Towards an Ecophilosophical reading of Space and Landscape in Theatre, Drama and Performance

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In recent years, several critical works—not only specific to the field of theatre studies but also interdisciplinary—have significantly explored the terms *space*, *place*, and *landscape*, turning them into research keywords for productive debate across many disciplines. This "spatial turn" seemingly relates to at least three major processes: the mass-scale migrations of human individuals and entire populations, both voluntary and enforced, with the ensuing crises of cultural identity and displacement; the shift from an Euclidean to a non-Euclidean paradigm of space-time;[1] and the recently generalized recognition of an ecological interdependence between organic life forms and their surrounding environments or dwelling spaces.

Although theoretically distinct (namely linguistic, post-linguistic, and extra-linguistic), these critical works all seem to agree that the concepts of *space*, *place*, and *landscape* cannot be considered neutral or inert, but instead be regarded as both determining factors and open-ended processes, co-produced by those who inhabit or view them. What is striking, however, is that apart for a few interdisciplinary spatial studies, most perspectives on space, place, and landscape seem tacitly *anthropocentric*. In humanist trends of phenomenology spatial perception is centered on the *human* body; in structuralist interpretations, space is read as a signifying system of signs resembling that of *human* language; and in poststructuralist approaches,

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[1] In *Elements*, the Greek geometrician Euclid (c.300 B.C.E.) described time and space as separate entities. Later, Isaac Newton viewed time and space as a series of containers. Kant argued that space and time are perceptions of the human mind: our own interiority is perceived as time, and all exteriority as space. More recently, Einstein's theory of relativity has led to a major shift away from thinking of space and time as separate entities. Whereas Euclidean is a zero-curvature space in which parallel lines keep an even and constant distance between each other, a non-Euclidean geometry is pitted, broken up, twisted, tangled, and intertwined.

space/place/landscape are seen as ideological constructs of a fundamentally *human* culture.

Drawing on French thinker Félix Guattari's suggestion that we need to link *environmental* ecology to *social* ecology and to *mental* ecology so as to articulate an *ecophilosophy*, this article argues for an *ecocentric* reading of space, place and landscape in theatre/drama/performance that articulates a continuity between body and space, reflecting upon the reciprocality or participatory relationship between character and environment. It therefore suggests that we connect the debate on space, place, and landscape to an ecocentric ethics, a linkage particularly relevant for our times, given that we are witnessing a widespread recognition of the interdependence between organic life and space that calls for the activation of post-anthropocentric ties to an environment that is also made up of non-human beings and entities. In order to clarify what an ecophilosophical reading of space and landscape may consist of, this essay will start by reviewing selected critical works that investigate spatial concepts.

1. Space-Place-Landscape

Space and place are concepts that often intertwine, although the former is typically considered more abstract, and the latter more particular, associated with an actual site. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines place as a space that is endowed with value.[2] In *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Edward Casey argues that place is not a stable entity, but part of something ongoing and dynamic. We understand the idea of space and place primarily because we inhabit them physically and mentally; but while place can be viewed as the room *of* a body, space gives room *for* a body. Place is viewed as defined, specific, occupied; whereas Space offers the potential for occupation, it is endowed with the quality of infiniteness.[3]

Because it suggests a framed view of space from a situated place, landscape interconnects with both space and place. The word in Portuguese, Spanish and French derives from the latin *pagus*, which means country in the sense of territorial sector; in English and Dutch its etymological source is *land*, an earthly open space. The term landscape from the Dutch *landtschap*

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[2] Tuan, 1977, 6.
[3] Casey, 1997, 94/117.

was first introduced in the sixteenth century as a technical term in painting, to refer to a picture representing natural inland scenery.[4] Since it refers to a view, a prospect, or a vista, landscape as a concept implicates the incidence of a "gaze." As a result, landscape corresponds to a perspective that is culturally, socially and ideologically produced.

As a concept, landscape has often been debated in geography and other social sciences, as well as in literary and art theory within a long tradition of criticism that examines the signification of nature imagery in texts/artworks.[5] In theatre studies, however, it was only introduced in the twentieth-first century, namely through a collection of essays entitled *Land/Scape/Theater* (2002), edited by Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs.

2. Critical Approaches to Space and Place

In the field of theatre and performance studies, although landscape as a theoretical keyword is relatively new, the notions of *space* and *place* have been comprehensively explored. Consequently, an understanding of the theoretical ways in which these two spatial terms have been approached may be crucial so as to contextualize an ecophilosophical perspective on landscape.

In broad terms, and regardless of disciplinary differences, the concepts of space and place have been envisioned in three distinct ways: as stable signifying systems; as dynamic material texts with historical, cultural, and political implications; and as perceptually embodied entities that are subjectively and materially experienced. Such differences in spatial understanding can perhaps be best summed up through three correspondingly distinct questions: 1) is space/landscape a signifying system?; or 2) is space/landscape a cultural construct, a "text," or a discursive category of "other"?; or 3) is space/landscape a substance/ material presence that can be felt or experienced?.

Across major critical works in the field of theatre studies, the above mentioned three predominant lines of approach to *space* and *place* may be

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[4] O.E.D. online edition 1989.

[5] In the field of geography notable interdisciplinary works on landscape include Douglas Porteous's *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) is one of the first works of literary criticism on landscape with ecocritical resonances.

discerned. The first is a structuralist approach based on a linguistic model; it envisions space as language or as signifying system, and often adopts semiotics to interpret how space communicates or produces meaning.[6]

Accordingly, in *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (1989), Marvin Carlson argues that the performance-audience interaction should be seen as an event embedded in a complex spatial matrix that frames the theatre experience by providing a variety of "messages" for those who utilize it (performers, organizers, and spectators). Carlson examines how ideas of theatre across history may be read in the text of theatre architecture (size, shape, exterior and interior decoration, articulation and hierarchy of interior spaces), and of its location within the larger urban space of the city. The theatre building, with its interior organization and surrounding context, is accordingly envisioned as a signifier that emits various signifieds.

In a similar vein, the essays that comprise *The Theatrical Space* (1987), edited by James Redmond, concern either different historical forms of *theatre space*; or different historical forms of *theatrical space*, set up through dramatic conventions, set design, and directing practice. Concerning *theatre space*, some essays analyze how spatial characteristics of theatre buildings and sites are both transformed by and reflected in drama throughout different historical periods. In relation to *theatrical space*, the critical discussion verges on questions of scenery, decoration, sound effects, lighting, and stage machinery; on the spatial activation by actors (movements, acting styles); and on the relationship between seen and unseen, on-stage and off-stage areas of performance.

A strcturalist approach to space is equally manifest in *Woman's Theatrical Space* (1994), where Hanna Scolnicov associates the female gender with "interior space" itself, due to women's historical confinement within the house. Scolnicov finds that changing spatial conventions in the theatre

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[6] By positing an undivided sign, in the Saussurian sense of the union of signifier and signified, Semiotic readings are dependent upon the invocation of specific signifieds, equating representation with signification. This simple one-to-one relationship of signifier to signified was disrupted by Jacques Derrida (see *Of Grammatology*), among other poststructuralist thinkers. More recently, semiotic analyses often acknowledge that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Nevertheless, in their study of structural relations of objects and events, they usually assume that sign systems are stable. See Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

express corresponding changing attitudes in society toward woman and her sexuality. Thus, in her evolutionary account of Western drama, she argues that the house interior is associated to the woman figure in Greek tragedy, Roman comedy, Renaissance drama, and Baroque comedy. Gradually, however, men start sharing women's interior space—a development that reaches a climax with Henrik Ibsen's dramaturgy, when woman leaves the house. Since in late twentieth century drama the house interior is undifferentiated in terms of gender, Scolnicov concludes that women's special links with interior space have ceased: "space is no longer a woman."[7]

A second approach, poststructuralist (postmodern and/or deconstructionist)—inspired by Derrida's critique of logocentrism, metaphysics of presence, and categories of "subject," "representation" and "history"—reflects upon space as a social/cultural/ideological construct. Although based on the incompetence of the linguistic model, this perspective nevertheless implies that all—including spatial notions—is textuality and discourse.[8] Accordingly, most of the essays that comprise *Space and the Postmodern Stage* (2000), assert that there is a striking difference in terms of stage space between a modern staging/design characterized by a singular quality and displaying a unity of metaphorical images; and a postmodern staging/design that brings together a collage of quotations, and elements of different styles, resulting in an ambiguous and hybrid stage picture. Differently from modern theatre, which is based on genres and foregrounds the presence of the author/playwright, postmodern theatre is marked by a new "écriture," by a hybridization of texts and images that juxtapose and result in a hypertext, within a privileging of *spatialization* over temporality. Thus, in contemporary theatre performance the real is

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[7] Scolnicov, 1994, 154.

[8] Deconstruction questions the underlying metaphysics of meaning in texts. Texts are made up of traces or of deferred meanings, there is no fixed locus of meaning. Meaning is a passing product of words or signifiers, shifting and unstable, part-present and part-absent, the effect of a wider and deeper history of language of the unconscious, of social institutions, and of cultural practices. Throughout Western philosophical tradition, writing has been considered a derivative form of speech. Derrida argues that writing is prior to utterance, that the self is written (i.e., it is not autonomous). Writing constructs and marks subjects; it is not something that they execute. By suggesting that all is textuality, and that "writing" constructs subjects, Deconstruction implies the conceptual disappearance of extra-linguistic "presence," as well as of any subjective agency. See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2008).

mediatized (becoming the absence of presence), and the body becomes "posthuman."

In a similarly post-structuralist view of space in the theatre entitled *Death of Character* (1996), Elinor Fuchs argues that the postmodern does not refer to a style but rather to a cultural condition, a "legitimation crisis" — the crisis of the subject, who no longer stands for an essence, a presence, or a position. When theatre is no longer of character (since all is "writing" and the human being or character becomes just another sign), we encounter the *landscape stage,* or "a thing held in full view the whole time," in Gertrude Stein's words. Consequently, the spatial principle replaces the temporal principle of the dramatic mode, and theatre performance becomes interested in the field, the terrain, the environment. In response to the crisis of subjectivity, the new postmodern theatre foregrounds spectacle; it tends towards a visual dramaturgy, and becomes a *textscape* (i.e., language as an exhibited object).

Complementing Fuchs's thesis, in *Postdramatic Theatre* Hans-Thies Lehmann reveals that a "postdramatic" or "dedramatized" theatre beyond representation is primarily a response to a new scientific and technological paradigm that affects the configuration of time, space, and the "mediality" of theatre. Postdramatic theatre emerges in a mediatized society, due to the accelerated technologization and spread of the media in everyday life that flourished in the late 1970s, along with a transformation of the human body from "destiny" to a programmable "techno-body." Lehmann argues that this "anthropological mutation" either leads to a theatre characterized by a low density of signs, muteness and silence, and an *empty stage* space; or else to a plethora of signs, a multitude of "rhizomatic connections." In any case, space in postdramatic theatre has no hierarchy, causality, unity or meaning; it is a place of traces or intertexts.

A third approach to space and place in the theatre is based on an extra-linguistic model that affirms the materiality of space within a phenomenological, and/or feminist perspective, the latter inspired by the pre-linguistic concepts of Julia Kristeva[9] and Luce Irigaray.[10]

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[9] Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic *chora* is that of a pre-Oedipal and pre-linguistic space that provides a position for everything that comes into being. It is the subject's point of origin (synonymous with a womb where the child's drives are directed towards the mother). It is "semiotic" in the sense of existing at a pre-linguistic level prior to the linguistic structuring of the "symbolic" law of the father; and because it returns as a semiosis of poetic language.

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A phenomenological approach to the theatre focuses on the theatre's essential materials—bodies, objects, settings, speech, sound, movement, etc.—and "wraps" its analysis in their presence, liveliness, and corporeality. Accordingly, In *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (1985), Bert O. States considers that theatre (through performance) is a site of sensory engagement with the inanimate, where objects become theatricalized by being placed into "an intentional space."

States calls attention to theatre's duality, of being present and yet absent, of being real and yet fictional/unreal. Theatre is the space where the real is both itself/self-given and presented as image/fictional space; consequently, it brings spectators into a phenomenal contact with both what exists and what may exist.

Within such reasoning, States argues that Antonin Artaud's theatre is particularly "phenomenological," since it seeks to retrieve a "naïve perception of the thing" before it is defined by language (i.e., a pre-linguistic or extra-linguistic perception).

Likewise, in *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Modern Drama* (1994), Stanton Garner seeks to uncover through phenomenological strategies the relationship between the human body and its environment (or immediate spatiality) that is latent in late twentieth century playtexts (by authors such as Samuel Beckett, Sam Shepard, Harold Pinter, among others). Garner further argues that phenomenology has the potential of offering a return of both experience and subjectivity to the discourse of space and body in the theatre.

In contrast to Fuch's suggestion of a "death of character" in late twentieth-century theatre and drama, Les Essif's phenomenological study, *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage* (2001), reinstates the significance of subjective interiority, and claims that a new type of *hypersubjective* character emerged with the "nouveau théâtre" (French-language theatre of the 1950s-70s). For Essif, the empty space of this new dramaturgy stands for an extra-linguistic realm, the inside of the psyche; it relates to a space that is non-representational and non-referential, to a realm of hypersubjectivity not contaminated by psychology. Whereas scholars of Samuel Beckett have read

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[10] Luce Irigaray's work explores the possibility of mapping out a female imaginary and an ethics of psychosexual difference, denouncing both the monosexual/monologic patriarchal culture and the poststructuralist assumption that masculinity and femininity are but social and cultural constructs.

the emptiness in his works as a sign of existential nihilism or "absence," Essif regards Beckett's empty stage as a spatial exteriorization of the inner life of the character, a theatre of the mind that actually started with Romanticism, and was subsequently explored by Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and the theories of Artaud. From Les Essif's "metaphysical-phenomenological" perspective, the focus of late twentieth century theatre has shifted to the inner cosmos, which, like the outer cosmos, is characterized primarily by extra-linguistic vacuity or chaos.

Questions of *platiality* are markedly emphasized in studies of space/place written from a feminist perspective. In *Private Topographies* (2005), Marzena Grzegorczyk focuses on actual sites/places that "attract," or become affective, by being lived and produced by human beings as dwellers in space, while introducing two keywords of analysis: 1) *implacement*; and 2) *private topographies*. Implacement refers to the process of converting space (abstract, indefinite, undifferentiated) into place (defined; differentiated). Private topographies are territories endowed with a meaning by the individual, resulting from a co-production between subject and space.

These territories become spaces of belonging, of presence and agency, and consequently raise issues of boundaries, and of control.

Inspired by the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray, in *Embracing Space* (1999) Kerstin Shands contrasts two contrasting spatial metaphors that have recurred across the three historical waves of Feminism—the topophilic "embracing" space (from *topophilia*, a term coined by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, to refer to an affective attachment between humans and places), related to the house space and body interiority; and the hypertransgressive "bracing" space of mobility, which valorizes speed, stress, and instability. Shands argues that the feminized space of the house is a dwelling place analogous to that of the female body (related to the inside/outside landscapes of the vulva, the vagina, and the womb), and may be charged with an upturned sense of power, linked to liberation. She thus calls for a feminism that demystifies *patriarchal spatial constructs*, and empowers a feminine spatial rhetoric related to concepts of rest, immobility, dwelling, house, cave and grotto. According to Shands, the feminist topophilic impulse turns "inward" to primordial and pre-discursive time-spaces, approaching Kristeva's concept of the semiotic *chora*, of a pre-Oedipal physical space; whereas the hypertransgressive impulse (predominant in poststructuralist feminism) turns outward, negates place (associated with

referential closure) and is concerned with the marginal, the excentric, the transgressive.

The above-mentioned three theoretical approaches to space/place—linguistic, post-linguistic, and extra-linguistic—are evidently not "pure," as there is often interpenetration between them. Moreover, a fourth conjoining perspective is often found in works of cultural theory and interdisciplinary criticism, which ensues from a dynamic combination of the above, since these studies reflect upon space both as individually felt/perceived, and as social/cultural construct. Such works tend to investigate questions of territoriality and boundaries, of cultural belonging and circulation, of difference and otherness, and of historical memory as tied to place, within a concept of space as ideological discourse, or as structure of power/knowledge.

These interdisciplinary works are evidently influenced by the theoretical writings of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, who are key figures in the cultural investigation of spatial practices and meanings. From a Marxist dialectical perspective, Lefebvre argues in *The Production of Space* that space is both a structure that affects the social (through the politics of space, such as that exercised by urbanism over the spaces of consumption and habitat), and an expression of social relations. "(Social) space is a (social) product," therefore every society produces "its own space."[11]

Foucault's concept of space as a structure of knowledge—explored in works such as *Discipline and Punish*, *Madness and Civilization*, and *History of Sexuality*—views knowledge (including self-knowledge) as determined by the subject's position in, and by her/his relationship to, a particular spatial environment. Not only is our knowledge *situated* but space is always embedded in a social matrix—and therefore it is gendered, sexed, class-demarcated, racialized, and medicalized. Since Foucault's structures of knowledge are also structures of power, space in his works is often envisioned as a means of social control, through the discipline and surveillance of individual subjects. Consequently, critical texts inspired by Foucault's theories often tend to textualize subjectivities and articulate them in relation to spatial terms such as zones, sites, centers, borders, and margins.

Such is the case of Joseph Roach's study, *Cities of the Dead* (1996), which following Richard Schechner's concept of performance as "restored

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[11] Lefebvre, 1991, 26/31.

behavior,"[12] argues that disparate kinds of performance, both written and non-written, are ways of restoring memory—the "dead," or history not remembered. For Roach, just as modernity has separated the dead from the spaces of the living, it has also replaced environments of memory (oral and corporeal retentions of traditional cultures) with places of memory such as archives, monuments, and theme parks. Nonetheless, certain spaces/environments—such as the cemeteries in New Orleans—are haunted by cultural memories that can be activated through performance. Geographically located at the margins of the city's center, the cemeteries are places segregated from the living, "outside of all places" (heterotopic places in Foucauldian terms), but sites of cultural self-invention through rites and rituals (vortices of behavior).

3. The Concept of Landscape

As manifest in the different works reviewed, *space* and *place* are significant keywords in current critical discourse, and give rise to many productive discussions, whether they are envisioned as signifying systems, as texts/*écriture*, or as experienced material substances.

The same can be said of *landscape*, which, as a theoretical keyword, was introduced in the field of theatre studies by a collection of essays entitled *Land/Scape/Theater*. According to its editors, Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, *landscape* is a mediating term between space and place:

If *space* is too unfeatured, *place* is overly particular. Landscape is more grounded and available to visual experience than space, but more environmental and constitutive of the imaginative order than place. It is *inside* space, one might say, but *contains* place. (…) [Landscape] can therefore more fully represent the complex spatial mediations within modern theatrical form, and between modern theater and the world.[13]

Landscape may be characterized by "an underlying tension between thing and idea, between matter and meaning, place and ideology,"[14] and has therefore produced, through critical studies, at least "ten views" of the term: "as habitat, as artifact, as system, as problem, as wealth, as ideology, as

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[12] See Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36-7.
[13] Chaudhuri and Fuchs, 2002, 3.
[14] Chaudhuri, 2002, 25.

history, as place, [and] as aesthetic."[15] For Chaudhuri and Fuchs, *landscape* theory can open up "a new conceptual space" in the field of theatre studies in three significant ways: by reflecting upon the implications of the recent *spatial turn*; by exploring the role of spatial experience in constructing *cultural meaning*; and by focusing on the presence of the *non-human order* in theatre/drama/ performance.[16]

4. Ecocentric Understandings of Space and Landscape

Michel Foucault argues that, "A whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of powers—from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations."[17] According to Foucault, space has been treated as a dead, fixed, and immobile entity, due to Western history's obsession with time or with temporal tropes such as development, suspension, crises, cycles.

Such a history of spaces, however, if ever accomplished, would still be an insufficient account within an ecocentric view of space/landscape/place that also includes the dynamic materiality of a non-human order.

In effect, according to most critics, landscape is considered to be an ideological and cultural construct, a "way of seeing" conditioned by social structures in its framing of space. Further, in most critical approaches to landscape there is always an emphasis upon seeing or visual perception, with an implied downgrading of other cognition channels. Since in most of these views landscape is never free from cultural coding, and "land" seems to have lost its presence and material substance to become but an "essentialist" notion, the term "landscape" might as well be replaced by "culturescape."

A concept of culture exclusively concerned with *human* development proceeds from, and is usually tied to, a dualistic vision of culture/nature.

This dualistic ideology of separation started in the modern age with the Cartesian definition of "culture" as the opposite of "nature," to arrive at the notion of nature as fabrication or at the postmodern concept that there is

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[15] Ibid., 27, note 14.
[16] Chaudhuri and Fuchs, 2002, 4.
[17] Foucault, 1980, 149.

no such thing as "nature," since there is nothing outside the text of culture. Thus, it rather seems, as Terry Eagleton observes in *After Theory*, that much contemporary postmodern criticism that typically only emphasizes cultural contexts and frameworks, has replaced an old kind of essentializing notion (nature) with another (culture):

Instead of doing what comes naturally, we do what comes culturally. Instead of following Nature, we follow Culture. Culture is a set of spontaneous habits so deep that we can't even examine them. And this, among other things, conveniently insulates them from criticism. (. . .) Culture thus becomes the new Nature, which can no more be called into question than a waterfall. Naturalizing things gives way to culturalizing them. Either way, they come to appear inevitable.[18]

In this sense, most anthropocentric cultural readings—because of their conception of culture as the totality of social *human* practices that make up a *human* community, and a *human* everyday life; because of the way they explain concepts and artworks as shaped by the social forces of *human* ethnicity, race, class, gender; and because they often contextualize cultural products along a progressively linear *human* historical time—mostly work within, or fundamentally endorse, the "mechanical" Western humanist paradigm of knowledge.

The first assumption of the "mechanical philosophy" initiated by René Descartes is that nonhuman matter has no life or creativity of its own; the second assumption is that if the earth can indeed be described as a "machine," then it functions according to a set of predictable and fixed rules and structures that it itself did not generate, which implies that it was constructed from "outside" by an inventor, maker, or builder (God, in a religious perspective; Humanity, in a secular view).[19] As David Abram observes, "by presenting nature as an assemblage of working parts that have no internal relation to each other—a set of parts, that is, that can be readily taken apart or put back together," the mechanical paradigm "ensures that the human researcher has a divine mandate to experiment upon, to operate

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[18] Eagleton, 2003, 59.

[19] In "Some Principles of Ecocriticism" (*The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996, 69-91), William Howarth notes that with the publication of Descartes's *Meditations* in 1641, material reality started being envisioned as a mechanical realm with a determinate structure, whose laws of operation may be discovered through mathematical operations and measurements. Thus, a dichotomy was established between "mechanical" unthinking matter (animals, plants, minerals, and the human body), and "pure" thinking mind (of humans, and God).

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upon, to manipulate earthly nature in any manner that he or she sees fit,"[20] and therefore to put the world to use for exclusively human needs.

In contrast to a technophilic and anthropocentric celebration of space as "construct," in *Space-Place-Environment* Lothar Hönnighausen considers that there is a strong case for reopening the debate on space in a world of electronic simultaneity marked by a globalized economy that accelerates displacement and placelessness.[21] In the same anthology, James Peacock argues that place is existential, biological, and connected to inner life, a central aspect of human existence that is now being dissolved by the "Weberian iron cage" of capitalism.[22] Globalization—the interconnecting of "everyone" and "everything" around the world, through commerce, cyberspace, migration, etc.—challenges localization, the idea of space as place, and the meaning of locale. How far can this process go in transcending place?[23]

Heide Ziegler adds that through electronic information media our communication has gained in scope and immediacy, but has lost in "humanness," in allowing the "other" to impinge on our actual lived space. As a result, the "desktop" has become for many individuals their solipsistic and most concretely lived existential place.[24]

Within a similarly non-anthropocentric understanding of space, some decades ago Maurice Merleau-Ponty posited that space is not the setting in which things are disposed or arranged, but rather *the means whereby all things*

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[20] Abram, 1991, 69.

[21] Hönnighausen, 2004, 7-14.

[22] Peacock, 2004, 88-100.

[23] I suggest that it is important to associate the emergent postmodern *placelessness* with the postmodern economic mode of a market system utterly "free" or deregulated—or with what Edward Luttwak has designated by "turbo-capitalism" (*Turbo-Capitalism: Winners and Losers in the Global Economy*, New York: HarperCollins, 1999). Since the mid-1980s a global kind of corporate capitalism has "turbo-charged" the speed of structural change, brutally exceeding the adaptive capacities of both individuals and communities. Further, and due to ever-inflated costs of real estate, it has led to an increasing homogeneous gentrification of urban centers, and to an ensuing loss of non-profitable spaces (such as meeting places for oppositional artistic expression and social intervention). Luttwack considers that "free" markets and unfree societies go hand in hand, and in fact we are now witnessing stricter enforcement of socio-spatial control, through an increasing surveillance of public and private spaces, and an aggravated "modernist" spatial zoning—for dwelling, for work, and for leisure – the latter of which has been basically reduced to consuming merchandise goods, including those of the mass-entertainment culture industry.

[24] Ziegler, 2004, 31-41.

connect.[25] Space is a pre-linguistic phenomenon, it is existential just as our existence is spatial.[26] Our relationship to space is not that of a disembodied subject to a distant object but that of a being who dwells in space and is intimately connected to its habitat:

[Our] world lacks the rigid framework once provided by the uniform space of Euclid. We can no longer draw an absolute distinction between space and the things which occupy it, nor indeed between the pure idea of space and the concrete spectacle it presents to our senses.[27]

As a result landscape can never be understood *merely* as an ideological construct, for that would imply the reality of a unifying perspective.[28]

In Euclidean physics space is "absolute," and within it objects have an absolute location. This uniform space can be equated to a landscape painting based on the laws of perspective.

The painter arranges the objects and provides them with a size, colors, and aspect that are not those of his gaze, but rather the conventional size that they would present if the gaze were directed at a vanishing point in the horizon, a gaze fixed at infinity. By subjecting all details to his analytical vision, the painter fashions a representation of the landscape that does not correspond to his own free visual impressions.[29] In contrast to this landscape painting based on the "objective" laws of perspective, and upon the assumption of a stable point of view, Merleau-Ponty alludes to Cezanne's paintings—which are structured by a plurality of overlapping perspectives within which different aspects are somehow seen together, connected—so as

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[25] Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 284.

[26] Ibid., 293-94.

[27] Merleau-Ponty, 2004, 51.

[28] The term *ideology* originated during the French Enlightenment, to designate "the scientific study of human ideas." Later, Marxist thinkers elaborated on the notion of ideology to arrive at two main meanings. The first meaning (held by Karl Marx, among others) equates ideology with "false consciousness," i.e., with the way social subjects are subordinated by the mode of production of the economic "base," and led to reproduce through cultural practices the prevailing system of class relations, and defend as their own the ideas of the ruling class ("deceptive mystification"). A second sense of ideology, proposed by the sociological tradition within Marxism, refers to "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas" (Raymond Williams). In this latter sense *ideology* is not determined by the modes and relations of production of the economic "base" of society, but is nevertheless conditioned by the assumption that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Karl Marx). In any case, *ideology* is exclusively made up of meanings and ideas that are *socially* produced.

[29] Merleau-Ponty, 2004, 52-53.

to exemplify the way in which the visual world forms itself through our gaze.[30] Within a "lived" experience of space, landscape entails a point of "anchorage" within space (my body in a given environment); multiple levels of perception (e.g. the "upright" world and the "slanted" world which I experience in succession); and a temporal, or historical continuity between them (to which my body constantly adjusts itself, usually imperceptibly).[31]

Our take on the debate over space—between either anthropocentric perspectives, or ecocentric approaches, on whether space is a cultural construct, or instead a medium that connects all things—is vital in order to clarify our own ethical stance in relation to the current environmental crisis. If we accept that nothing exists outside language/culture, that there is no extra-linguistic perception, then nature is evidently also a cultural construct—a position that not only justifies the historical human mastering of nature, but also a reliance on future environmental "engineering" so that humankind can proceed with "business as usual." If on the contrary we consider that space precedes language, that it is a medium that connects all things, then nature becomes the larger context of culture/s (not only of humans but also of other living beings, such as plants and animals, as well as of all matter).

This implies that human beings are inevitably part of a natural environment, even if they can control and manipulate large parts of it.

5. Toward an Ecophilosophical Reading of Space/Landscape

An ecophilosophical reading of space and landscape in theatre/drama/performance emphasizes ecocentric values by acknowledging the existence of a nonhuman world in its analysis, and by taking into account each individual character's ethical stance. In this sense, I want to invoke Félix Guattari's suggestion that we need to link *environmental* ecology to *social* ecology and to *mental* ecology, so as to articulate an "ecophilosophy" or ecocentric ethics:

The ecological crisis can be traced to a more general crisis of the social, political and existential. The problem involves a type of revolution of mentalities whereby they would cease to invest in a certain kind of development, based on a productivism that has lost all human finality. Thus

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[30] Ibid., 53-54.
[31] Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 330.

the issue returns with insistence: how do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity—if it ever had it—a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos?[32]

A generalized ecology associates environmental responsibility to individual agency and ethics (the production of a new mentality), to a change in the economic mode of production of our society, and to a reinvention of social practices. Such a concept of three interacting and interdependent ecologies (of mind, society, and environment) stems from an anti-dualistic view of culture/ nature, from a notion that the materiality of "nature" is not the definitional opposite of "culture," but rather its larger context.[33]

The recognition of space's immanent materiality is extremely relevant towards an ecophilosophical reading of landscape and space in theatre/drama/performance. Space in most plays figures not only as a mental/imaginary emanation of the characters that inhabit it, but also seems to produce or have a material effect on these characters' bodies and minds. It is a space immanently expressive and productive of relations, rather than a setting for human actions or an effect of representation.

What I am arguing therefore, is for an ecophilosophical analysis that articulates continuity between body and space, or that reflects upon the reciprocality or participatory relationship between character and environment. In doing so it takes into consideration the multifaceted and dynamic interaction of the three ecologies referred to by Guattari, namely:

1) an ecology of the mind, of individual subjectivity, of the political/ethical choices made at the smallest scale;[34] 2) an ecology of the

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[32] Guattari, 1995, 119-20.

[33] In "Logos of Our Eco in the Feminine" (*Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2007, 91-115) Carol Bigwood notes how the ancient pre-Socratic Greek word for "nature," *Phusis*, was "understood as the coming to be and passing away of all that is. It emphasizes nature as movement, growth, and decay" (94).

[34] Individually ethical in the sense of evaluating distinctions between "good" and "bad" based on one's existential experience, rather than adopting moral judgments based on universal principles.

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social, that interrogates the macropolitical, and collectively produced cultural relations between humanity and environment; and 3) an ecology of the environment that emphasizes the agency and dynamic materiality of an other-than-human space.

In this sense, I disagree with the suggestion of reading for landscape and space in a playtext in terms of its representation of green spaces and/or natural landscapes. This would be reading *nature* in a play as if it were just another *text*, reading but the cultural constructions or representations of nature, and ignoring nature as materiality, as well as the nature/culture inter-relationships. If, on the contrary, we read for nature in a play as its own context, as an ecocentric way of sensing suggests, we find that there are striking ecocritical resonances in plays that have been dismissed as "complicit with the dualistic, distanced, and ecologically disastrous ideologies of modernism." I am specifically alluding to Una Chaudhuri's words in her essay "Animal Rites: Performing beyond the Human," when in reference to some "mid-century modernist dramas of alienation, stories of the "little man" lost in the vast machinery of the corrupt state," she argues that "the politics of that drama, because of their exclusive focus on the individual, are largely irrelevant to ecoperformance."[35]

Differently, and within an ecophilosophical perspective, I suggest that playtexts "focused on the individual" are immanently environmental and therefore susceptible to an ecologically informed reading. An ecocentric reading of landscape should also focus on the mental ecology of individual human beings, and therefore bring back to our current critical discourse the notion of subjectivity, and of its impact on environment and space. In effect, the concept of an individually "lived experience" of space contends with the normative notion of a common objective spatial experience of "everyday life," as if we were all collectively immersed in the same factual and shared plane of "reality."

Everyday life is usually defined in exclusively socio-cultural terms, in which variation and diversity are mostly determined by local cultural differences, and by the positions of the subject within the field of social relations. Such a view leaves out the possibility of differentiation through individual imagination, emotionality, subjectivity, and self-experience, since

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[35] Chaudhuri, 2007, 517.

the individual as experiencing agent is always recast in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other "subject positions."

The notion of subjectivity that may be brought to such a dramaturgical analysis does not refer to the intentional consciousness of an "autonomous individual" or to a unitary self-presence/personality; but instead to the differentiated, sensuous, and corporeal experience of a concrete lived-body anchored in space. In this sense I would like to invoke once more Guattari's concepts, when he states that subjectivity is polyphonic and plural.

According to his writings, subjectivity has no dominant or determinant instance that guides a *fixed subject* to *being-in-the-world*; differently, subjectivity is always in the making or in process, it is a *becoming-in-and-with-the-world*: "One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette."[36] Consequently, subjectivity can engender political/ethical agency, and have effects upon the world, since it is capable of re-inventing itself, and of resisting to forms of subjection.

Landscape theory can activate new areas for the critical imagination in the field of theatre, drama and performance studies. In effect, the many facets of the concept of landscape allow us to reflect upon the implications of the recent *spatial turn*, to explore the role of spatial experience in constructing *cultural meaning* (and vice-versa), and to focus on the spatial agency of the *non-human order*. Although any dramaturgical reading of space and landscape in theatre, drama and performance unquestionably *also* requires a probing of cultural, social and historical contexts and intertexts, in this article I have argued for the need of an ecocentric understanding of spatial concepts that emphasizes the interdependent ecological agencies of non-human material environments, social developments, and individual subjectivities.

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[36] Guattari, 1995, 7.

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