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Taking Space Seriously: Tehiru, Khora and the Freudian Void

Abstract:

In the first part of the paper the author focuses on the way the great historian and thinker Gershom Scholem understood the Lurianic idea of *tsimtsum* (i.e. divine contraction as the first act of creation) as the key category of Jewish theology. Next, he combines the conceptual structure emerging from the Scholemian understanding of *tsimtsum* with Jacques Derrida's analysis of space. He suggests that the Platonic notion of *khora* as read by Derrida can be identified with the idea of *tehiru*, i.e. the void that comes into existence as a result of divine contraction. In the second part of the paper the author extends the equation even further by pointing out how the notion of *khora-tehiru* can be fruitfully combined with the idea of the "Freudian void," the space created by the separation of the mother from the child in Freudian analysis of the emergence of the human subject. One of the benefits of such a conceptual merge is that the Scholemian/Derridean/Freudian space thus understood can be seen as permeated with a complex affective and libidinal dynamic. Drawing on various post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorists (Lacan, Klein, Winnicott, Green), the author proceeds to analyze this dynamic, focusing on the notions of mourning, anxiety and desire.

Keywords:

space, *tsimtsum*, *khora*, Freud, anxiety

The idea of *tsimtsum* – i.e. the notion of God's necessary contraction as the first step in the drama of creation – introduced by the sixteenth century Kabbalist Isaac Luria, is a haunting piece of speculation. Among the minds that it haunted not the least important one was Gershom Scholem, one of the key historians of the Kabbalah and an independent thinker in his own rights. The notion of *tsimtsum* was clearly one of the key categories in his conceptual universe. This is true in at least two respects. First, *tsimtsum* was a crucial category in

Scholem's description of the contemporary world and the contemporary status of revelation. Second, *tsimtsum* was a crucial category in his understanding of Jewish theology as such. The former, perhaps more interesting, complex of ideas has been analyzed in detail by Irving Wohlfahrt in an important essay.¹ Here it is the latter issue that I want to address briefly in order to define my starting point.

Scholem's grand historical narrative includes a series of strong and controversial propositions concerning the very structure of Jewish theology, many of which focus on the idea of creation in general and on the idea of *tsimtsum* in particular. These propositions inform the way Scholem presents the history of Jewish mysticism and the history of specific concepts in Judaism. They remain more or less implicit in most of Scholem's historical writings, but they come to the fore in his two "unhistorical" pieces, namely *Ten Unhistorical Theses on Kabbalah* and *Reflections on Jewish Theology*.² On the basis of these two crucial pieces, I would like to present what one may call *Ten Scholemian Theses on Tsimtsum*. The first three of them would be the following:

Thesis 1. Judaism cannot survive without the idea of creation, the gist of which is the separation between God and the world.

Thesis 2. The idea of creation does not make sense if it is not meant as *creatio ex nihilo*.

Thesis 3. The idea of *creatio ex nihilo* does not make sense if it is not understood in terms of *tsimtsum*.

The first two of these statements are neither controversial nor original and they would be accepted by most of Jewish theologians. Thesis 3 is certainly more controversial, but it is rooted in a tradition, which seems to begin – as Christoph Schulte suggests in his now-standard book on *tsimtsum* – with *Yosher Levav* by Emmanuel Chai Ricchi (1736).³ However, this is not all. For if the idea of separation and thus the idea of creation can be understood only in terms of *tsimtsum*, then Scholem has to take a radical position in the age-old controversy concerning the literal or metaphorical nature of *tsimtsum*, a controversy that Christoph Schulte reconstructs so carefully in his book:

Thesis 4. The idea of *tsimtsum* must be understood literally and not metaphorically; any metaphorical understanding of *tsimtsum* is either a thin disguise for its literal understanding or, worse, a disguise for a pantheistic reading which ruins the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*.

This point, however, if followed to its most radical conclusions, results in a point which Scholem identified with the Sabbatian theology and which he quite explicitly accepted:⁴

Thesis 5. The idea of *tsimtsum* should be understood as affecting *ein-sof* (the highest and most originary form of divinity) itself; thus, due to *tsimtsum* which posits a negative moment in the divinity, God cannot be seen as identical with himself.

The next point seems to be rather idiosyncratic and thus of lesser importance, but it does demand our full attention. Namely, if *tsimtsum* is the only proper way of expressing the idea of *creation ex nihilo*, then the

1) Irving Wohlfarth, "Haarscharf an der Grenze zwischen Religion und Nihilismus.' Zum Motiv des Zimzum bei Gershom Scholem," in *Gershom Scholem: Zwischen Disziplinen*, eds. Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995), 176–256.

2) Gershom Scholem, "Reflections on Jewish Theology," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 261–297; Gershom Scholem, "Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala," in *Judaica 3* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 264–271. Important, quasi-normative statements on the idea of creation can be also found in Scholem's essay: Gershom Scholem, "Schöpfung aus Nichts und Selbstverschränkung Gottes," in *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 53–89.

3) Christoph Schulte, *Zimzum: Gott und Weltursprung* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), 227–234. For Scholem's own explicit articulation of this statement, see: Scholem, "Reflections on Jewish Theology," 283.

4) Scholem, "Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala," 267.

idea of *tsimtsum* must have been implicitly present in any notion that successfully expressed the idea of creation even before Luria. Thus:

Thesis 6. The idea of *tsimtsum* was already embedded in the notion concerning the strict separation between *ein-sof* and the first *sefirah* (*keter* or *ayin*), a separation without which the idea of creation is reduced to the idea of emanation and thus ruined in its essence.

The thesis is far from obvious. It is one thing to say that this separation is necessary in order to save the transcendence of God and the idea of creation as such, i.e. in order not to reduce creation to emanation, an idea which Scholem explicitly despises. It is quite another to say that the idea of the separation follows the logic of *tsimtsum*. Now, Scholem does make this stronger claim as he points out that the passage from *ein-sof* to *keter/ayin* is in fact the passage from full being to full nothingness and thus a full-fledged *tsimtsum*.⁵ However, this argument contains implicitly an even more important statement. Namely, Scholem claims that this passage from being to nothingness contains (in an infinite condensation) everything that follows in the drama of creation, i.e. the coming-into-being of all the multiple orders and strata of the created world. Thus, this passage is a liberation of multiplicity, a liberation which finds its full expression in the very idea of *tsimtsum*: “By positing a negative factor in Himself, God liberates creation,” writes Scholem. However, the dark side of this liberation is an unavoidable rift present in every created thing, a rift clearly visible for someone that Scholem calls “a pious atheist”: “The void is the abyss, the chasm or the crack which opens up in all that exists”.⁶ It is clear, then, that Scholem is utterly unable to think of the liberated multiplicity of the created things otherwise than in terms of the catastrophic “breaking of the vessels” (*shvirat ha-kelim*) that Luria identified as the second act of the drama of creation after *tsimtsum*. Thus, we arrive at the next point:

Thesis 7. The idea of *shvirat ha-kelim* is already embedded in the idea of *tsimtsum*; in other words, you cannot have *tsimtsum* without catastrophe; for if anything appears in the void created by the act of contraction, it must be internally broken; otherwise, it would be divine and thus *tsimtsum* would be undone; in other words, no created thing can be identical with itself.

Furthermore, the idea that God’s non-self-identity posited by *tsimtsum* liberates a multiplicity of broken, non-self-identical things of the created world, results in the two following theses on the question of representation.⁷

Thesis 8. The Second Commandment should be understood not as a prohibition, but as a statement of the impossibility of representing the divine; as such, it is equivalent to the idea of *tsimtsum*, for if *tsimtsum* is a fact, then no created thing in the non-divine void can fully represent the divine; if it could, it would be divine.

Thesis 9. No thing of the created world can be fully represented, either, but not because it is divine, but precisely because it is not; if something is to be represented it must be self-identical and no created thing is.

Finally, this sefirotic system of propositions finds its fulfillment in the tenth thesis. In the fourth of his *Ten Unhistorical Theses on Kabbalah* Scholem claims that kabbalists may be seen as “mystical materialists of dialectical bent.”⁸ Scholem’s own argument supporting this claim is that the Lurianic logic of *tsimtsum* and *shvirat ha-kelim* requires a material *substratum* in the divinity. This, however, is not to be read in terms of a naturalist claim that everything, including God, is made of a material substance. Such a crude naturalist has

5) Ibid., 267–268. For Scholem’s most explicit rejection of the idea of emanation see: Ibid., 269–270.

6) Scholem, “Reflections on Jewish Theology,” 283. Perhaps it is worth pointing out that for Nachman of Bratzlav *tsimtsum* which creates the godless space is both (in Christoph Schulte’s words) “the condition of possibility of creation, but also of the real atheism.” Schulte, *Zimzum*, 277.

7) For the textual basis of the following two propositions see Scholem, “Reflections on Jewish Theology,” 280.

8) Scholem, “Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala,” 266–267.

nothing to do with dialectic and with the idea of creation. Rather, I suggest that Scholem shows how the very idea of *tsimtsum* enables us to become better materialists than any naturalist can ever be. The meaning of this materialism is grasped by the following, final proposition:

Thesis 10. The idea of *tsimtsum* implies radical materialism; such materialism escapes Platonism as well as naturalism, both of which imply the belief in a stable structure of the world which can be immanently known – and thus both can be seen as forms of idealism, self-conscious and inadvertent, respectively; radical materialism is to be understood less in terms the ultimate substance of the world – although matter does matter – and more in terms of the anti-idealist belief in the essential non-self-identity of all things; in order to be a proper materialist, you have to believe in *tsimtsum*.

Now, I am aware of the fact that this final thesis is the result of a radical interpretation of Scholem's thought, a reading which brings him close to the conceptual realms of Theodor W. Adorno and Jacques Derrida. Leaving Adorno aside,⁹ I would like to focus on the latter connection, i.e. the one between Scholemian *tsimtsum* and Derrida's thought. However, I am less concerned with the explicit references to *tsimtsum* and the kabbalah in general that appear here and there in Derrida's writings – such as a reference in an important, early essay on Edmond Jabès or a passage in *Dissemination*¹⁰ – and more with his meditations on the Platonic concept of *khora*.

Reading Derrida's reading of Plato's *Timaeus* against the background of the traditional debates on *creatio ex nihilo* shows the full originality of his interpretation. It is rather well known that the models of divinity and the world's coming-into-being bequeathed by ancient philosophy were highly problematic from the point of view of the monotheistic religions. Scholem was just one among many to point out that Neoplatonism with its vision of the One emanating everything else without any need for an additional substratum was, in fact, a false friend of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, not only because it excluded the idea of creation being a voluntary process, but mostly because it cancelled the crucial separation between God and the world. At best, Neoplatonism permitted one to think of *creatio ex nihilo* as a creation out of divine Nothingness, which is just a fancy name for emanatory pantheism.¹¹ As we have seen, according to Scholem, the point of the distinction between *ein sof* and *ayin/keter* was to avoid this very danger.¹²

Resorting to the original Platonism as a remedy for this problem seems at first rather extravagant: true, the *demiurgos* seems to be a person endowed with divine will, but apart from the forms (which we can always – as it has been done – locate in the divine mind), there is always the question of that strange additional substratum named *khora* whose independent existence seems to exclude any thought of *creatio ex nihilo*. However, this is precisely where Derrida's reading is of much help. As he points out, it is simply wrong to follow Aristotle in his reading of *khora* as *hyle*, as a material substratum of the making-of-the-world.¹³ *Khora* is not a substance. It is, indeed, a very strange element of the structure of the universe, a *triton genos*, which is neither sensible nor

9) For the definition of dialectical materialism as an anti-idealist metaphysics of non-identity in Adorno's work (with a crucial reference to the Second Commandment) see: Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1975), 193–207.

10) Jacques Derrida, "Negativity in God, Exile as Writing, the Life of the Letter are All Already in the Cabala," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Jacques Derrida, "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," in *Writing and Difference*, 74. For an explicit reference to *tsimtsum* see Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981) 344. I am grateful to Agata Bielik-Robson of the Franz Kafka University of Muri for drawing my attention to the latter reference.

11) Gershom Scholem, "Das Ringen zwischen dem biblischen Gott und dem Gott Plotins in der alten Kabbala," in *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums*, 9–52.

12) Scholem, "Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala," 367–368.

13) Jacques Derrida, "Khora," trans. Ian McLeod, in *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 127.

intelligible, neither a phenomenon nor a form.¹⁴ As a receptacle for the imprint of the forms, it is necessary for the phenomenal things to appear and hence for the Platonic dualism to constitute itself. However, being the third element, it also dismantles the dualism at the very moment of its constitution. This is not just the question of counting the number of the world's ultimate elements. For if *khora* is needed for the phenomena to appear, then if the phenomena are to be what they are – i.e. something different from the forms – *khora* must both link the phenomena to and radically separate them from the forms. But this means that while giving rise to the phenomena it must also subvert their identity, make them non-identical with themselves, for a phenomenon which is identical with itself is identical with its form. But if so, then Platonism is really deconstructed at its very origin, for the phenomena, in order to exist, have to be catastrophically broken and hence not really subsumable under the general categories defined by the forms. Thus, *khora* gives rise to the phenomena and deconstructs them at the same time. “Indeconstructible” in itself, it is the very “spacing of deconstruction”, a realm of “infinite resistance” against any organizing gestures.¹⁵

But if *khora* is not *hyle* then what is it? It is a space which provides room for the phenomena. However, it is a peculiar kind of space – in fact, the only one which truly deserves that name. It is “a third kind” also in the sense that it escapes what Henri Lefebvre defined as the double illusion concerning the nature of space: the illusion of transparency which reduces space to a geometrical construct and thus to the realm of forms; and the realistic illusion which reduces space to a physical container and thus to the realm of the phenomena.¹⁶ Indeed, the two aspects of the illusion may be related to the two forms of idealism I have defined in thesis 10: the straightforward idealism which reduces everything to forms and the inadvertent idealism disguised as naturalism which assumes the self-identity of material things and the presence of a logos in the world of phenomena. The idea of *khora* as the space that spaces the phenomena and cracks their identity while providing room for them enables us to avoid the double reduction of space, a reduction which tries to do away with its uncanny, deconstructive strangeness. But if all this is true, then it is hard not to take the next step. For in his analysis of Sabbatai Horowitz's understanding of *tsimtsum* Christoph Schulte points to the element which – precisely like Derridean *khora* – both mediates between and separates the creator and the created: it is the *tehiru*, the original empty space produced as the first result of *tsimtsum*.¹⁷ Thus, I would suggest that on Derrida's reading, *khora* is not *hyle*, but *tehiru*.

Identifying *khora* and *tehiru* is a move of double effect. On the one hand, it places Derrida's ostensibly “pagan” meditations on *khora* within the context of Jewish thought. On the other hand, it enables us to stress what may be seen as the crudest aspect, but what in fact is the most primal aspect of the very idea of *tsimtsum*: namely, that *tsimtsum* means, first of all, *letting the space be*. Everything else, including the deconstructive catastrophe of materialist non-self-identity, should be seen only as a logical consequence of this primal move. *Tsimtsum* is the proper way to think something that seems to be so simple, but is most difficult to think without any reduction: to think space – and take it seriously.

Now, having linked *khora* with *tehiru*, I would like to relate them both to a third vision of space, which I derive from the psychoanalytic tradition. What I mean is something that may be called “the Freudian void”, the space which appears when the mother and the child are separated. This void appears as a result of what deserves the name of the “maternal *tsimtsum*” which is necessary for the child to come into being as an individual

14) Ibid., 89–91.

15) Jacques Derrida, “Sauf le nom,” trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in *On the Name*, 80; Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” trans. Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 59.

16) Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 27–30.

17) Schulte, *Zimzum*, 104–105.

creature, but which also leaves it in the state which can be seen as parallel to a cosmic catastrophe. On the most general level, the status of the created being and the status of the infant as described by psychoanalysis can be seen as isomorphic at least in one fundamental respect: they are both separate-from-but-dependent-on or, if you will, dependent-on-but-separate-from their existential source (God and mother, respectively). The paradoxical status of the created world, which is so hard to conceive – if it is separate, can it be dependant rather than autonomous? If it is dependant can it be separate rather than epiphenomenal? – has been always most natural for the theorists of psychoanalysis.

More specifically, the benefits of bringing *tehiru* and *khora* on the one hand and the Freudian void thus understood on the other are twofold. First, it can help us re-read and reorganize the Freudian universe. Second, it enables us to enrich the Scholemian/Derridean, materialist space with a libidinal and affective dynamic. From the psychoanalytic perspective, our spatial condition is the one of being inevitably misplaced, de-centered, always lacking the fundamental object. If Freud recognized that even though culture is our element, we are always at war with it, always feeling the unease, *das Unbehagen*, in culture, we may also speak of *das Unbehagen im Raum*, the unease in space, of our feeling of loss, exile and misplacement.¹⁸ From this point of view, the Freudian void is a field of affective forces, a zone filled with alluring and dangerous objects, with afterimages, anticipations and false copies of what is most important and what is always lacking. In particular, this affective dynamic of Freudian *tehiru* seems to be marked by three distinct moments: mourning, anxiety and desire. I would like to take a look at these three moments, focusing especially on anxiety.

However, let us begin with mourning. This is an obvious starting point, as the defining condition of the Freudian subject is that of loss of, and separation from, the primary object, the mother who has withdrawn in the act of *tsimtsum*. At various stages of his/her development, the child resorts to a variety of strategies and activities aimed at coping with the situation, one of the crucial strategies being the practice of play. Freud tried to analyze this practice in the seminal passage devoted to the *fort-da* play in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.¹⁹ However, it was Donald Winnicott who developed this analysis to the full – even if in a peculiar way – thus offering also the first full-fledged psychoanalytic vision of space.²⁰ According to Winnicott, if things go well, the child is not traumatized by the void for it is able to cope with maternal absence by playing with the so-called “transitional object” – e.g. a piece of cloth, thread or string – which is an effective symbol of the missing mother. This object occupies the dynamic field that grows between the mother and the child, the intermediate zone which Winnicott calls “the potential space.” Remarkably enough, this space is also marked by an essential thirdness: it is neither the internal space of child’s fantasy, nor the objective physical space; rather, it is the paradoxical third sphere of play between them, filled with transitional, symbolic objects, which then extends itself into the field of what we call culture.

However, this kind of thirdness is not enough to bring Winnicott’s potential space in line with *tehiru* and *khora*. Indeed, I believe it can be equated with the two latter concepts, but only if crucially modified. Moreover, such a modification would bring the potential space closer to the spirit of Freud himself. Unlike for Winnicott, for the father of psychoanalysis things can go bad or worse, but they cannot go really well: you cannot have *tsimtsum* without a catastrophe. In particular, what needs to be revised is Winnicott’s all-too mild vision of the transitional object as a symbol of the mother. As things stand, Winnicott’s symbols are strings that attach us

18) For a partly successful attempt to use the Freudian perspective for thinking about space and geography, see: Steve Pile, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 96–120.

19) Sigmund Freud, “Jenseits des Lustprinzips,” in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 224–227.

20) Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), especially 1–34 and 128–139.

to the center and hence, effectively, prevent true separation – and so we feel no *Unbehagen* in the cozy, homely potential space. If we are to get closer to Freud’s catastrophic imagination – and to bring the potential space closer to *tehiru* and its discontents – every transitional object, apart from symbolically representing the missing mother, must include the moment of mourning, the aspect of loss, the consciousness of the futility of all representation. If you take space seriously, you cannot believe in the Neoplatonic symbols that offer an unbroken passage to eternity or in Winnicott’s transitional objects uncontaminated by the aspect of loss. In the space we live in, some objects, in various ways and degrees, manage to refer to the missing existential center of our lives, but they are able to do it only in a highly indirect, broken way. If they do not incorporate the knowledge of loss, the wisdom of mourning, the Scholemian crack which goes right through them, they cannot represent the transcendent. Paradoxically, they can represent it if and only if they know they cannot do it accurately.²¹

Thus, the humming of mournful sadness permeates the Freudian *tehiru*. However, another affective tune is perhaps more easily heard in this space: that of anxiety. Indeed, Freud believed that “the problem of anxiety is a knot in which the most diverse and the most important issues meet, an enigma the solution of which would throw strong light on human life as a whole.”²² In the present context, I would like to stress two important, intertwined moments of Freud’s analysis of anxiety, namely, its temporal and spatial dimensions. Indeed, there is an intriguing temporal dialectic embedded implicitly in his analysis, which makes this affect conceptually more complex than the past-oriented mourning. This dialectic can be derived, by means of an interpretative twist, from Freud’s book on *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety* (1926). Here, Freud repeats his old idea that the model for all reactions of anxiety is the primary moment of birth.²³ However, he opposes Otto Rank’s thesis according to which every moment of anxiety can be seen as a return to the trauma of birth and an attempt at its “abreaction”.²⁴ There are numerous reasons for Freud’s protest, one of the most important being that Rank’s theory questions the central position of the Oedipus complex and the castration anxiety, which mattered so much to Freud. More importantly for our purposes, however, agreeing with Rank would mean reducing a highly complex vision of human anxiety and life’s temporal axis to all-too simple a picture.

Freud himself presents human life as a series of real, potential or feared separations: birth, weaning, castration, death of loved ones, and so forth. All of these separations can be understood as object losses: all but the first one, because – as Freud insists – at the moment of birth the mother is still not perceived as an object.²⁵ Anxiety reaction – modeled, indeed, on our reactions during birth – may appear either in a dangerous moment of separation which is to leave the subject in the state of helplessness; or, as a signal of warning against a coming danger, when such a separation is anticipated.²⁶ This distinction is perhaps rather problematic, as it may be argued that if we feel anxiety in a moment of an actual danger it is because we still anticipate something more to come. What is more important, however, is the fact that, in Freud’s analysis, all anxiety moments are marked

21) In suggesting such a modification of Winnicott’s transitional objects I am partly inspired by Hanna Segal’s vision of symbol developed on the basis of the Melanie Klein’s idea of the depressive position. For Segal, symbols are “healthy” precisely if they include the consciousness of loss which prevents them from being confused with the object they refer to. However, Segal stresses the intra-psychical nature of symbols, whereas for Winnicott symbols exist in the “thirdness” of the potential space, an idea which I find most valuable. See: Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London: Routledge, 1991).

22) Sigmund Freud, “Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse,” in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 1, 380.

23) Sigmund Freud, “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst,” in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 6, 239. For an earlier articulation of this idea see: Freud, “Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse,” 383–384.

24) Otto Rank, *Das Trauma der Geburt und seine Bedeutung für die Psychoanalyse* (Leipzig-Wien-Zürich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924).

25) Freud, *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst*, 271–272, 278–279.

26) *Ibid.*, 275–277, 299–300.

by a peculiar reference both to the past and to the future. Again: all except for the moment of birth. If we put things in order, we may see the following pattern arising from Freud's slightly chaotic analysis. The relative and artificial unity of mother and child reestablished after birth is ultimately broken by the second act of separation, the loss of the breast. This moment serves as a repetition of something that was the primal moment of anxiety, but which was not yet an object loss, i.e. the moment of birth. It is only this repetition that retroactively establishes the moment of birth as the moment of primal *tsimtsum* according to the logic of *Nachträglichkeit*, the "afterwardness", developed by Freud in his analysis of the Wolf-Man, the logic of a later event establishing an earlier one as the cause.²⁷ Moreover, it is only this very moment of the loss of the breast that establishes the full temporal dialectic of anxiety. For *einmal ist keinmal* and twice is infinity. If something happened twice, nothing can stop it from happening again. And so, every moment of anxiety – every new moment of the actual or expected separation, of the renewed maternal *tsimtsum* – is marked both by the memory of a previous separation and by the anticipation of a new loss that, as our memory teaches us, is inevitably to come. We have fallen into the Freudian *tehiru* and we keep on falling in the unlimited series of renewed acts of separation.

Now, the Freudian analysis of anxiety links it to what might be called its agoraphobic dimension. Freudian anxiety is the terror of the open space which – as we anticipate – is to be broadened again and again, each time leaving us even more helpless than before. However, it is Freud himself who points out that there is an etymological connection between the word *Angst* and the word *Enge*, narrow straights or predicament.²⁸ In Freud's argument this connection is supposedly to strengthen the idea that during the process of birth the baby is afraid of the approaching separation from the mother. And yet it is all too natural to suggest that if this etymology is meaningful, then it points rather to a different spatiality of anxiety, i.e. its claustrophobic character. It was Jacques Lacan who seems to have understood anxiety along these lines. The official text of his seminar on anxiety, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, differs from the unedited typescripts in a substantial (and rather astonishing) way, but the general structure of the argument remains the same. I quote the Millerian version, adding phrases from the unedited version in square brackets:

Don't you know that it's not longing for the maternal breast [for what is called the maternal womb] that provokes anxiety, but its imminence? What provokes anxiety is everything that announces to us, that lets us glimpse, that we're going to be taken back onto the lap [that we are going to re-enter it]. It is not, contrary to what is said, the rhythm of the mother's alternating presence and absence. The proof of this is that the infant revels in repeating this game of presence and absence. The security of presence is the possibility of absence. The most anguishing thing for the infant is precisely the moment when the relationship upon which he's established himself, of the lack that turns him into desire, is disrupted, and this relationship is most disrupted when there's no possibility of any lack. ... Anxiety isn't about the loss of the object, but about its presence.²⁹

And slightly later, even more explicitly: "A certain void is always to be preserved.... The disruption wherein anxiety is evinced arises when this void is totally filled in."³⁰

27) Freud, "Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose," in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 8, especially 220 and 223.

28) Freud, "Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse," 383.

29) Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A.R. Price (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 53–54. The unedited version: Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Seminar-X-Revised-by-Mary-Cherou-Lagrez.pdf> (access on 27 Dec 2016), 46–47.

30) *Ibid.*, 65.

Now, I certainly do not want to take sides in this debate between Freud and Lacan. Neither am I competent to decide which version of Lacan's sacred scripture is the correct one, even though, for understandable reasons, it would be rather good to know if the French heresiarch was actually talking about the breast or about the womb as the source of anxiety! And as, fortunately, I do not have to pledge allegiance to any of the schools or sects, I would take the liberty of suggesting that Freud and Lacan (in whatever version) are talking about two antithetical, but complimentary aspects – the agoraphobic one and the claustrophobic one – of any anxiety felt in the *tehiru* which appears as the result of the maternal *tsimtsum*. Indeed, nothing seems to be more natural than to claim that we are terrified *both* by the void we are falling into as the result of the first-though-repeated separation which anticipates all the other cuts to come *and* by the possibility that the space will close upon us, that the maternal *pleroma* will reconstitute itself and erase our singular being. This double anxiety of spatial existence is the price we pay for our liberated-but-fallen or fallen-but-liberated being in the Freudian void.

Before I move to the final element of the affective/libidinal sequence which already appeared briefly in the quote from Lacan – i.e. the moment of desire – I would like to draw the reader's attention to two peculiarities of the Freudian "Lurianism" I am reconstructing here. First, it is worth pointing out that the original maternal *tsimtsum* – which is established as such retroactively by its own repetition – the catastrophic and liberating separation, the first disappointment of our love life and the fall into the Freudian void, might be seen as parallel to the crucial split in the psyche itself. For it is only from that moment on that one can begin to think about the *ego* and the *id* as really distinct. Thus, we may perhaps venture a speculation according to which the external *tsimtsum* of separation is paralleled by the internal *tsimtsum* of the primal repression that establishes the split between the *ego* and the *id*. Moreover, it is only from that point on – once space as such exists – that Freud finds it possible or even necessary to think about human psyche itself in spatial terms: according to him, the negotiating *ego* – which is also the actual locus of anxiety³¹ – develops on the surface while the angry *id* remains withdrawn into the recesses of our psyche.³² And it is only now, when catastrophically cut off from the immediate satisfaction and thrown into the treacherous space, that *the drive* comes into being as a distorted form of *the biological instinct*, which will aim at a transcendent object and will be never satisfied with what is immanently given.

Secondly, what demands a commentary is the gender aspect of the Freudian psychotheology. In the Platonic/Derridean narrative *khora* is a "mother" which mediates between, but at the same time separates the paternal forms from the filial phenomena.³³ The gender map of Lurianic kabbalah is of course much more complex, but at least one may say that the strong connection between the emanatory light and the paternal sperm suggests a similar pattern. Now, the Freudian narrative inverts this scheme: the original *pleroma* is maternal and it is the mother – rather than the father – which then withdraws in the act of *tsimtsum*. The paternal element completes the separation between the creator and the created by entering between the child and the mother as the partner of the latter in the Oedipal drama. Thus, following Lacan's identification of the father as the source of law, one might perhaps suggest that in the psychoanalytic universe the paternal law is the key source of existential stability in the Freudian void which, as we have seen, is marked by mournful sorrow and double anxiety. The paternal law is a grid of right paths that charts the vertiginous space. Under the rule of law, instead of feeling the contradictory *anxiety* in every point of *tehiru*, we just walk in sorrow and patience in the right paths of the father and feel the well-defined *fear* of straying into the zones of sin. This is what we have our *superegos* for: in order to transform our indefinite anxiety into an organized fear the source of which we can then avoid.

31) Freud, *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst*, 238.

32) Freud, "Das Ich und das Es," in *Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, 293–294.

33) In Derrida's memorable phrasing: "*Khora* ..., this strange mother." Derrida, *Khora*, 124.

However – and this is my final point – this relatively stable space organized by the law which at least partly wards off our anxiety is never free of the element of desire. To use André Green’s elegant definition, desire – the desire for the transcendent Other – “is the movement by which the subject is de-centered,”³⁴ a movement only natural for an inhabitant of the Freudian *tehiru*. One of the ways to cope with the predicament of this transcendent desire is narcissism which Green, again very lucidly, defines as the “desire of the One, in which all trace of desire for the Other is erased.”³⁵ In other words, when we yield to the temptations of narcissism we do not need the law anymore for in our fantasy we have supposedly overcome the separation, the anxiety-producing space, as well as our internal splits. Now, if we resist the temptations of narcissism – i.e. the temptations of egological immanence – we are left in a peculiar condition: we are protected by the law, but troubled by desire. Lacan rather disastrously claimed that he discovered the death drive at the heart of desire. However, he is definitely worth listening to when he states that the relationship between the law and desire is of a dialectical nature.³⁶ Desire transcends the symbolic order of the law, but it does not exist without it. For without the law, which organizes our space and solidifies the separation, there is no longing for the transcendent object of desire, but rather the claustrophobic horror of maternal immediacy which alternates with the agoraphobic horror of maternal absence. Desire may be antinomian, but it does not strive to regress to the state before the law: rather, it aims at going beyond it.

Thus, finally, we can define the aim of desire which in this context perhaps deserves to be characterized as messianic. It should not be identified with the reestablishment of the union with the maternal or with the reconstruction of the Empedocles’ *sphairos* of the Love that Freud fantasized about in his later writings.³⁷ For Freud this utopian state was equivalent with the triumph of the gathering principle of Eros over the dispersing forces of death. However, as a fantasy of loving union it is a state in which all object love seems to be sublated, thus yielding to the triumph of narcissism. Moreover, as a state which does away with all difference and separation, this narcissistic utopia would be ultimately indistinguishable from the triumph of what Green identified as “negative narcissism”, the apocalyptic victory of the death drive which undoes *tsimtsum*, erases the troubling, broken multiplicity of the created world and thus brings peace of total annihilation.³⁸ If the triumph of narcissism – positive or negative – undoes that resistant thing called space, then the messianic desire beyond the law must aim at something different. Again, desire is born within the paternal law as a protest of the subject for whom the legal stability of immanence is not enough. It is born because the maternal has been lost, but the maternal is not its proper object. Thus, paradoxically, the messianic desire – which responds to our funda-

34) André Green, *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism*, trans. Andrew Weller (London and New York: Free Associations Books, 2001), xix.

35) *Ibid.*, xvii–xix.

36) Playfully, but brilliantly paraphrasing the passage from Saint Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans* on the relation between the law and sin (7, 7), Lacan says: “Is the Law the Thing [the cause-object of desire]? Certainly not. Yet I can only know the Thing by means of the Law. In effect, I would not have had the idea to covet it if the Law hadn’t said: ‘Thou shalt not covet it.’ But the Thing finds a way by producing in me all kinds of covetousness thanks to the commandment, for without the Law the Thing is dead... The relationship between the Thing and the Law could not be better defined than in these terms... The dialectical relationship between desire and the Law causes our desire to flare up only in relation to the Law, through which it becomes the desire for death.” Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 83–84.

37) Sigmund Freud, “Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse,” in *Studienausgabe*, Ergänzungsband, 384–386.

38) “Alongside positive narcissism we need to put its inverted double, which I propose to call *negative narcissism*. So Narcissus is also Janus. Instead of sustaining the aim of unifying the ego through the activity of the sexual drives, negative narcissism, under the influence of Nirvana principle, representing the death drives, tends towards lowering all libido to the level zero, aspiring for psychical death. ... *Absolute* primary narcissism seeks the mimetic sleep of death. This is the quest of non-desire for the Other, of non-existence, non-being; another way of acceding immortality.” Green, *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism*, 222.

mental loss – must aim at something familiar and yet wholly new, at *re-finding an object we have never really had*.³⁹ The triumph of desire would be marked by our ability *to exist in space without anxiety* together with the object of our desire. Alas, this truly transcendent, messianic state can be glimpsed only in fleeting moments, through the deconstructive cracks in the wall of the law. And yet, if I am right that all this happens in space that is to be understood not only as the Freudian void, but also as Derridean *khora* and Lurianic/Scholemian *tehiru*, then we may be sure that such cracks will always appear. The space, that strange, subversive element, will space the law. We only have to help it here and there.

39) Drawing on Freud and Walter Benjamin's theory of language as well as his definition of happiness as a paradoxical combination of uniqueness and repetition, I try to develop and explain this messianic dialectic in my essay: Adam Lypszyc, "The Name as the Navel: On Refinding Things We Have Never Had," in *Thinking in Constellations: Walter Benjamin in the Humanities*, eds. Nassima Sahraoui and Caroline Sauter (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 31–49.

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