



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

## KHŌRA: SPATIAL SYMBOLISM IN PLATO

(a revalidation of temperaments and character typologies in handwriting)

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*Khōra helps us to understand psychophysical elements as expressed within spatial symbolism. When elaborating a personality profile, such elements are key in formulating graphonomic assessments of handwriting in order to provide insight into psychosomatic, volitional and moral characteristics.*

Max Pulver's work with spatial symbolism contributed greatly to psychoanalysis (especially to Jungian analysis) and opened up new worlds to graphologists. However long before that, Plato had described his spatial scheme in *Timaeus*, agreeing on many points with Pythagoras.

For Plato, space (khōra) is to be found at the meeting point between the chronological history of our world and our personal histories. It exists where the generation of the world and our own small time periods come together. Therefore, our own space converges with these two aspects and with others. The medium is the setting of time. Space is configured through the momentary and changeable crystallisation of historical events. Seen from this perspective, the medium's relation to space is that of a fixing of generation.

Khōra's structure is that of a cross, which could be defined in the language of the Italian school of graphology as the vertical axis (the path of will) and the horizontal axis (the path of intelligence). Khōra is the intersection of willpower and intellect; it is movement within space and time themselves, which characterise the very essence of personality (temperament, character and intelligence).

Looking at the vertical axis, we see what Plato set out concerning "*being*" versus "*becoming*". In Spanish culture—which has in fact been greatly influenced by Plato—the difference between these two (*being* and *becoming*) is patent. The clearest examples is that there are in fact two different ways of translating the verb "to be" into Spanish, namely *ser* and *estar*. There are many other languages which do not have two different verbs to express this difference of nuance, causing repercussions on their cultures and in the way they formulate certain questions. This could also affect studies of handwriting: the importance of vertical symbolism, vertical strokes, which is the greatest exponent of the coordinate of space. In psychophysics, it is the personal concept of one's own dignity as well as of power, control, and self-affirmation. In TA (Transactional Analysis) this corresponds to the position of the "Parent", to the confidence implicit in an attitude towards life that says: "I'm OK; you're not OK". *Being* becomes directly involved in the world of ideas; that is why it is related to abstract space: people "feel" like they have a specific status, which may be imaginary or not. If, on the other hand, when someone "happens to be" (*estar*) in a specific situation, then here it is the determining factors that define the subject. That is why one speaks of concrete space – one lives the experience, one finds oneself in a certain condition for pragmatic reasons, is materialised, there is nothing but bare physical reality, completely lacking in imaginary or idealised attributes. This distinction made in Spanish culture is helpful in developing the concepts of abstraction and idealisation (the upper

area) vis-à-vis that which is concrete and comes closest to the body and to one's instincts (the lower area).

In psychophysics, the horizontal axis is related to the coordinate of time, and in TA, to intelligence (specifically, to the way the "Adult" as well as the "Little Professor" move). We can see that Plato already distributed the horizontal axis to the right as *logos* (eikōs logos) and to the left as *myth* (eikōs muthos). It must be kept in mind that in Spanish culture, we tend more towards *logos* than towards *myth*. Our tendency is to believe that *logos* is the correct way of thinking and we therefore inhibit or disallow *myth*. This also explains why we consider primitive cultures to be inferior. We believe that our exceptional rationality and our never-ending search for logic and deduction make us better than them. However here we must not fool ourselves: despite our overuse of the deductive method (especially with cold empiricism), we still seek refuge in myth (metaphysics itself is a mix between the abstract and the supernatural). We have a tendency in our culture to confuse knowledge with taxonomy (classification): we pigeonhole every little thing and often overuse systematisation, thus undervaluing appearances. In short, *logos* is to be identified with Jungian conscious *thinking*, or with the mental processes of the "Adult" from TA; *myth*, on the other hand, is related to the Jungian unconscious processes of *intuition* and *perception*, or with the "Little Professor" from TA (i.e., knowing without knowing why).

We write from left to right: this is not the case in other cultures. We are continually in search of reason –we value it, believing it to be the foundation for any properly made decision. If thinking is not based on certain criteria or guidelines, it is not considered valid. And yet, we are surprised by the skills that certain (native) peoples have: we observe a philosophy of life that is in complete contradiction with our own apparent lack of common sense and with this imaginary world of perfection in which we live, an idealised world of materialism that clashes with the ties that humanity actually has with the rest of creation, with the force of spirituality, with the source and origin of life.

Khōra is the centre itself: it is the totality of those processes that take place within it. It therefore corresponds to the area of the ego and of emotions coming from the feeling of one's own space.

(Explanatory and comparative charts on the symbolism of space can be found in the book *Psicodiagnóstico por la Escritura: Grafoanálisis Transaccional*, by Francisco Viñals and María Luz Puente, published by Herder Editorial, Barcelona, 1999)

It is not easy to define khōra, but it means something like "space in general", which need not be space occupied by anything specific. According to Ross (1986), Plato considered spatiality, or extension, to be both inseparable from sense objects as well as necessary for being. As opposed to other scholars such as Crombie or Gómez Robledo, who did not completely understand Plato, Ross (an excellent author) points out how spatiality must be clearly distinguished from Aristotelian interpretations of matter (or, the place that contains something). Naturally, when considering this idea of space, the Aristotelian viewpoint is much more limited than Plato's, which has caused a lot of confusion throughout history.

In their attempts to get at an understanding of the symbolism of space as seen in *Timaeus*, authors such as Derrida (1993) have examined the dialogues of Plato and the premises and postulates found therein (many of which are either hotly debated or falsely assumed to be understood), such as the way of understanding *muthos* and *logos*, or *being* versus *becoming*. This understanding comes through the constant reference to bipolar opposites, through inverted and symmetrical insinuation linked simultaneously to other descriptions.

A large part of the symbolic framework is also related to the description of the creation of the universe, the world, and the soul (the soul having its X-shaped circles, one of which revolves around the same, while the other revolves around the diverse). There are key sentences such as "... the nurse of happening, moistened by water and inflamed by fire, and receiving the forms of earth and air,..." that speak not only of the movement of the circle, but also of the areas where each of the elements are usually found. These elements are fire, air, water and earth (sanguine, melancholic, phlegmatic and choleric), and we propose a psychological correlation for each of them when analysing handwriting: expansion, variation, plasticity and resistance.

Allport (1963) echoes Wundt in declaring the study of expressive behaviour to be one of the most promising methods for studying individual personality. It involves the analysis of temperament as an element within the involuntary nature of expression, comparing and contrasting it with conscious, adaptive behaviour.

The correlation that exists between handwritten expression, on the one hand, and temperament and character, on the other, has been thoroughly corroborated by numerous tests and questionnaires, among which is the PMK, or Myokinetic Test, developed by the eminent graphologist Dr Emilio Mira y López (1951). Study of the PMK is mandatory in many university programmes, most notably in the postgraduate degree in Psychological Analysis of Handwriting at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, taught by Professors Viñals and Puente (2006).

The interplay of groups of agonist and antagonist muscles is a determining factor in written expression (for example, in vital force, in experiential reactions and in aggressiveness); but what is more, it is also the link to khōra, Plato's spatial symbolism, via the identification of the element "Fire" with the graphic trait of forward expansion (height and impetus), as opposed to the element "Water" which yields, stays low, adapts itself with pliability to the recipient, and falls when there is no support. Similarly, there is the element "Earth" with tension-resistance, applied when flexing muscles, seen in downward movements that add a vertical quality to horizontally moving strokes. Their persistence contrasts with the changing lightness (or one could say *disconnection* or *inequality*) of the "Air" element or gestures affected by the antagonistic muscles that support or lighten the top-down load of tension-pressure. This constant feature is changed by the force which raises the stroke towards itself rather than towards the rest when it should be bringing pressure to bear in its descent.

Naturally, these concepts are being continually reinterpreted based on new ways of analysing personality, and yet they retain their validity in modern psychiatry and psychology due to the unarguable importance of temperament (that is to say, genetic or inherited structures –see Millon, 1998). The TCI-R expresses this in terms of the dimensions RD, BN, HA and P (Cloninger, Sven) and their differentiation, or points of interrelation, with character (the results of the coming together of temperament and external influences and exercising one's will to self-guidance, cooperation and self-transcendence).

Temperamental and character typologies therefore offer us an incredible wealth of information for assessing and complementing the study of handwriting; this is something that has been proven quite clearly by scientists working in the field of graphology, such as Dr Emilio Mira y López and, later, Dr. Jean Charles Gille (1991), whose works are required reading in the Master's Programme in Graphistics, Graphopathology and Forensic Graphology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

No graphologist worth their salt nowadays would work without taking into account the importance of temperament (be it via Moretti's method, Vels's or other current methods) and character (for example, using our system, Viñals & Puente's Transactional Graphoanalysis based on Eric Berne's TA).

So we can see that the description that Plato offers of khōra does not in any way contradict the later discoveries of psychoanalysis. After all, psychoanalysis is not really so recent; it was practiced by a Native American tribe near Washington that new nothing of Freud, although they have unfortunately been exterminated.

An understanding of khōra makes clear the need for a reassessment of the symbolism of space that we use in graphoanalysis or in the psychological analysis of handwriting via psychophysics. What is more important, through khōra, physics itself can be reassessed: the idea of temperaments, for example, is not unique to Greece. In Japan, long before they had ever heard of Hippocrates, they spoke of *taiheki*. In fact, Brändstrom, Paul Schlette, Thomas R. et al. (1998) affirm that all cultures have explored the concept. Likewise, khōra allows for a reassessment of the mind, in terms of character and deep personality as reached through Transactional Analysis, which is only one of many innovative and currently valid comprehensive systems of individual and social psychiatry.

### A selection of paragraphs from Timaeus

#### A key factor in understanding the symbolism of space

33:

"(...) "Now the creation took up the whole of each of the four elements; for the Creator compounded the world out of all the fire and all the water and all the air and all the earth..."

"(...) that the animal should be as far as possible a perfect whole (...)"

"(...) Now to the animal which was to comprehend all animals, that figure was suitable which comprehends within itself all other figures Wherefore he made the world in the form of a globe, round as from a lathe, having its extremes in every direction equidistant from the centre, the most perfect and the most like itself of all figures; for he considered that the like is infinitely fairer than the unlike (...)"

35:

Whereas he made the soul in origin and excellence prior to and older than the body... to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject. And he made her out of the following elements and on this wise: Out of the indivisible and unchangeable, and also out of that which is divisible and has to do with material bodies, he compounded a third and intermediate kind of essence, partaking of the nature of the same and of the other, and this compound he placed accordingly in a mean between the indivisible, and the divisible and material. He took the three elements of the same, the other, and the essence, and mingled them into one form, compressing by force the reluctant and unsociable nature of the other into the same. When he had mingled them with the essence and out of the three made one, he again divided this whole into as many portions as was fitting, each portion being a compound of the same, the other, and the essence".

36:

"(...) This entire compound he divided lengthways into two parts, which he joined to one another at the centre **like the letter X**, and bent them into a circular form, connecting them with themselves and each other at the point opposite to their original meeting-point; and, comprehending them in a uniform revolution upon the same axis, he made the one the outer and the other the inner circle. Now **the motion of the outer circle he called the motion of the same, and the motion of the inner circle the motion of the other or diverse. The motion of the same he carried round by the side to the right, and the motion of the diverse diagonally to the left.** And he gave dominion to the motion of the same and like, for that he left single and undivided (...)"

"(...) And because she is composed of the same and of the other and of the essence, these three, and is divided and united in due proportion, and in her revolutions returns upon herself, the soul, when touching anything which has essence, whether dispersed in parts or undivided, is stirred through all her powers, to declare the sameness or difference of that thing and some other; and to what individuals are related, and by what affected, and in what way and how and when, both in the world of generation and in the world of immutable being. **And when reason, which works with equal truth, whether she be in the circle of the diverse or of the same -- in voiceless silence holding her onward course in the sphere of the self-moved -- when reason, I say, is hovering around the sensible world and when the circle of the diverse also moving truly imparts the intimations of sense to the whole soul, then arise opinions and beliefs sure and certain. But when reason is concerned with the rational, and the circle of the same moving smoothly declares it, then intelligence and knowledge are necessarily perfected (...)**"

"(...) When the father creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original; and as this was eternal, he sought to make the universe eternal, so far as might be. Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and this image we call time (...)" "(...) the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to the eternal

essence; for we say that he "was," he "is," he "will be," but the truth is that "is" alone is properly attributed to him, and that "was" and "will be" only to be spoken of becoming in time (...).

52:

"(...) And **there is a third nature, which is space, and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended without the help of sense, by a kind of spurious reason, and is hardly real; which we beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence.** Of these and other things of the same kind, relating to the true and waking reality of nature, we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth about them. For an image, since the reality, after which it is modelled, does not belong to it, and it exists ever as the fleeting shadow of some other, must be inferred to be in another, grasping existence in some way or other, or it could not be at all (...)" (a direct reference to *khōra*).

"(...) that being and space and generation, these three, existed in their three ways before the heaven; **and that the nurse of generation, moistened by water and inflamed by fire, and receiving the forms of earth and air,** and experiencing all the affections which accompany these, presented a strange variety of appearances; ...".

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