the refusal of "the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time on an experiment carried out in the name of

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[149] Julia Kristeva articulates a time different from the linear in relation to female subjectivity: "As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilisations." – in: J. Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7:1 (1981), p. 16. Cyclical temporality and female subjectivity are assigned the role of χώρα as a space attributed to women in Kristeva's thought – the matrix and nourishing space.

the irreducible difference…"[150] The subjectivity produced by different temporalisation, as exposed by the video work, is able to disrupt, reconsider, reimagine, recreate, and provide an aperture, allowing the conditioning of revision and modification, and makes apparent the potentiality for a commencement of transformation. Thus, the engagement with the concept of χώρα allows the artwork to suggest a mode of functioning, which produces a peculiar space of generation. In this manner, the investigation of *Cracks in Time* transcends an understanding of the crack as a repetitive disruption of the linear course of history, which inscribes the socio-historical existence, proposing a perception of its meaning as an opening, a generative force, a space of becoming – an aperture of generation in the cyclical temporality of the narrative.

In conclusion, both artworks disclose further understandings when perceived as χώρα. The embodiment of space, additionally, communicates with the perception of the spectator, who is triggered to think of issues of social relevance in contemporary world. This involvement of the viewer implies the presence of art's dynamic forces, and their capacities for engagement with and reconfiguration of conditions of order and abilities to resist structures of dominant suppositions, opening up space for reflection, transition, and transformation. The dynamic, ontological expression of art encloses and underlines its role in society as an essential factor for reconsideration and questioning, caused by its functioning on the level of a different modality – the modus of existence of the unknowable space of χώρα.

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[150] J. Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7:1 (1981), p. 20.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Cecilia Jonsson, *HAEM Blood Bound*, 2016.
Mixed media installation including compass apparatus, custom made glass bowl, vinyl letters,
sound composition, HD Video, concrete, water, and electronics, dimensions variable,
MU Art Space, Eindhoven, The Netherlands. Photo by Cihad Caner.
Source: http://ceciliajonsson.com/index.php?/installation/haem/ (10 January 2017).

Fig. 2. Cecilia Jonsson, *HAEM Blood Bound*, 2016.
Mixed media installation including compass
apparatus, custom made glass bowl, vinyl letters,
sound composition, HD Video, concrete, water,
electronics, dimensions variable,
MU Art Space, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.
Photo by Cihad Caner. Source:
http://ceciliajonsson.com/index.php?/installation/haem
/(10 January 2017).

Fig. 3. Cecilia Jonsson, *HAEM Blood Bound*, 2016.
Mixed media installation including compass apparatus,
custom made glass bowl, vinyl letters, sound
composition, HD Video, concrete, water, electronics,
dimensions variable,
MU Art Space, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.
Photo by Signe Tørå Karsrud. Source:
http://ceciliajonsson.com/index.php?/installation/haem
/ (10 January 2017).

Fig. 4. Cecilia Jonsson, *HAEM Blood Bound*, 2016.
Mixed media installation including compass apparatus, custom made glass bowl, vinyl letters,
sound composition, HD Video, concrete, water, electronics, dimensions variable,
MU Art Space, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.
Video still by Signe Tørå Karsrud.
Source: http://ceciliajonsson.com/index.php?/installation/haem/ (10 January 2017).

Fig. 5. Michal Rovner, *Cracks in Time*, 2009. Mortar, pigments and video projection, dimensions variable, Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow, Russia. Source: http://www.mamm-mdf.ru/en/exhibitions/mr/ (15 May 2016).

Fig. 6. Michal Rovner, *Cracks in Time*, 2009. Mortar, pigments and video projection, dimensions variable, Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow, Russia. Source: http://www.mamm-mdf.ru/en/exhibitions/mr/ (15 May 2016).

Fig. 7. Michal Rovner, *Cracks in Time* (detail), 2009.
Mortar, pigments and video projection, dimensions variable,
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Source: http://www.mamm-mdf.ru/en/exhibitions/mr/ (15 May 2016).

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or produced by another party in fulfilment, partial or otherwise, of any other degree or diploma at another university or institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Iva Boykova Buzhashka, July 2017