

Keywords Plato, philosophy of architecture, philosophy of nature, harmony, space
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Abstract *Timaeus*

Plato's *Timaeus* is not only one of the fundamental Western texts on the *philosophy of nature*. It must also be considered the first and fundamental text of Western *philosophy of architecture*: it tells of how a divine architect, the demiurge, designed the cosmos. The composition of the universe is a model for every human architectural composition. This is the first teaching, which still holds true today, that the *Timaeus* offers us: *every philosophy of nature*, as a philosophy of the construction of nature, *is a philosophy of architecture*. Conversely, *every philosophy of architecture*, as a philosophy of constructing that which is consigned to nature right from the start, *is a philosophy of nature*. What is surprising, however, is that the *Timaeus* contains not one but two philosophies of nature, and consequently two philosophies of architecture. We may define the first philosophy of nature/architecture a *philosophy of the heaven*, and the second a *philosophy of that which is before the heaven: space*.

Timaeus

Il *Timeo* di Platone non è solo uno dei testi fondamentali dell'Occidente di *filosofia della natura*. È anche il primo e fondamentale testo di *filosofia dell'architettura* dell'Occidente: racconta di come un architetto divino, il demiurgo, ha disegnato il mondo. La composizione architettonica dell'universo è modello di ogni composizione architettonica umana. Questo è il primo insegnamento, valido ancor oggi, che il *Timeo* ci offre: *ogni filosofia della natura* è, in quanto filosofia della costruzione della natura, *una filosofia dell'architettura*. Per converso, *ogni filosofia dell'architettura* è, in quanto filosofia della costruzione di ciò che fin dall'inizio è consegnato alla natura, *una filosofia della natura*. La cosa sorprendente è però che il *Timeo* contiene non una ma due filosofie della natura, e di conseguenza due filosofie dell'architettura. La prima filosofia della natura/architettura possiamo chiamarla una *filosofia del cielo*, la seconda una *filosofia di ciò che è prima del cielo: lo spazio*.

Daro Sulakauri, *I started to observe the nature, just like I did when I was a kid*, dalla serie | from the series *I was dreaming when I wrote this*, 2020

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Vesper è una rivista scientifica semestrale, multidisciplinare e bilingue, si occupa delle relazioni tra forme e processi del progetto e del pensiero. Ponendo lo sguardo al crepuscolo, quando la luce si confonde con il buio e l'oggetto illuminante non è più visibile, *Vesper* intende leggere l'atto progettuale seguendo e rendendo evidente il moto della trasformazione. Pitagora identificò nel pianeta Venere sia la stella della sera (*Hesperos*) che quella del mattino (*Phosphoros*), i due nomi si riferiscono allo stesso astro ma posto in condizioni temporali differenti. *Vesper* dichiara quindi una posizione più che un oggetto e privilegia il situarsi che ne profila lo statuto. Non è qui accesa la luce tagliente dell'alba, che promette giorni completamente nuovi e alti sol dell'avvenire, ma quella che fa intravedere nella penombra una possibilità nell'esistente.

Richiamando e rinnovando la tradizione delle riviste cartacee italiane, *Vesper* ospita un paesaggio articolato di modalità narrative, accoglie forme di scrittura e stili differenti, privilegia l'intelligenza visiva del progetto, dell'espressione grafica, dell'immagine e delle contaminazioni tra linguaggi. La rivista è pensata nella sua successione di numeri tematici come discorso sulla contemporaneità, nello spazio di ogni singolo numero è articolata in un insieme di rubriche che gettano luci differenti sul tema. Nel procedere delle diverse sezioni – editoriale, citazione, progetto, racconto, lezione, saggio, inserto, traduzione, archivio, viaggio, ring, tutorial, dizionario – mutano i riverberi tra idee e realtà, si accende l'intreccio tra evidenze concrete e loro potenzialità, potenziali trasformativi, immaginari. Le rubriche sono pensate non per aggiornare istantaneamente ma per indagare condizioni progettuali e per fornire strumenti e materiali dall'*ombra lunga*.

Vesper is a six-monthly, multidisciplinary and bilingual scientific journal which deals with the relationships between forms and processes of thought and of design. Gazing into the dusk, when light slowly merges with darkness and the illuminating object is no longer visible, *Vesper* aims to interpret the act of designing through tracing and revealing the movement of transformation. Pythagoras identified in the planet Venus both the evening star (*Hesperos*) and the morning star (*Phosphoros*), assigning the two names to the same star observed in different temporal conditions. *Vesper* thus states a perspective rather than an object, privileging the condition that defines its status. Rather than the sharp light of dawn, heralding a brand-new day and promising a brighter future, it is the twilight that allows you to have a glimpse at the potential of what is already there.

Following the tradition of Italian paper journals, *Vesper* revives it by hosting a wide spectrum of narratives, welcoming different writings and styles, privileging the visual intelligence of design, of graphic expression, of images and contaminations between different languages. The journal is conceived as a series of thematic issues that build a discourse on the contemporary. Each issue is divided into sections that offer a range of diverse perspectives on the theme analysed: editorial, quote, project, tale, lecture, essay, extra, translation, archive, journey, ring, tutorial, dictionary. Throughout the different sections, reverberations between ideas and reality change, connections emerge between tangible facts and their potentials, transformative prospects, collective perception. The principal aim of these sections is not to provide instant news, but to offer an in-depth investigation of different instances of design and to provide tools and materials that have a long-lasting effect.

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Daro Sulakauri, *Chiatura City. Cable Car System*, from the series | dalla serie *The Black Gold*, Georgia, 2018.

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Plato's *Timaeus* is not only one of the fundamental Western texts on the *philosophy of nature*. It must also be considered the first and fundamental text of Western *philosophy of architecture*: it tells of how a divine architect, the demiurge, designed the cosmos. The architectural composition of the universe is a model for every human architectural composition.

This is the first teaching, which still holds true today, that the *Timaeus* offers us: *every philosophy of nature*, as a philosophy of the construction of nature, *is a philosophy of architecture*. Conversely, *every philosophy of architecture*, as a philosophy of constructing that which is consigned to nature right from the start, *is a philosophy of nature*.

What is surprising, however, is that the *Timaeus* contains not one but two philosophies of nature, and consequently two philosophies of architecture. We may define the first philosophy of nature/architecture a *philosophy of the heavens*, and the second a *philosophy of space*.

The *Timaeus* tells of the harmonic construction of what Plato calls the universe, the cosmos, or 'the heaven' (*ho ouranos*). Universe, cosmos and heaven are synonymous (28b). The genesis of the cosmos is the genesis of the heaven; the first philosophy of nature contained in the *Timaeus* is a *philosophy of the heavens* and a philosophy of the *architectural composition of the heaven*. The demiurgic architect composes the universe using as a model the eternal paradigms that are 'beyond the heaven' (*exô tou ouranou*, *Phaedrus*, 247c), in a 'beyond' which, however, is not spatial.

First, the heaven, the universe, is made up of a *body*. The body is something visible and tangible. If visible, it is made of light, that is, of fire; if it can be touched it is solid, therefore made of earth. Constructing implies linking, and the most beautiful and perfect link is that given by a mean between the linked terms, in particular that given by the mean proportional. However, the body of the *ouranos* is not flat, but three-dimensional. Then, as Euclid teaches us (Euclid 1731, VIII.12, p. 44), in order to mediate between three-dimensional quantities, it is necessary to have not one, but two proportional means. The body of the heaven will therefore be composed thus: fire : air = air : water = water : earth. Between fire and earth there will be two means in this continued or geometric proportion. Thus, the body of the heaven was constructed (31b-32c).

The heaven is not just a body, however, but a *living* body with a *soul* (30b-31a). The universe is a gigantic *animal*. The demiurge then composes the soul of the universe. The later tradition will call it the *anima mundi*, but for Plato it is rather the *anima caeli*. The demiurge starts from the assumption that everything has three fundamental attributes: everything *is*, *is identical* to itself, *is different* from everything else. Being, sameness, and difference are the supreme immutable paradigms *beyond the heaven*. Being, sameness, and difference are also the main attributes of every perceptible and mortal body *under the heaven*. The demiurge then composes eternal being, sameness and difference alongside being, sameness and difference of mortal bodies, obtaining a compound made of *intermediate* being, sameness and difference. Hence the soul of the universe is this intermediate – between the mortal body of the *ouranos* and the immortal paradigm beyond the *ouranos* (35a-b).

With this mix, the demiurge has obtained what we may describe, with a somewhat improper expression, as the raw material of the soul of the universe. But now, like a good architect, he will have to divide it, cut it, and assemble it. A first division will be made thanks to the following numbers: one, the source of the numbers; two, the first even number; three, the first odd number; and then both two and three squared and cubed. The demiurge continues by cutting the intervals between these seven measures and each time finding within these intervals an arithmetic mean ($x = (a+b)/2$) and a harmonic mean ($x = 2ab/(a+b)$) (35b-36b). The result is pieces of soul that stand together in the main Greek musical consonances: the fourth, fifth and octave chords. With these consonant pieces of soul, the demiurge builds the different spheres of the heavens on which he places the earth, the planets, and the fixed stars. The soul of the heaven produces inaudible music for our ears (*Republic*, 616d-617c).

So here is the universe made, the heaven, with its body and soul, in the image of the eternal paradigm. The demiurge looks at it and 'rejoice[s]' (37c). But now, being well-pleased, he wants to make it even more like the eternal living model of it. Therefore, he gives the heaven time, which is 'the moving image of eternity' (37d). In the *Timaeus*, the heaven and time coincide: time, writes Plato, comes to be 'at the same time that the heaven was composed' (37e, cf. Brague 1982, pp. 27-71).

We have come to the end. The harmonic construction of the heaven is the consonant composition of body and soul over time. All the accounts add up: the heaven, time, architecture, body, soul, music, harmony.

But is it really the end? Plato, with one of the most spectacular argumentative fractures in the history of philosophy, realises that this architecture of the heaven does not hold. It collapses, and forces him to start over (cf. Derrida 1995; Sallis 1999, pp. 91-145).

Plato understands that the binary template that he has so far used to grasp our reality (the intelligible model always identical to itself *beyond the heaven*, and the sensitive and mortal copy of the model *under the heaven*) is not enough to understand the world we live in. In it everything changes incessantly, it becomes something else; in this continuous change we cannot stop anything, not even understand and name anything that has certainty and stability. Nor do immutable rational concepts help us. Over there we have the immutable intellectual model, on this side the changing perceived images. The rational model does not have a hold on our transient world.

That is why there is a need for something that guarantees immutability *inside* the heaven, where everything is changeable. How can I recognise that an object is the same as yesterday, if everything is constantly changing? I need a stable framework within which to understand instability, a framework that rational ideas beyond the heaven cannot give us. Timaeus then introduces a 'third kind' of being; he calls it 'the receptacle', 'the nurse of all generation' (49a), 'that in which things come into being' (50d). He calls it *chôra*, space, that which gives bodies a place.

Space is that something which always persists in a constantly changing world and which, thanks to its permanence, allows us to bestow intelligibility, determinedness, and regulative unity upon our world. However – and herein lies the paradox – the permanence of space is not the permanence of rational, determined and rationally understandable paradigms. The permanence of space is the permanence of the *indeterminate*, of the 'amorphous' (the formless, 51a) which for this very reason may assume any visible form. Indeterminacy gives stability to all the determinate shapes of our world.

Furthermore, space cannot be grasped in the same way as rational ideas. Space is *incomprehensible*, it is that incomprehensible element which allows us to understand everything that is under the heaven. Secondly, unlike the bodies that surround us, space is neither visible nor touchable; again, it is that *imperceptible* element which allows us to perceive bodies. How can we grasp that which is incomprehensible and imperceptible then? We grasp it by 'bastard reasoning', Timaeus says, because such is the reasoning that grasps that which is incomprehensible, keeping it as incomprehensible. And we understand it by perceiving it 'without sensation', as in a dream, says Timaeus (52b; see Agamben 2022, pp. 106-108). This dreamy perception must be further clarified. I do not think Plato simply means the perception we have in a dream, because, while we are dreaming, we really believe we are perceiving, and only when we are awake do we understand that we were dreaming. However, there is another state, one in which, *while we are dreaming*, *i.e. in the dream* (often in a bad dream), we understand that – perhaps – it is just a dream. This is the paradoxical dreaming perception of which Plato speaks. I feel that I am in a dream while I am dreaming, but without being able to get out of the dream completely. This sensation is elusive, partly reassuring (it's just a dream), partly disturbing (is it really just a dream?). It is a sensation that, as long as I am in the dream, cannot be ultimately confirmed nor contradicted. It is perceiving myself perceive; in it I perceive myself differently from how I perceive objects and characters of the dream. This is the perception of space 'without perception'. Plato does not spell it out, but this sensation of space is at the same time the sensation of myself in space. The incomprehensibility of space becomes the incomprehensibility of my own body in space.

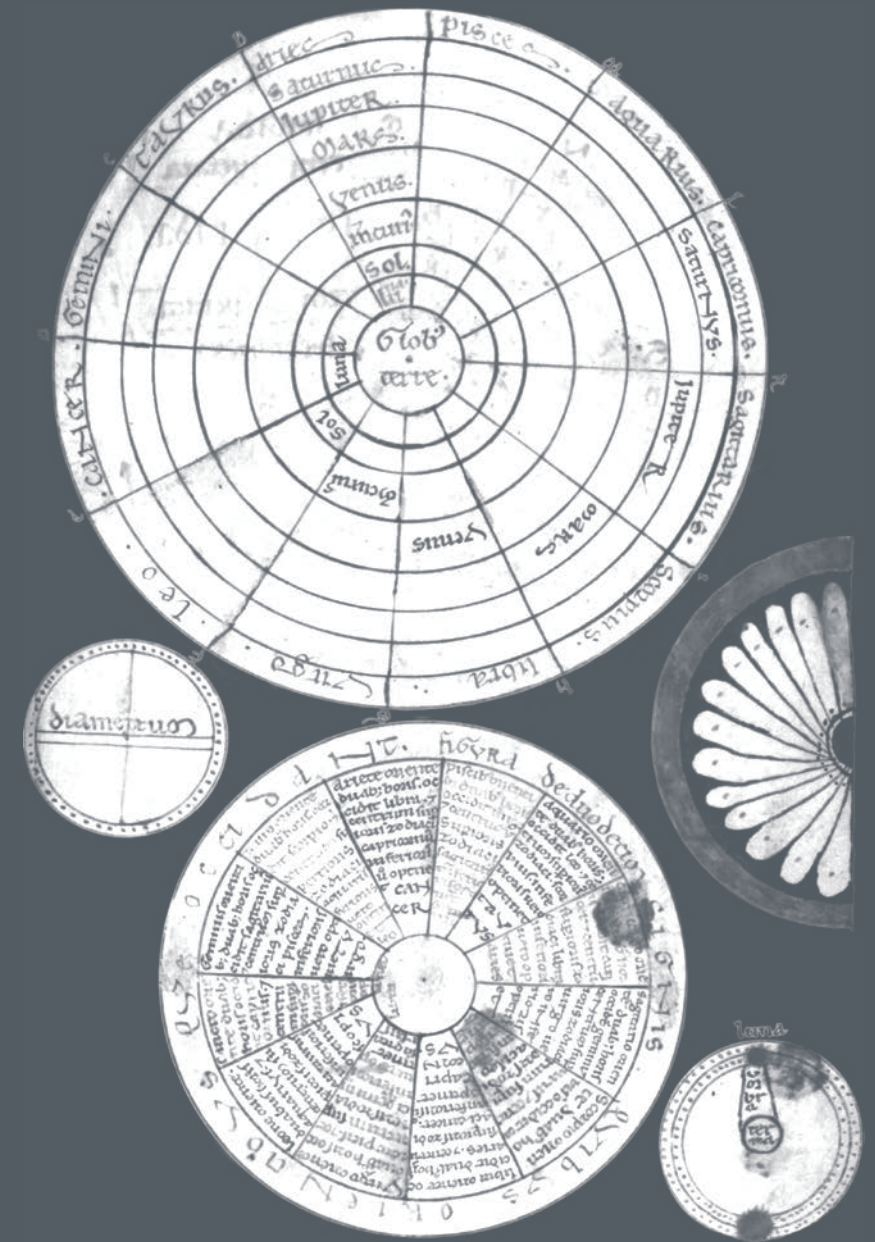
One cannot imagine a greater gap between the mathematical-proportional construction of the universe, on the one hand, and the incomprehensible indeterminacy as a condition of the universe, on the other. The first was the philosophy of the heaven. And the second? This has to do, as Timaeus says twice, with that which is 'before the birth of the heaven' (48b; 52d). This philosophy concerns that which is *before the heaven*. But 'before' in what sense, if the philosophy of the heaven was at the same time the philosophy of time? Another paradox: the philosophy of space is the philosophy of that which is *before time*.

At the beginning, I stated that every philosophy of nature is a philosophy of architecture. Accordingly, the other philosophy of nature to be found in the *Timaeus* requires another philosophy of architecture. A philosophy of architecture that focuses on space, on perceiving myself perceive in space, on the incomprehensibility and imperceptibility of space. Raphael's Plato holding the *Timaeus* in his hand refers us to two philosophies: a *philosophy of the heaven* and a *philosophy of that which is before the heaven*.

It is up to the architect to hold them together.

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Timaeus, one of Plato's dialogues written around 358-356 BC. It discusses the 'nature of the universe, [...] from the origin of the cosmos to the nature of man' (27a). The *Timaeus* is one of the fundamental texts of Western philosophy of nature. Over 1,800 years later, in a fresco by Raphael known as *The School of Athens* (1506-1509), Plato holds this very dialogue in his hand to indicate, still in the Renaissance, how the *Timaeus* represented the peak the human mind could reach in the rational understanding of the universe and its genesis. Among the annotated editions of the *Timaeus* in English see: Cornford F.M., *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary*, Kegan, London 1937; Taylor A.E., *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1928. In French: Brisson L., *Le même et l'autre dans la structure ontologique du Timée de Platon. Un commentaire systématique*, Klincksieck, Paris 1974; Platon, *Œuvres complètes, Tome X, Timée, Critias*, edited by Rivaud A., Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1925; Platon, *Timée, Critias*, edited by Brisson L., Flammarion, Paris 1992. In Italian: Platone, *Timeo*, edited by Fronterotta F., Rizzoli, Milano 2003. The dialogue derives its title from Timaeus of Locri, a 5th century BC Pythagorean legislator and philosopher, whose historicity is however disputed. A short piece of writing under his name has come down to us, called *On the Nature of the World and the Soul*. However, it is much later, presumably from the 1st century BC. For a critical edition of this text see: Timaeus Locrus, *De natura mundi et animae*, edited by Marg W., Brill, Leiden 1972. For an English translation see: Timaios of Locri, *On the Nature of the World and the Soul*, edited by Tobin T.H., Scholars Press, Chico 1985.

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