

From Ricœurian Hermeneutics to Environmental Hermeneutics Space, Landscape, and Interpretation

Martinho Tomé Soares

University of Coimbra, Center for Classical and Humanistic Studies (CECH)

Abstract

The analysis of fundamental texts such as “Architecture and Narrativity” and *Memory, History, Forgetting* aims to fill a gap in studies of Environmental Hermeneutics. Indeed, the analogy between space and narrative, through parallelism with the process of triple mimesis, is usually deduced by environmental hermeneuticists from the works *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*. However, Ricœur himself took it upon himself to make this transposition in a direct and elaborated way from a phenomenological and hermeneutic analysis of the built space (through architecture) and the inhabited space, opening the way for a broader and more grounded epistemology of environmental hermeneutics. The introduction of the critical concept of landscape, as seen today by constructivist and cultural geography, legitimizes the claims of an environmental hermeneutics as an interpretive process of formally non-textual objects. Indeed, landscape in its connection to territory has its own semiotic and semantic character, which is appealed to for reading and interpretation.

Keywords: Environmental Hermeneutics; Landscape; Space; Geography; Ricœur.

Résumé

L'analyse de textes fondamentaux comme *Architecture et narrativité* et *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* proposée dans cet article vise à combler une lacune dans les études d'herméneutique environnementale. Les herméneutes de l'environnement, en effet, s'appuient habituellement sur *Temps et récit* et *Soi comme autre* pour établir une analogie entre l'espace et le récit, en parallèle avec le processus de la triple mimesis. Cependant, Ricœur lui-même s'est chargé de faire cette transposition de manière directe et élaborée à partir d'une analyse phénoménologique et herméneutique de l'espace construit (à travers l'architecture) et de l'espace habité, ouvrant la voie à une épistémologie plus large et plus raisonnée de l'herméneutique environnementale. L'introduction critique du concept de paysage, telle qu'elle est vue aujourd'hui par la géographie constructiviste et culturelle, légitime les revendications d'une herméneutique environnementale comme processus d'interprétation d'objets formellement non textuels. En effet, le paysage dans sa relation avec le territoire a son propre caractère sémiotique et sémantique, qui demande à être lu et interprété.

Mots-clés: Herméneutique environnementale; Paysage; Espace; Géographie; Ricœur.

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From Ricœurian Hermeneutics to Environmental Hermeneutics¹

Space, Landscape, and Interpretation

Martinho Tomé Soares

University of Coimbra, Center for Classical and Humanistic Studies (CECH)

I. Paul Ricœur's Philosophical Thought in Environmental Hermeneutics Studies

Epistemological justification has been a continuous concern of environmental hermeneutics studies. Taking a conception of hermeneutics based on the narrative textual paradigm, the authors and promoters of this new discipline have been largely inspired by the philosophical thought of Paul Ricœur. David Utsler openly assumes it in an article entitled "Paul Ricœur's Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy", as well as in other publications.² Martin Drenthen,³ Forrest Clingerman,⁴ Brian Treanor,⁵ and others⁶ have sought to transpose Ricœurian hermeneutics to the field of environmental philosophy, emphasizing structuring concepts such as interpretation, meaning, and identity:

Environmental hermeneuticists explore what it means to interpret environments, how environments can become meaningful to us, and how certain interpretations of the environment support certain self-interpretations. It is particularly interested in how specific places and landscapes present themselves to us as being significant and meaningful. We do not always already fully know what they have to say to us; but we feel their appeal on us:

¹ This article was written with the support of FCT (Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology).

² David Utsler, "Paul Ricœur's Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 53/2 (2009), 173-8; "Who Am I, Who Are these People, and What is this Place? A Hermeneutic Account of the Self, Others, and Environments," in Forrest Clingerman and Mark Dixon (eds), *Placing Nature on the Borders of Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 139-51; *Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, Dissertation prepared for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Denton: University of North Texas, 2019), online version: https://www.academia.edu/43479472/Hermeneutics_Environments_and_Justice.

³ Martin Drenthen, "Reading Ourselves through the Land. Landscape Hermeneutics and Ethics of Place," in Forrest Clingerman and Mark Dixon (eds), *Placing Nature on the Borders of Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics*, 123-38; "New Nature Narratives. Landscape Hermeneutics and Environmental Ethics," in Forrest Clingerman, Brian Treanor, Martin Drenthen and David Utsler, *Interpreting Nature. The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 225-41.

⁴ Forrest Clingerman, "Memory, Imagination, and the Hermeneutics of Place," in Clingerman, Treanor, Drenthen and Utsler, *Interpreting Nature*, 245-63.

⁵ Brian Treanor, "Narrative Environmental Virtue Ethics. Phronesis without a Phronimos," *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 30/4 (2008), 361-79; "Narrative and Nature. Appreciating and Understanding the Nonhuman World," in Clingerman, Treanor, Drenthen and Utsler, *Interpreting Nature*, 181-200; *Emplotting Virtue. A Narrative Approach to Environmental Virtue Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

⁶ Nathan Bell, "Environmental Hermeneutics with and for Others: Ricœur's Ethics and the Ecological Self," in Clingerman, Treanor, Drenthen and Utsler, *Interpreting Nature*, 141-59.

these places present themselves as significant and beckon to be understood and interpreted—‘what is it about this place?’⁷

In their collective work, published in 2014 with the suggestive title *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*,⁸ what stands out is this concern with defining the object of study and justifying the extension and application of the hermeneutic method to the environment. In an epistemological preamble, the authors seek to delimit, in a relatively flexible and permeable way, the scope of this new discipline, listing multiple possibilities of connecting interpretation with nature. As a result, environmental hermeneutics emerges as an open, interdisciplinary, and ongoing field. Less broad and less abstract than the simple extension of interpretation principles to the environment, the focus of environmental hermeneutics can be as much on the interpretation of natural and historical spaces as on a specific type of environmental literature or texts about nature. Take as an archetypal case Henry David Thoreau's *Walden or Life in the Woods*, in which the author is himself an interpreter of nature and the reader a second-hand interpreter. Here, interpretation is associated with the various modes of representation and literary fictionalization of the natural world. In the field of environmental hermeneutics, space is also opened to interdisciplinarity, as its purpose may be to expose, confront, explain, and critically mediate the (often conflicting) approaches of various disciplines to the theme of the environment. However, in its most robust sense, environmental hermeneutics “is a philosophical stance which understands how the inevitability of what Gadamer called our ‘hermeneutical consciousness’ informs our relationship with environments.”⁹ In this sense, environmental hermeneutics goes far beyond a set of techniques for interpreting nature. Its intention is to reach the ontological structure that underlies the need of interpretation. From this viewpoint, the character of mediation of the subject’s encounter with nature appears as a novelty and specificity of the discipline. There is no direct or immediate access to the natural world, the authors reaffirm. To a large extent, we can say that its starting point is Heideggerian, in the sense that our understanding of the world is not *primo loco* factual, but rather interpretive. Meanings do not exist in a separate Platonic sky but are always incarnated in what Gadamer called the “cultural and historical horizon,” accessed through interpretations. Likewise, the ties woven with the environment are not primarily factual, but historically and geographically situated and conditioned, recalling Gadamer’s hermeneutical circle. We do not establish a relationship with nature as “Nature,” as if it were a concept or subject, but we establish connections within nature, that is, in a certain place. This is why one of the most important themes of this philosophy is the study of landscape, or, more broadly said, of space or place. The place is the condition of possibility, or rather, the means through which an experience of nature can take place and from which signs can be read and interpreted: “To exist is to dwell. To exist is to interpret where we dwell. This is the premise of all environmental hermeneutics to the end of having a world that can be shared and in which we dwell together.”¹⁰

The concept of mediation thus imposes itself as a structuring of environmental hermeneutics, highlighting the fact that, on the one hand, the meaning of nature is never direct,

⁷ Drenthen, “Reading Ourselves through the Land,” 1-2.

⁸ Clingerman, Treanor, Drenthen and Utsler, *Interpreting Nature*.

⁹ Clingerman, Treanor, Drenthen and Utsler, *Interpreting Nature*, 4. Italicized in the original.

¹⁰ Utsler, *Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, 8.

but always passes through an intermediary support of a spatial order; and, on the other, it is interpreted by a language in an already significant historical and cultural horizon. Underlying is the Ricœurian conviction of the historical and linguistic nature of our experience of the world. The reality of the human being cannot be understood immediately, but it requires the mediation (the long way of hermeneutics) of his symbolic and cultural expressions.

Ricœur, like Gadamer, limited the mediation elements to textual forms. Environmental hermeneuticists extend the principle of mediation to the places where we live and, therefore, to nature and landscapes. One of the pioneers of environmental hermeneutics, Robert Mugerauer, says that hermeneutics can be applied to the natural world, because there is polysemy and a variety of interpretive possibilities.¹¹

Some of these environmental hermeneuticists—among them Martin Drenthen, with the concept of “legible landscape”¹² and David Utsler, under the concept of “environmental identity,”¹³ based on his reading of *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*—have supported the thesis that landscapes and places can be read as texts, and the act of reading and interpreting landscapes as texts and landscapes in texts can refigure personal and collective identities in the same way as literary texts do. The stories we tell about the meaning of a place, and what it means to be in that place, not only reflect and support our identity, but can also transform it and broaden horizons of understanding. In this sense, environmental hermeneutics becomes a key to understanding and strengthening the connection of people to specific places and landscapes, and to reinforce and promote ethical-environmental values and advances in ecological sustainability, biodiversity and in the historical-geographic sense of place attachment and identification.¹⁴

It is a fact that the landscapes can be read as texts, but we need to understand why. What phenomenological features of landscapes allows this analogy, or allows facing them as effective historical-cultural expressions? Drenthen already provided some clues.¹⁵ Our aim is to deepen and validate these insights, firstly, with the contribution of Ricœur’s meditations on space, and secondly, by borrowing from another human science, geography, for whom landscape is a core but

¹¹ Robert Mugerauer, *Interpreting Environments. Tradition, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), XXVII. This same idea is strongly emphasized by David Utsler, based on Ricœur: “hermeneutics is not about decoding or uncovering *the* meaning or a single way of understanding. Hermeneutics recognizes both the inherent polysemy (or multiplicity) of understanding and the inherent conflict of interpretations frequently present among multiple meanings (or supposed meanings)” (in *Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, 12).

¹² Drenthen, “Reading Ourselves through the Land,” 3. Introduced in the Netherlands by author and landscape activist Willem van Toorn, the term “legible landscape” is widely discussed in Dutch society on the subject of landscape conservation. “Typically, it is used to point out how old cultural landscapes—some more than others—contain signs that can be ‘read’ like meaningful texts that tell a story about ourselves and our history, much in the same way as other texts from our cultural heritage do.”

¹³ Utsler, *Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, 42-61.

¹⁴ Treanor, “Narrative Environmental Virtue Ethics.”

¹⁵ Drenthen, “Reading Ourselves through the Land.”

problematic concept.¹⁶ There is a whole fundamental aspect of landscape dynamics – its symbolic, historical-cultural, polysemic, subjective, sensory, political, interpretive character – which requires a critical analysis of this concept from the perspective of geographic epistemology, whose formulation both authorizes and challenges a dialogue with philosophical hermeneutics. Furthermore, a critical and phenomenological analysis of the landscape facilitates the transition from the world of text to the world of nature.

II. Ricoeur on Space and Hermeneutics

The landscape issue must be framed within the matrix framework of space. Despite the importance and prevalence of this concept and the correlates of “place” and “inhabit” that favors the connection of the environmental hermeneutics to the so-called *spatial turn*, this new branch of environmental philosophy has lacked a phenomenological and hermeneutics analysis of space. Ricoeur has not extensively developed a phenomenology of space, but has left us, as is known, some very suggestive and helpful pages, from which we can depart for a more extensive and supported reflection.¹⁷ This is what several scholars have done, seeking to expand and continue his reflections.¹⁸ As for us, we want to focus our attention on three vectors that are, in our view, pivotal to Paul Ricoeur’s reflection, which can greatly contribute to the epistemological validation of the hermeneutics of the environment: space as an *a priori* condition of the lived body; the analogy

¹⁶ John Wylie, in *Landscape* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007), gives an account of the more significant landscaping tensions: proximity/distance; observation/inhabitation; eye/land; culture/nature. In his words: “since the 1980s [...] there have been many distinctive and often opposed and competing understandings of what landscape is, how it functions and what methods should be used to study it. In turn, these different understandings of landscape reflect the influence of different philosophical and political beliefs and agendas. They also reflect the ways in which cultural geographers both influence and are influenced by other disciplinary positions, and in the case of landscape the list of engaged academic subjects is long” (11-2).

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Urbanisation et sécularisation,” *Autres temps. Cahiers d’éthique sociale et politique*, vol. 76-77 (2003), 113-126, online version: https://www.persee.fr/doc/chris_0753-2776_2003_num_76_1_2414; Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 369-80; Paul Ricoeur, “Architecture et Narrativité,” *Études ricœuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, vol. 7/2 (2016), 20-30, online version: <https://ricoeur.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/ricoeur/article/view/377> [Text originally published by Ricoeur, “Architecture et Narrativité,” *Urbanisme*, vol. 303 (1998), 44-51]; Paul Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 183-91.

¹⁸ Marc-Antoine Vallée, “L’esquisse d’une herméneutique de l’espace chez Paul Ricoeur,” *Arguments. Revue de philosophie de l’Université de Montréal*, vol. 2/1 (2007); Luís Umbelino, “On the Ricoeurian Project of a Hermeneutics of Space,” in Andrzej Wiercinski (ed.), *Hermeneutics-Ethics-Education* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), 199-206; Luís Umbelino, “On Paul Ricoeur’s Unwritten Project of an *Ontology of Place*,” *Critical Hermeneutics*, vol. 1 (2017), 233-46, online version: <https://ojs.unica.it/index.php/ecch/article/view/3150>; Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Space and Narrative. Ricoeur and a Hermeneutic Reading of Place,” in Bruce B. Janz (ed.), *Place, Space and Hermeneutics* (New York: Springer, 2017), 169-82; Francesca D’Alessandris, “La durée dans la dureté. Espaces de la mémoire et mémoires de l’espace chez Paul Ricoeur,” *Études ricœuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, vol. 10/1 (2019), 58-72, online version: <https://ricoeur.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/ricoeur/article/view/439>; Johann Michel, “L’interprétation et le problème de l’espace,” *Methodos*, vol. 20 (2020), online version: <http://journals.openedition.org/methodos/6651>.

of the built and inhabited space with the text; the opening to geo-history. Each one of them constitutes an ascending level in the process of the hermeneutic rationalization of space, evolving from an analogy to an almost effective semiotics of space, as we intend to demonstrate.

The comparison of space with text, valuable to environmental hermeneutics, is an idea that Ricœur develops directly and openly in "Architecture and Narrativity"¹⁹ and *History, Memory, Forgetting*.²⁰ There he proposes a narrow parallelism between the act of narrating time and the act of building in space--and therefore, between narration and architecture. Architecture, as a configuring operation, is to space as narrative is to time. The constructed space of architecture mediates between geometric space and the space experienced by and in the body, just as narrative time mediates between cosmological time and phenomenological or lived time. These crossings result in human space and human time. The application of the literary process of the triple mimesis to the act of building is particularly illustrative.

At the level of prefiguration, Ricœur formulates a series of phenomenological and ontological statements that highlight the spatial condition of the human being and the dialectic between dwelling and building. Appealing to renowned authors of the phenomenology of space, such as Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty and Edward Casey, Ricœur recalls that inhabiting and building are basic and primary needs of the human being, needs that arise from the fact that man is an emplacement and displacement being. Man's action on the intimate and social space is so immediate that it is not possible to return to a primordial nature: "it is always already along the way to fracture and a suture between nature and culture that the so-called 'primitive' humankind allows itself to come across."²¹ Therefore, space is not just the setting where our lives take place, but it is an inalienable constituent of our condition as corporeal beings: "every biography takes place in a life space," Ricœur says.²² To prove it, it is enough to observe how temporal events necessarily occur in a given place, generating an overlapping of time and space, well expressed in the Bakhtin's idea of chronotope, or in Kantian's transcendental aesthetics, where space and time are interconnected as an *a priori* of the human being's condition. The very action of remembering is both temporal and spatial.

This sense of place, inherent to the activity of remembering, leads Ricœur in *History, Memory, Forgetting* to deepen the relationship of memory and, following that, of history with space, introducing the notions of environment and site of memory. All memories of a space are simultaneously intimate and shared with others. In the process of remembrance, the corporeal

¹⁹ We follow the English version: Paul Ricœur, "Architecture and Narrativity," *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 7/2 (2016), 31-42, online version: <https://ricoeur.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/ricoeur/article/view/378>.

²⁰ We follow the English version: Paul Ricœur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

²¹ Paul Ricœur, "Architecture and Narrativity," 34. Jeff Malpas, in *Place and Experience. A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), considers the opposite, the place is before its social construction.

²² Ricœur, "Architecture and Narrativity," 34. According to Casey, "where we are has everything to do with what and who we are". So "to be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place" (Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place. Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), XIII, XV.

spatiality appears linked to a broader and shared space, which he calls environmental space: “At the beginning, we have the corporeal and environmental spatiality inherent to the evocation of a memory.”²³ From shared memories he passes to collective memory and sites of memory—wild nature—spaces consecrated by tradition for collective commemoration.

All this is possible because first there is a body in situation. The body itself (in Merleau-Ponty’s sense in *Phenomenology of Perception*) is a reference center that is even before the mathematical or geometric space. However, the body itself cannot be said without *some* reference to this Euclidean, cartographic space. That is why “between the lived space of the lived body and the environment and public space is intercalated geometric space.”²⁴ And it is in the confluence of these two spaces that the act of inhabiting is located, an act that materializes in building.

The configuration of space through architecture is understood as an inscription in the enduringness of materials, reinforcing the parallelism with the inscription in time made by the narrative. Writing ensures duration to the literary artifact and the enduringness of the material gives durability to the construction itself. The relationship between space and narrative temporality is even greater because each construction holds the petrified memory of the construction process within itself, leading Ricoeur to claim that “constructed space is condensed time.”²⁵ As so, more than just a simple parallelism between the two poetic acts, we can recognize the temporal and narrative dimension of the architectural project, or, put another way, an architectural narrativity. This one becomes more evident as we go forward in the configuration operation. Each construction operates a synthesis of the heterogeneous and merges together discordances into a concordant unity in terms of an intelligibility that seeks to make what is complex understandable. Furthermore, we can speak of an intertextuality phenomenon in the construction process. Each new building contrasts with those that already exist in the urban space, generating a tension between sedimentation and innovation, equivalent to what occurs in the process of literary construction: “Each new building is inscribed in urban space like a narrative within a setting of intertextuality.”²⁶ The intertextuality, resulting from the contextualization of the new building in the urban set, gives historicity to the architectural configuring act. Not a historiographical historicity, so to speak, but a historicity related to the very act of building/inscription within a space with other constructions. As so, this space brings together different eras in the same place and offers our gaze a solid history of aesthetics tastes, styles, and cultural forms. At this point the phonic and semantic resemblance between monument and document becomes very relevant. The proximity between history and architecture, too, becomes very close: the stone, like the text, displays the testimonies of the past that *is no longer but which-once-was* and allows us to save the *having-been* of the past despite its *being-no-longer*.

The city and all the places we inhabit attract both our gaze and our reading. It is therefore at the level of urban or public space that the action of time in space is best perceived, as the city itself becomes a repository of life stories and traces of the past that invite receptive and active inhabitants to constant readings and re-readings, producing with this process a plurality of

²³ Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 148.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 150.

²⁵ Ricoeur, “Architecture and Narrativity,” 36.

²⁶ Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 151.

readings of the act of dwelling itself. Therefore, Ricœur concludes by saying that in the city, “narrated time and inhabited space are more closely associated than they are in an isolated building.”²⁷ The act of reading and refiguring a built space has other points of contact with the literary process. The interplay between sedimentation and innovation is also manifested in this third stage, in the way in which novelty is accepted or resisted. The conservative inhabitant prefers repetition, the known, and rejects the new. However, someone who values a reconstruction-memory instead of a repetition-memory, will be more receptive to the novelty and reorganization of space. Ricœur is clearly an apologist for the dynamism and plurality of space, stating that it is no less a question of de-familiarizing the familiar, that is, completely erasing the past to the point of making the place unrecognizable, than of familiarizing the single, that is, of accepting novelty and change as ways of valuing and culturally enriching social dwelling. Or, using the literary metaphor of refiguration, to broaden horizons of understanding.

It is also at the level of urban space that the contrast with the unbuilt and with nature becomes more noticeable, and the attraction for wild nature is reinforced. This wild nature, far from being marginalized, manifests its primacy.

Finally, in order to place space at the equivalent level of the rationalization of time done for history, Ricœur climbs one more step and goes from the built space of architecture to the inhabited land of geography. This transition is another innovation in relation to the article “Architecture and Narrativity” and is of great benefit to *Environmental Hermeneutics*, as it allows us to introduce the core and transversal concept of landscape.

Geography has its scope in “places,” “countrysides,”²⁸ “visible effects on the earth’s surface that were both natural and human.”²⁹ Geography, in fact, is not just cartography, or geometric space, because it gives us an account of another very important dimension, the inhabited space or the environment (*milieu*), where *bios* and civilization, climate and culture come together. We owe the Annales school and the pioneering work of Fernand Braudel for opening history to geography and the environment. Structural history has highlighted the capacity for inscription and permanence in time of humanized natural spaces. Their structures are stable and almost immobile, so they allow a long-term historical study. Hence the preference of this school for rural landscapes and territories. This type of story makes the best use of the narration of space. It is no longer an analogy, but real geo-history.

Starting from a phenomenology of places, passing through the architectural intelligibility, Ricœur’s discourse finally reaches the inhabited space of geography. Therefore, he closes his reflection by evoking the famous concept of *oikoumene*, used by the geographer Augustin Berque: “the discourse of space too has traced out an itinerary thanks to which lived space is turn by turn abolished by geometrical space and reconstructed at the hyper-geometrical level of the *oikoumene*.”³⁰ *Oikoumene* elevates the discourse to a global, planetary scale, that of the earth as a

²⁷ Ricœur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 151.

²⁸ “Paysages” in the original French version.

²⁹ Ricœur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 151. Ricœur is quoting François Dosse, *L’Histoire en miettes. Des “Annales” à la nouvelle histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010 [1987]).

³⁰ Ricœur, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, 151.

common home, shared by all inhabitants of the planet.³¹ At the same time, it is a key concept in the renewal of landscape studies, a central but problematic concept of geography in recent decades. Interestingly, the discussion around the landscape narrows this bridge of interdisciplinary dialogue opened by Ricoeur. Geographers are not shy about visiting his work in search of support for their epistemological inquiries, as we will see now.

III. Landscape and Interpretation

The geographer Anne Sgard³² recognizes the influence of Paul Ricoeur's thought and uses it on several occasions to base her reflection on the nature and epistemological status of landscape: she evokes Ricoeur's narrative theory to support a landscape's narrative;³³ she draws on the ethical goal developed in *Oneself as Another* to frame its proposal for a landscape ethics;³⁴ she draws on the Ricoeurian concept of narrative identity when she reflects on the ubiquitous theme of identity in the landscape,³⁵ and she confronts the author in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, when she distinguishes the way history and geography relate to landscape memory and discusses the theme of the relationship between memory and place.³⁶

By the way, on this last topic, Sgard says that although history and geography may share landscape as object of study, the way in which the two sciences approach the subject is different. History turns to the past, seeking to rewrite the history of a place from the memory of that place; geography, on the other hand, inverts and goes beyond this process, as it is based on the two-way relationship between past and present. It does not start from memory for the present, but from the current discourses of the users of the territories, their becoming, the ongoing transformations, in order to discern logics of action there. As so, regarding the inscription of memory in a place,

³¹ The famous French geographer Augustin Berque is the propellant of cultural geography, which brings together various constructivist approaches and those resulting from the analysis of perceptions, representations, mobilizing interdisciplinarity. The author resorted to phenomenology to reflect on the relationship between man and the so-called *écoumène*, reconstructing from the base the project of the discipline itself. The *écoumène* is not the earth as a mere physical body, nor even as an ecological entity—as it could be if humanity did not exist—"écoumène is the earth as we inhabit it" (Augustin Berque, *Être humains sur la terre. Principes d'éthique de l'écoumène* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 12). Phenomenology allowed Berque to overcome the subject-object split and remove geography from the hegemony of positivism. Hence the neologism "*médiance*," which created a school in the 1990s. The term makes it possible to overcome the subject-object duality and establish a dialectical relationship between questions from the field of philosophy and aesthetics and those from geography. Berque and other contemporary French-speaking geographers were responsible for the epistemological renewal in landscape studies.

³² Anne Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, thesis of HDR (Grenoble: Université de Grenoble, 2011), online version: <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00686995>.

³³ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 105-7.

³⁴ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 174-9.

³⁵ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 185-96.

³⁶ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 204-7.

geography is more interested in the places where memories occur than in the remembered places, as only the former re-connect memory to the current territory.

The various forms of appropriation of Ricœur's philosophical thought identified above are used in the context of a long phenomenological and epistemological reflection on the strategic concept of landscape. From this analysis carried out by Anne Sgard we are interested, above all, in highlighting a series of arguments that justify its polysemic and hermeneutic character.

Let us try to approach a definition, aware of the difficulty that this entails, because—Sgard warns us—the landscape is a kind of black beast, very revealing of the multiple ways of doing geography.³⁷ In short, we will say, quoting the author, that it is an affective and sensory relationship between individuals and the territory. In a more complete definition, “it is the sensory, aesthetic and affective dimension of the relationship that a socialized individual builds with the territory.”³⁸ Such a definition must be inscribed in a constructivist and cultural filiation, that of Berque and many others. Indeed, Sgard is not interested in the materiality of the landscape, in its ecological or naturalist side, but in its symbolic dimension. Preferring to focus on the relationship between the spectator and the spectacle, she works on the representations and social discourses about the landscape. Hence, in line with Berque, she recognizes herself as a debtor of the phenomenological method: in overcoming the division between subject and object, through the intentionality of the gaze, which projects itself on and is attracted by the landscape (constructing it); in opting for the hermeneutic method; for the possibility of intersubjectively linking the individual and the collective.³⁹

Among these three contributions of phenomenology to the study of landscape, we would like to emphasize the use of the hermeneutic method. Its use confirms the semiotic and polysemic character of the landscape. If the landscape arises from the intentional projection of the subject who looks to know and tries to decipher what his gaze sees, we need tools for analyzing the encoding/decoding process that only hermeneutics can provide.⁴⁰ The gaze seeks to decode the landscape in order to build its meaning. The perception of landscapes and their expression through language give meaning to objects, shapes, and sensations, and attributes certain values to them, translating them through the filter of cultural codes, social values, and the aesthetic norms of the

³⁷ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 16.

³⁸ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 52.

³⁹ We must note that there is not an overlap between the constructivist and the phenomenological approach to landscape. There are phenomenologists who do not consider themselves constructivists (for instance, David Seamon and Yi Fu Tuan) and there are also geographers whose work contains constructivist elements that are acknowledged as somehow antithetical to phenomenology (for instance, the structuration theory proposed by Anthony Giddens, the time-space geography of Hagerstrand, and Harvey's Marxist geography). About the phenomenological approach to landscape see Wylie, *Landscape*, chapter 5. We would like to thank the external reviewer of this article for his/her good report and precious recommendations, which allowed us to improve some less clear or less developed aspects, such as, for example, this question of phenomenology applied to geography. On this point we follow his/her comment very closely.

⁴⁰ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 47.

group. Therefore, we can speak here of a hermeneutic circle.⁴¹ Although the reader and interpreter of the landscape does not look for the intentionality of an author, it relies on intersubjectivity and intertextuality, as their appreciation of the landscape is supported and confronted with the readings and interpretations of others, many of which have already been established in the individual and collective landscape memory. The landscape is simultaneously, in a total and intrinsic way, individual and collective; it mobilizes both the observer's perception schemes at the moment of observation and the collectively shared references, social codes and aesthetic values (the picturesque, the unmissable places....) of the community to which it belongs.⁴² In saying that, we are acknowledging that the observer's gaze is always conditioned by sociocultural matrices, social positions, habits, and ideologies. The diversity of perceptions raises a multiplicity of readings. Sgard says that "there are as many gazes and landscapes as observers."⁴³ Here, landscape is considered historically and culturally as a particular visual mode of observing and knowing. For that reason, this type of research and understanding landscapes has moved towards the interpretative methodologies of the arts and humanities.⁴⁴ This strand especially influential within cultural geography argues that the landscape is a construction or configuration that is already the result of a refiguration process, if we want to use Ricoeurian terminology.⁴⁵ The idea that the landscape could be the faithful reflection of a nature given to sight is no longer tenable. Each one takes a subjective look at nature, each one sees nature from their own angle and composes their landscape, according to their point of view. In turn, the geographer is an interpreter of territory and territorialities in action. His work does not consist so much in analyzing and describing materiality, but in studying the mechanisms that support the codification process and the discourses about the landscape. In other words, he is the true hermeneuticist of the landscape. In the role of hermeneuticist, as Ricoeur taught us, he must not limit himself to discursiveness or to the signs of discourse (semiotics) but must consider the reality of the speaker, the place from which he speaks, the referents he mobilizes, and the material components that he summons in his speech.

The landscapes themselves undergo mutations not only at the physical-natural level, but also at the interpretive level. The readings that are made of it change and evolve depending on the

⁴¹ "Landscape is not only something we see, it is also a *way of seeing things*, a particular way of looking at and picturing the world around us. Landscapes are not just about *what* we see but about *how we look*. To landscape is to gaze in a particular fashion. And how we look at things is not only to do with the biological functioning of our eyes. How we look at things is a cultural matter; we see the world from particular cultural perspectives, the ones into which we have been socialised and educated. What this means—and this has become almost axiomatic for cultural geographers—is that studying landscape involves thinking about how our gaze, our way of looking at the world, is always already laden with particular cultural values, attitudes, ideologies and expectations" (Wylie, *Landscape*, 7).

⁴² See Jean-Marc Besse, "Écrire le paysage," *Revue des sciences humaines*, vol. 209/1 (1988).

⁴³ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 57.

⁴⁴ To know more about these set of approaches see Wylie, *Landscape*, chapters 3 and 4.

⁴⁵ For Danny Trom, landscape results from a broad configuration activity, which implies a series of operations such as the choice of relevant objects, approximation of the constituent parts, qualification of objects and their articulation, bringing them together in a unit. ("À l'épreuve du paysage. Constructivisme savant et sens commun constructiviste," *Revue du Mauss*, vol. 1/17 (2001), 247-60.)

context and value systems of the moment and the group in question. Therefore, they are constantly being reinterpreted, updated, revisited both individually and collectively.

On the other hand, if a landscape is a cutout in the territory, it must include both natural spaces and built-up spaces, including urban ones. The landscape does not have to be a picturesque place or one with beautiful views; it can be an ordinary, everyday space, any space that offers itself to aesthetic appreciation. This new concept of landscape forced geography to bring to its field of studies a concept that was foreign to it, that of aesthetics.

Another strategic concept in the constructivist approach to landscape is the phenomenological notion of inhabiting, directly linked to territory and territoriality. To inhabit, as Ricœur already said, criticizing Aristotle, is not putting oneself in a hole, it is acting on the territory, transforming it through construction and at the same time being an agent of its own realization as a being that seeks meaning.⁴⁶

Anne Sgard uses the concepts of territory and territoriality instead of space and spatiality, which she considers to be older and more abstract. In doing so, she believes that she is offering geography a unifying conceptual framework for the study of landscape. These two concepts, she argues, are encompassing, eclectic, and fluid historical and social constructions, of individual and collective appropriation, which combine the factual or material (objects, spaces, practices, and everyday experiences) and the ideal of representations or imaginaries (ideas, symbols, myths, memories). The material and symbolic resources present in the configuration of a territory both structure the conditions of individual and collective existence and inform the personal and collective identity of the inhabitants. The concept of territoriality designates the forms and modalities of the relationship with the territory, the practices, meaning and values that we attribute to it, individually and collectively. According to this author, it is therefore against the background of territory and territoriality that the landscape must be faced. Knowledge of the territoriality's reading grid is a prerequisite for the analysis and understanding of discourses about the landscape. In turn, the landscape is also a source of knowledge, as it projects the facts and imaginaries of the territory while at the same time serving as a mediator between individuals and the territory. As a rule, those who observe and know well their territory tend to produce a sensitive discourse full of information, natural and symbolic, cognitive and sensory, useful for knowledge and management of the territory. Concludes Sgard, "the landscape is the gaze over a territory and the territory is constructed through this gaze."⁴⁷

Finally, the issue of narrative. It may seem paradoxical to speak of narrative about landscape, which is inscribed in the present and in the sensorial, and is more prone to description, image, and synchrony. The truth is that in the current context, in which environmental concerns and nature are on the agenda, we cannot dissociate the landscape from historical time, the historical time—as demonstrated by Ricœur—which is inscribed in every building, in every public space, and in every landscape. Furthermore, it appears that the theme of landscape easily evokes the

⁴⁶ See André-Frédéric Hoyaux, "Entre construction territoriale et constitution ontologique de l'habitant. Introduction épistémologique aux apports de la phénoménologie au concept d'habiter," *Cybergeo. European Journal of Geography*, article 216, 2002, online version: <http://cybergeo.revues.org/index1824.html>

⁴⁷ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 59.

narration, whether through life stories, memories, or even historical narration. It is a fact that the characteristics and values of a landscape are largely due to its inscription over the long term and therefore seek out narrative. Hence, Sgard recognizes that the narrative process developed by Ricoeur is “not only interesting, but particularly adapted to the landscape theme, however paradoxical it may seem.”⁴⁸ Also, in the discourse about the landscape, there is room for characters (and the landscape may be one of them) and plot, events and unforeseen events, continuity and ruptures, and all of this is combined in a narrative in which past, present, and future are articulated. Indeed, contemporary geography is not limited to landscapes description, with the aim of producing a regional monograph, today its concern must go through articulate temporalities, putting into perspective the present action with reference to the past, heritage, collective memory, foundations, and projection into the future. Finally, the use of narrative makes it possible to link the landscape to identity and memory, themes to which Sgard pays particular attention.

Very briefly, we just say that individuals identify with the territories and find in the landscape personal and collective reference points. On the other hand, as we have seen before, landscapes, like any space, are fundamental anchors of personal and collective memories. In addition, they can also be places of commemorative and ritual memory, heritage monuments and historical documents. Their inscription over a long period of time makes them transmitters of diverse material vestiges and signs—architecture, agricultural practices and techniques, plantations, human and natural components—conducive to the process of patrimonialization and construction of a local history. In this sense, territories are authentic semiological fields, full of evidence from the past, whether intentional (impressions) or occasional (traces), human or natural, which demand from the observer an attentive reading, interpretation and decipherment. And this work of reading or refiguration, to use Ricoeurian terminology, contributes, of course, to the construction of identity. Therefore, it is no longer a question of reading the territory and landscape as a text, but of reading from the semiotics of the territory and its semantics on multiple formats.⁴⁹

IV. To Conclude: From the Lived Space to the Landscape, Towards an Environmental Hermeneutics

Evoking geo-history and the work of the Annales school, Ricoeur ends his reflection recognizing that space, including landscape, can be the object of historical narration, but he does not speak directly of interpretation; although we know that the entire process of historical construction necessarily implies interpretation in each of the moments of the historiographical operation. In any case, today no one questions the possibility of interpreting space, inhabited and

⁴⁸ Sgard, *Le Partage du paysage*, 106.

⁴⁹ Janz (“Is Place a Text?,” in *Place, Space and Hermeneutics*, 23-34), like Michel (“L’interprétation et le problème de l’espace”), consider that the text is not the only possible support to think analogically about the problematic nature of space. There are other metaphors such as place as scene, place as image, place as body. Utsler (*Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, 13) considers that “hermeneutics must be emancipated from the presumption of the primacy of the text in the meaning of hermeneutics in order to broaden its scope and to do justice to our experience of environments. Both texts and non-texts shares the quality of something that can be interpreted and understood”. About the metaphor of the landscape as text, see Wylie, *Landscape*, 70-82.

natural. More recent studies have shown that “there is nothing that is immune to interpretive engagement and that if one can understand at all, then one can always understand differently.”⁵⁰ David Utsler is also categorical on this subject:

Anything we might call an environment is a locus of interpretation—a space I inhabit and inevitably makes sense of and therein find meaning.

[...] Environments can be considered a locus for interpretation, in that they are places in which we find or attach meaning, our relationship to them results in self-understanding, and they are the places from which we speak. Once we recognize that environments are open to interpretation, it follows that there is never any single meaning in an environment, which is simply uncovered or decoded.⁵¹

In a remarkable article in which he delimits three regimes of human emplacement (spatiality of the own body, of things and social), Johann Michel justifies in a more precise way what leads us to interpret space. He says that this happens when space becomes problematic, that is, “when it has lost its usual points of reference, when we are confronted with spatial distortions of meaning, when unknown, strange or foreign spaces are presented to us.”⁵²

It seems to us that the scientific concept of landscape, understood as the result of a process of reading and interpreting space, allows us to go further towards an environmental hermeneutics. On the one hand, it is an epistemologically more delimited and critically more precise concept than that of environment. On the other hand, the landscape is a regime of the relationship of the subject and communities with the territory that has its specificity as a result of the continuous and plural process of interpretation and is not dependent on any loss of spatial reference, however productive and creative this may be. The introduction of this concept, as theorized by constructivist and cultural geography, demonstrated how this form of sensorial and emotional relationship with space allows us to view territories as codified places that can be read and refigured.

Furthermore, the concept of landscape allows us to overcome other gulfs amid studies in environmental philosophy. The fact of including both the inhabited spaces that Ricœur spoke of (marked by the matrix of human inscription in a long term) and natural spaces (where the inscription of human authorship is smaller) let us to overcome the traditional division between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism.⁵³ We consider all space to be a lived and built space, even the landscape (see the intervention of farmers, gardeners, road, bridge and other infrastructure builders in the natural space), and that the more the space is inhabited, the more it lends itself to being interpreted. Nonetheless, a phenomenology of landscape must consider natural spaces, even those that Ricœur designates as wild nature, to be open to interpretation. In

⁵⁰ Jeff Malpas, “Foreword,” in Janz (ed.), *Place, Space and Hermeneutics*, VII.

⁵¹ Utsler, *Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, 22; 23-34.

⁵² Michel, “L’interprétation et le problème de l’espace.”

⁵³ See Alexander Federau, *Pour une philosophie de l’Anthropocène* (Paris: Puf, 2017), 339-384; Utsler, *Hermeneutics, Environments, and Justice*, 63-89.

fact, in the interpretation of the landscape, not only the traces left by man count, but also the unintentional made by nature itself.⁵⁴

The application of phenomenology to the study of landscapes also has the virtue of overcoming other dichotomous tensions (subject-object, symbolic and ecological, sensorial and factual, culture and nature) opening the way to a comprehensive and articulated vision of the relationship between man and the environment. No less significant is the relationship between landscape and memory and identity, in the ways that it can open up a fair and balanced dialogue on ethical and ecological issues of environmental preservation and environmental sustainability.

Therefore, it seems to us that the contribution of a critique of the landscape can be of the utmost importance to studies of environmental hermeneutics. Understanding landscape as a crucial concept and meeting point of environmental hermeneutics with geography, our main purpose was to demonstrate and legitimize the application of interpretation to a given experience of space, that of the landscape. At the same time, we believe we have left clues for other possible paths of research and reflection on issues related to the field of environmental hermeneutics studies.

⁵⁴ We can extend this reflection to the edge of the intentional marks of nature itself, in a non-anthropocentric perspective. The hermeneutics of the living, proposed by philosopher Jean-Claude Gens, from the so-called comprehensive biology, goes in this direction, defending a kind of animal hermeneutics. For biosemiotics, which studies biological signs, the animal, depending on the way it presents itself, expresses a series of meanings, directed mainly, but not only, to members of its species. He does this because he perceives meanings and interprets the appearance and attitude of other beings that inhabit his environment. The animal perceives an environment around it (the environment built and perceived by itself; a coherent whole, its own world) that does not correspond to the surrounding environment. This comprehensive biology provides a very interesting conceptual framework for recovering and rethinking the classic metaphor of the "book of nature" in a non-anthropocentric perspective. See Jean-Claude Gens, *Éléments pour une herméneutique de la nature. L'indice, l'expression et l'adresse* (Paris: Cerf, 2008). Since Dilthey, hermeneutics tends to privilege textual support, durable inscriptions of human authorship and human interiority (see Federau, *Pour une philosophie de l'Anthropocène*, 351). It is also the hermeneutic primacy of human inscription that leads Ricœur and others to privilege inhabited space and anthropocentric inscription over natural space and inscription. However, in our view, this does not mean that one cannot extract from Ricœur's meditations clues for a broader understanding of hermeneutics, based on signs produced (although unintentionally) by animals other than humans (cf. Michel, "L'interprétation et le problème de l'espace," 44-5). We believe that there is room in Ricœur for interpretation and hermeneutics of nature (even if it cannot be considered non-anthropocentric). Take, for example, as a starting point, his reflections around the notion of trace as a sign-effect, in *Time and Narrative. Volume 3*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988). It is worth recalling here some of his stimulating statements in this book: "the trace invites us to pursue it, to follow it back, if possible, to the person or animal who passed this way. [...] We may know by other means that people or animals existed somewhere, but they will remain forever unknown if there is not some trace that leads to them. Hence the trace indicates "here" (in space) and "now" (in the present), the past passage of living beings. It orients the hunt, the quest, the search, the inquiry. But this is what history is. To say that it is a knowledge by traces is to appeal, in the final analysis, to the significance of a passed past that nevertheless remains preserved in its vestiges" (120).

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