



The Mythopoetics of Space in the *Timaeus*

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The universe is a machine for making gods

—Henry Bergson

(Bergson 1935: 306)

The reading of Plato's *Timaeus* leaves the contemporary reader with a special kind of disappointment. Despite the fact that we read in its pages some of the most spectacular and perennial myths of the Western world, modern readers feel rather uneasy with Plato's physiology and psychology, astronomy and medicine, even with the most challenging element of the whole dialogue, its underlying political agenda—which refers to his whole philosophical project, and its powerful indictment by Sir Karl Popper. Yet today the reader of philosophy lives in a completely different perceptual world which views such grand narratives about the natural world with suspicion and dysphoria. The totalisation of experience within a scheme of universal applicability seems rather incongruous with the postmodernist project of fragmentation, the decentred subject, anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism. Within such context the accretions on platonic writing resulting from centuries of readings have indeed obscured the relevance of his writing to our present day thinking.

Certainly, Plato thought in a completely different way from us—and we need a large degree of analogical imagination in order to establish connections with his era and its semantic horizons. It seems however that we can hypothesise what made Plato construct his grand theory of everything in this dialogue after the rather “de-constructive” questioning



of his early and middle dialogues. We suggest that what incited Plato to move to such grand cartography of everything was the need for order within a history both personal and collective that was tumultuous and turbulent, in constant transition and self-contradiction. The need for order makes Plato take extreme risks with his own philosophical vision—and despite the bleak and rather outlandish ideal city as illustrated in the *Laws* and to a certain degree in the *Republic*, the vision of *Timaeus* is even more pessimistic and depressing, offering a rather personal melancholic epilogue to the grand myths of the *Republic* and of the *Politicus*.

In his old age Plato had lost the usual euphoric charm of his earlier writing—one could easily be tempted to claim that in his later works the philosopher inaugurated an autobiographical mode of representing thinking; indeed it seems that Plato depicted his personal anxieties and intellectual dead-ends in an artistically provocative manner which focused on deep processes of creative thinking instead of presenting syllogisms and arguments through dramatic exchange of ideas and their refutation. In his later dialogues, like *Parmenides*, *Sophistes*, *Politicus* and *Philebus*, Plato seems almost lost within the complexities of his own dramatic economy—the reader thinks that is the philosopher himself who becomes the dramatic persona of his own writing. Most of the dialogues end with a deferral of conclusive knowledge; indeed they end with the recognition of a systemic *aporia* within Plato's own philosophical project.

Moreover in this later work the philosophy itself seems to embody a vision of introspective self-questioning introducing a kind of irony, which now does not involve an ignorant interlocutor but the philosopher himself. In his last works Plato seems to go beyond his own philosophical grounds and tries to bring together a *summa* of his philosophical approach to thinking, writing and myth-making. Indeed the dramatic economy of previous dialogues, punctuated by images and myths, is now almost totally replaced by the complete domination of the mythopoetics of his own writing, by narrating myths which involve the philosopher himself and recapitulate his philosophy through the language of myth so relentlessly criticised earlier.

In this paper we approach *Timaeus* not as a *summa* of the natural

knowledge of the period of its writing, whenever that was; or as a Pythagorean tractate in an attempt to discover mathematical regularities upon the chaotic universe by finding its structural patterns; or discuss its psychology and the pathology of the human body. We suggest that *Timaeus-Critias* is a highly personal document, in which Plato the artist dealt with the dilemmas of his own philosophy in all levels of its articulation but more crucially with the manner in which all central questions of his philosophy become part of a mythopoetic structure about cosmic order. We see his final dialogues as works of imagination and artistic consummation in an attempt to solve the problem of forms and their relationship with the mind.

Philosophical questions are still present indeed but now they are parts of the general pattern of figurative thinking that wants to offer a coherent counter-*mythos* to the dominant world-image of his day. Here, Plato's thinking reflects on the limits of knowledge and the limitations of understanding; but it deals with the problem of knowledge in an imaginative way, that is through imagination, in order to recapitulate, as it were, the full vision of his philosophical enterprise. The philosopher now recognises clearly and articulates them as "possible stories" since the philosopher is the being that stands closer to god himself (*Timaeus* 53d). In that respect the ideal city of Atlantis, both in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, is an illustration of the philosopher's vision to construct a holographic image about the world and about his own exploration of the world through the mind. Even his theory of forms and his overall natural philosophy look like partial symbols for an intellectual impasse, transposing onto cosmic level the personal quest for answers.

The text itself therefore, far from being simply a treatise on natural philosophy, even though it contains elements of the natural sciences of the time, is a symbolic articulation of Plato's self-fashioned philosophical enterprise, a final attempt by the philosopher to transfer onto the level of imagination the unsolved questions of his thinking. Indeed both dialogues essentially complete the *Republic* and somehow illustrate the ideals of the *Laws* in a unique way which both transcends and completes the general platonic vision. When Plato is unable to solve a genuine philosophical

problem, he reverts to myth. Myths become the main vehicle of not simply solving the question but alleviating its semantic and intellectual tension. In his last dialogues he constructs a counter-mythos which both perfects and transcends the religious narratives of his day, while offering a powerful reaction to the de-mythologising projects of the sophists.

In this dialogue, Plato sees the whole world as *eudaimona theon*, a blessed god, (34b); and at the end of the dialogue the image of a visible god made out of harmony, regularity and order offers an ethical understanding of the story of creation itself. Everything, even the secondary gods, express *logismon theou*, the self-reflective activity of god, of the ever existing god, as Plato stresses. The act of divine utterances calling forth complete elements into existence stands inimical to the platonic vision of creating life through consciousness. In most other cosmogonies, as for example in the Orphic poems, Chronos, temporality, was the main catalyst for the gradual emergence of life. In Hesiod, Chaos, the undifferentiated matter, was the primal force that generated the fecundity of life in its endless continuity. In Plato, the *logismos* becomes the originary event, the event that inaugurates existence as an externalisation of thought. The creation of the world is firstly a mental event which happened in the mind of god who re-creates it through space and the forms—the movement in space is time. The whole creation is a reflection of the intelligible world as already existing in the mind of god, who makes visible and invisible realities co-exist in an act of divine fulfilment.

The final paragraph of the dialogue recapitulates the complete platonic vision and would resurface in many occasions in the Christian world view. In the letters to the Philippians and the Colossians, attributed to Paul, the very same expressions indicate how pervasive Plato's vision remained:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether

on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.
(Colossians, 1, 15-20, NRSV translation)

As in Paul, a moral vision of natural creation, the foundation that is of moral law as the centre of the created world, needed a sense of order and symmetry, a belief in the completeness of the visible form. The last paragraph of *Timaeus* is at the heart of the imaginative understanding of life which permeated the western world ever since. It is the same vision that was consolidated with the Ecumenical Synods of the Christian Church, re-appeared during the Renaissance, was re-defined through Newtonian Physics and lies at the heart of every religious, or quasi-religious, understanding of life to this day. Plato's cosmogony had one main purpose, to incorporate and amalgamate the individual within the order of a harmonious universe; the depiction of an orderly account of the creation would raise in front of the eyes of humans the act of creating life as a conscious re-creation for the good life, as if the individual re-placed god the creator with the actions of his moral conscience.

T. K. Johansen observed that: "The *Timaeus-Critias* can in part, then, be viewed as a philosophical *ekphrasis*, or depiction in words, of the whole cosmos. To see one's proper place in this world order is to understand the practical imperative of leading the good life" (Johansen, 2004: 6). The moral imperative for the individual means an understanding of the original mental event in the mind of the *Dêmiourgos*. Being a *logismos*, the materiality of the universe is also intelligible. It is of the same substance as the nous of the ever-existing god who projects onto the space through geometric structures the form and the nature of things and beings. So at the heart of Plato's creation narrative one cannot find the awe-inspiring sublimity that we see in the Hebrew Bible. What can be experienced is a conscious attempt to place the individual within an orderly universe which has to remain orderly so that it functions as a reflection of the intelligible world. The individual is *responsible* for the continuing order within the universe; the creation does not annul moral responsibility, but on the contrary every individual act is the continuation of the original event of the creator's fecundity as an ongoing act of creative agency within history and space.

Undoubtedly there is a strong sub-text within the plan of the dialogue. Johansen indicates an implied criticism of Thucydides' depiction of human nature (Johansen, 2004, 11-14)—probably one could add a criticism of the sophists understanding of human nature and of their art of telling stories. Furthermore one could also add a criticism of tragedy, which would complement Plato's aesthetics within his ideal city. There could be an interesting approach to study this dialogue against the depiction of divinity expressed by Euripides' *Bacchae*. The idea of a god causing mania and frenzy to his followers would have been an intolerable concept in the platonic world of rational order and inner symmetry. Even more so would have been the final lines of the tragedy:

Many are the forms taken by the plans of the gods and many the things they accomplish beyond men's hopes. What men expect does not happen; for the unexpected heaven finds a way. And so it has turned out here today.
(*Bacchae*, 1388-1392 trans. John Davie)

Yet the tripartite hierarchy by Euripides between *daimons*, gods and god, is also another form of thinking that appears in Plato's creation story in the dichotomy between the initial creator, the gods and finally the humans. The manic state of the mind described in the tragedy by the chorus, the ebullient celebration of life, would have also been another asymmetry within the platonic world:

O take me there, Roaring on, Roaring one, god who leads your Bacchantes, spirit of joy! There are the Graces, there is Desire, there your worshippers have leave to celebrate your name. (*Bacchae* 410-412, trans. John Davie)

Furthermore, Cornford in his monumental study on Plato's cosmology had pointed out another affinity between Plato and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: "For each there lies, he states, beyond and beneath this problem, the antithesis of cosmos and chaos, alike in the constitution of the world and within the confines of the individual soul" (Cornford, 1997: 363). Eric Voegelin discussed the affinity from a philosophical perspective indicating that:

[T]he Zeus agoraios, the Zeus of persuasion over the assembly of the people, is next of kin to the Demiurge and the Royal Ruler. The victory of

Nous over Anankê in the Timaeus must be seen against the Aeschylean background of the victory of the new wisdom over the older mythical forces. If such support were needed, this relation between the Timaeus and the Oresteia would further confirm the systematic place of the Timaeus in Plato's philosophy and politics. (Voegelin, 2000: 258).

Furthermore, in Plato's account of his utopian Atlantis, people "were submissive to the laws and kindly disposed to their divine kindred. For the intents of their hearts were true and in all ways noble, and they showed gentleness joined with wisdom in dealing the changes and the chances of life and their dealings with one another" (*Critias*, 120e). Their proximity to god made them behave *meta phronêseôs* irrespective of the changes happening around them. The centre, god, corresponded to the firm cohesion within their own soul. Yet in an early form of the "death of god" theory, "when the divine portion within them began to fade, as a result of constantly being diluted by large measures of mortality..." (*Critias*, 121b, trans. Robin Waterfield)—and consequently the correspondence was lost and with it the relation between god and individual soul. Humans ever since are thrown into the realm of necessity and fluidity—they become individuals with physical and intellectual problems, resulting for the severance of the bond with their origin. Plato does not elaborate how the divine portion waned in humans and how they lost their contact with their divine "participation." The idea which will become an integral part of the Gnostic universe and of the Plotinian understanding of the flesh suggests indeed a very paradoxical understanding of human nature—unless we see it as indicating that the corruption of the divine nature was meant to be a consequence of a *necessary* or even *inevitable*, fall from the completeness of the original greatness, beauty and perfection in the "eikôn tou noêtou."

In the *Statesman* Plato gave another version of the same idea of a periodic waning of the divine influence in the universe. In an apocalyptic passage Plato talked about how "the pilot of the ship of the universe—for so we may speak of it—let go the handle of its rudder and retired to his conning tower in apart" (*Statesman*, 272e trans. J. B. Skemp). This is an extremely interesting symbolic "image" in order to refer to the position

of the demiurge in the universe. One could claim that this is the first indication of the concept of *deus absconditus*, or even of the idea of the *agnôstos theos*, of the unknown god, who, because of the corruption of human nature, cannot only be known but is impossible to be known. During the Neoplatonic revival in the Renaissance, the hidden god became the source of the beatific vision since the Timaeus was interpreted as the ultimate manifestation of divine goodness. In *Critias*, Plato brings this idea to its absolute completion: “Anyone with the eyes to see could mark the vileness of their behaviour as they destroyed the best of their valuable possessions; but those who were blind to the life that truly leads to happiness regarded them as having finally attained the most desirable and enviable life possible, now that they were infected with immoral greed and power” (*Critias*, 121b). It is obvious that Plato here enters a dialogue with Thucydides’ understanding of the *anthrôpeios phusis* (*Historia* 3, 45) and seems to accept the essential corruptibility of human nature. Obviously there is also a certain Euripidian touch in his idea that power and greed corrupt and create what could be called, in modern Marxian terms, false consciousness. Corrupt people think that in their own life they were “*malista pagkaloi te makarioi te ... pleonexias adikou kai dynamêôs empiplamenoî*” (*Critias*, 121b). They thought, (*edoxazonto*), that they were the happiest and the most blissful, unable to become conscious of their real situation which was a product of greed and power. One could immediately understand greed as a corrupting factor and as a form of self-alienation—but power here has a specific meaning for Plato, which needs further analysis.

Finally Plato’s self-mythopoetic fantasy does deal with an idea which dominates cultural debates today—namely that of the intelligent design of the universe. Some presocratic philosophers, among them Heraclitus, seem to have rejected the idea of intelligent design. As Karl Popper has noted “the view [Heraclitus] introduced was that there was no such edifice, no stable structure, no cosmos. ‘The cosmos at best, is like a rubbish heap scattered at random,’ is one of his sayings. He visualised the world not as an edifice but rather as one colossal process; not as the sum-total of all things, but rather as the totality of all events, or changes, or facts” (Popper, 1978: 8). Heraclitus’ idea is the very opposite of the platonic vision; the

concept of change, which meant perpetual division, would cause the emergence of the innate tendency towards self destruction. Disorder led to entropy, and a system turned against itself—the very opposite therefore of the creative god imagined by Plato. Yet what motivated the Demiurge to create the world, although he foreknew that it would corrupt itself? This main question remains open in Plato and somehow the creator remains a mystery unto himself.

Simon Weil in her insightful yet highly controversial ideas about Plato stated that “the essential idea of the *Timaeus* is that the foundation, the substance of this universe wherein we live, is love. It has been created by love and its beauty is the reflection and the irrefutable sign of this divine love, as the beauty of a perfect statue, of a perfect song, is the reflection of supernatural love which fills the soul of a truly inspired artist.” (Weil, 1987: 102). This is somehow an over-interpretation since there is no indication of an *ordo amoris* in the *Timaeus*. His Atlantic city, like his Magnesia, expresses the desire for immutability, for a sense of permanence and perenniality, in order to confront and resist not simply change and corruption, but more than anything else, degeneration as a result of social time. A. N. Whitehead stated that “... for the *Timaeus*, the creation of the world is the incoming of an order establishing a new epoch. It is not the beginning of matter of fact, but the incoming of a certain type of social order” (Whitehead, 1978: 96).

This idea of an implied “social order” does not simply indicate a political ideology and the system of power structure that consolidates authority and stability. There is something more in Plato’s vision which indicates somehow a personal sense of ending, the summing up of his own self-fashioning as a thinker and artist. In the last century, a great Platonist, Benjamin Jowett, had stressed that:

[T]he Timaeus is more imaginative and less scientific than any other of the Platonic dialogues. It is conjectural astronomy, conjectural natural philosophy, conjectural medicine These are not fixed modes in which spiritual truths are revealed to him, but the efforts of imagination, by which at different times and in various manners he seeks to embody his conceptions. The clouds of mythology are still resting upon him ... (Jowett, 2003: 174)

Jowett's statement does not in the least undermine or diminish the importance of imaginative structure of the book; on the contrary it stresses something that the Victorians, like himself and Walter Pater, were more sensitive to—and that was the personal mythos of the book, the identification between the *dêmiurgos* and the philosopher himself. Indeed it seems that Plato illustrated the cognitive function of imagination, by stressing the “form-making”, mytho-poetic activity of the experiencing mind.

Greek enlightenment, as expressed by the sophists and by Socrates, juxtaposed and confronted mythos to logos, emancipating thus thinking subjects from collective patterns of self-understanding. But *mythos* was not altogether abandoned and could not be abandoned at the moment that tragedy represented publicly the dominant forms of collective identity. The second half of the fifth century was a period of individuated thinking, a period when traditional mythic structures were re-assembled by personal imagination as seen especially through tragedy. The tragic poet re-invented traditional myths, by inserting his own ideas and political aspirations; the tragic poet transformed the collective myth into a landscape for his own sensibility and public intervention. In historiography Thucydides criticised myths, the *mythôdes*, as he called it, by exploring a level of human self-understanding which had remained untouched by previous thinkers, the level of intentions. In many occasions the Sophists, like Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen*, re-wrote traditional myths and re-invented them in an attempt to de-mythologise and contemporanise them. Plato stood somewhere in between constructing a philosophical language that made myth an essential part of its semantics; in his dialogues, myths function not etiologically but as synthetic articulations for the many aspects of his argument. His ambiguity towards *mythos* and *logos* receives in this last period of his life a rather poignant form in his *Seventh Letter* (341c) where he questions the possibility of articulating linguistically propositional knowledge. It seems that in his last period Plato expressed a sense of puzzlement in front of the very issues that his philosophy had persistently raised—and he almost abandoned some of his most recurring themes. As Charles H. Kahn observes:

In the Timaeus there are no immanent forms but only images of the Forms; and these images are construed neither as entities nor as properties of individuals but as fleeting qualifications of the Receptacle. The Timaeus has thus replaced the notion of participation by a careful elaboration of Plato's earlier conception of sensible things as "appearances" of Forms. (Kahn, 1996: 358)

The idea about an *eikôn*, an image which would encapsulate the complete essence of his thinking, comes to its complete fruition at the end of this work—in a sense the image replaces the whole universe and the natural world and becomes the ultimate quest of the philosophical enterprise. In *Timaeus-Critias* this practice is completed by offering to his own myths the ground of a specific mythogony, of a special "emplotment" of how order is created out of ataxia and how a certain form of cosmic energy accounts for both motion in the universe and identity in humans. These works could be seen as works of self-criticism and self-questioning where Plato considers how his own philosophy could deal with its own limitations in its ability to formulate eschatological propositions not only about the origins of the world but also about its ultimate purpose.

It is interesting to remember how Plato's cosmic myth differs in comparison to the oriental creation stories of *Enumah Elish* and of the Hebrew Biblical creation. In Plato, god, the *dêmiourgos*, created everything in his mind and through his mind; so cosmic order is an act of intelligent construction, which develops its physical and psychological dynamism only because of its intelligibility. For Plato the cosmos is primarily and in its origin a mental event, and most specifically the creation of the world eventuates within the mental space in the being of the demiurge and as a consequence in the mind of Plato's reader. Meaning emerges as re-construction of the creative act in a sequential narrative. In oriental creation stories, the naming process becomes the cause for the creation of the world, although, we must remember that there is nothing in the Hebrew Bible to indicate a creation out of nothing. Both the Babylonian Story and the Hebrew Creation rely on the act of naming in order that the universe becomes actual—the name is the cause of the thing. The

platonic creation has little room for the naming process—after having dealt with this in the *Cratylus*, reaching no conclusion. What interests Plato is the underlying pattern of order that can be surmised through the study of formal arrangements. Order itself creates its own semantics through causation and generation—order creates meaning. Plato is more concerned with the spatial arrangement of things, and their *position* within the general pattern of cosmic order.

What Plato introduced here is the idea of an infinite space within the confines of the empirical place. Indeed Plato's understanding of the "receptacle" as "baffling and obscure" yet seen as "the nurse of all becoming" (49a) is based on the logical paradox of space being simultaneously finite and infinite, defined by the "alongsidedness" of its specific parts and yet by the infinity of its extent. Space is both endless and defined by the specificity of the objects that shape it; in platonic language, space is the mother, the matrix, which is both "invisible and unshaped, all-receptive and in some most perplexing and most baffling way partaking of the intelligible;" (51b). It is not only "*hypodochê*", but moreover "*chôra*" (52b) something closer to Aristotle's notion of place as the first limit of the encompassing body. Later Aristotle suggested a much more specific understanding of space as specific *topos*, in the sense that the physical reality of natural bodies next to each other forms unities and relations which develop a dynamic motion through their interaction. What sustains the universe is the dynamic interaction of objects which by being next to each other influence each other's body and enforcing mutual change. For Aristotle is the specificity of the object whereas for Plato is its position within the cosmic order. Plato sees the "*hypodochê*" as the matrix of natural materiality yet at the same time as the ultimate place of formal completeness and realisation. Motion is generated through space; it is the ability of space to receive or generate that sustains the order of beings. *Chôra* then becomes the infinite space; creation is about space as both specific and dynamic, a fused reality between concreteness and fluidity. As Peter Kalkavage suggested about *chôra*:

Perhaps the name in English best suits it is Field. First of all the name suggest the field theories of modern physics, which Plato seems to have prophesied here



as an ingenious combination of Pythagorean mathematical configurations and Empedoclean process of flux. The electromagnetic field in particular bears a certain resemblance to Timaeus' third kind; it is the medium for the play of forces, a locus of tensions and conflicts, and the medium for the transmission of wave or periodic motion. (Kalkavage, 2001: 30)

Certainly, in his image there is a structural ambiguity representing space as both passive and active, as the origin and the ongoing energy, maintaining action and therefore life. In the interpretation of the *Timaeus*, indeed of the idea of space in Plato, one must choose between the essential ambiguity in his concept in what is actually foregrounded: the mental space or the natural event; yet at the same time one could be tempted to explain Plato's sense of empirical space as the convergence of the abstract/geometric and the infinite/imaginative space, and that in the real world human perception of space is both empirical and mental.

Such interpretation would bring Plato closer to Kantian mental categories and make him the first representative of participatory consciousness. The Milesians stressed the primacy of the external world while the Eleatics the primacy of the mind; with Plato a third path was suggested, especially in his late dialogues, in the sense that reality is considered as the hybrid product of the mind and the objective world, the interfusion of the mental and the empirical. In order to illustrate such hybrid notion about the "mixed" nature of reality, Plato's metaphoric language attempts the complete humanisation of natural order working through the power of imaginative figuration—what Voegelin called "the myth of the myth in the *Timaeus*" (Voegelin, 2000: 248). The language of myth is transferred onto another level of meaning full of the expressive connotations of existing religious references but at the same time with the complete new element of the individual intentionality. In the *Timaeus*, Plato introduced individual consciousness as an integral part of constructing "mental pictures" about the world—and the paradox of his mythopoetics is that, while he employed a pre-existing mythological language, the intellectual foundations of his edifice are totally anti-mythological. Indeed one could even suggest that the intellectual consequences of his approach



are equally anti-mythological illustrating a constructivist approach to the understanding of reality. The experiencing consciousness is aware of its knowing limitations so it constructs a “likely image”, a “probable narrative” (*eikôs logos*) about the world: the invented image offers order and intelligibility to the amorphous flow of experiences by establishing repeated patterns and reliable relations between them. The Heraclitean idea that we can enter the same river only once and the nihilistic Cratylean suggestion that even this is impossible find in the *Timaeus* their most cogent answer and rebuttal. One could suggest that beyond the different methodology and approach, the *Timaeus* paves the way towards Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, establishing a particular tradition of ‘metaphysical realism’ which combines the empirical and the mental, the perceptual apparatuses with the intentionality of the thinking subject within the perception of repeated regularities that make order possible and prediction a reasoned form of syllogistic argumentation. Plato’s *Timaeus* epitomises the greatest temptation that any philosopher has to confront in the attempt to make sense of ceaseless flux and change—and it seems that Plato succumbed to this temptation in rather felicitous yet complex way.

Overall one could claim that despite the fact that Plato’s *Timaeus* remains within the conceptual framework of a post-mythological critique of aetiological stories, there are in his representational codes forms of constructivistic thinking and patterns of argumentation which transcend the limitations of their semantic use. Indeed philosophically, the creation by the Demiurge is the visualisation of order as a conceptual pattern for explaining life; cognitively it constructs the first “world-image” in a way that presents the universe of experiences as a comprehensible totality; finally mythopoetically, Plato introduces a strong aesthetic element in the cognitive appropriation of the world by foregrounding space as both topos and field where the mind interacts with reality and establishes forms for intelligible articulation. Plato’s surrender to the aesthetic temptation is not without its cognitive benefits—and indeed resonates with similar dilemmas of scientists in our era. After talking with the poet Saint-John Perse about the processes of creative thinking, Albert Einstein stated that ideas in science come also in ‘a sudden illumination, almost a

rapture. Later, to be sure, intelligence analyses and experiments confirm or invalidate intuition. But initially there is a great forward leap of the imagination" (Isaacson, 2007: 549). For sure the *Timaeus* represents one of the greatest forward leaps of the imagination ever composed by an individual writer—and as such it will continue to puzzle and fascinate.

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