

Introduction – Ricœur and the Problem of Space. Perspectives on a Ricœurian “Spatial Turn”

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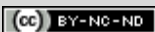
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Introduction – Paul Ricœur: Thinker of Space. Envisioning a Ricœurian Spatial Turn

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Human existence is always localized. Although today's global world is characterized by the speed of physical movement and the ease of mediated communication by multitudes of overlapping networks, such that our "roots" have been replaced by "anchors,"¹ we are born and always live some-where. Since all our actions and thoughts necessarily take place in a spatial context, spatiality is an essential dimension of human beings's personal and collective life. However, contemporary philosophers and social scientists have only recently realized the complexity of the concept of space. Some critics in both philosophy and the human sciences have spoken of a "spatial turn" as "a response to a longstanding ontological and epistemological bias that privileges time over space in all the human sciences, including spatial disciplines like geography and architecture."² Over the past decade, not only the disciplines of urbanism and architecture are becoming more receptive to philosophy and social theory, but also social thinkers and philosophers are becoming more involved in debates about the spatial dimension of human being's existence. This issue of *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies* on "Ricœur and the Problem of Space" aims to explore Ricœur's insights into the topic of space as a polysemic concept whose meanings are addressed in different disciplines, such as physics, astronomy, physical and human geography, cultural anthropology, architecture, urbanism, and design.

Ricœur is widely recognized as a philosopher of time, history, and memory.³ His constant interest in the study of the temporal dimension of human existence is succinctly expressed in the

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 11.

² Edward Soja, "Taking Space Personally," in Santa Arias and Barney Warf (eds.), *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 11.

³ Marc-Antoine Vallée, "L'esquisse d'une herméneutique de l'espace chez Paul Ricœur," *Arguments. Revue de philosophie de l'université de Montréal*, vol. 2 (2007), 6.

titles of his works, such as *History and Truth* (1955),⁴ *Time and Narrative* (1983-85),⁵ and *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000).⁶ Whereas Ricœur consistently explores the topic of time in his oeuvre, he rarely offers direct analyses of the problem of space. Since Ricœur almost never broached this topic in a thematic way, his work could be (and in fact has been) considered a perfect example of the temporal bias that has characterized both philosophical thought and the human sciences. More specifically, Ricœur directly works on the problem of space in three texts: (1) in the section on the alterity of the flesh and its originary and non-objective spatiality in the tenth study of *Oneself as Another* (1990),⁷ (2) in his article “Architecture and Narrativity” (1998),⁸ and (3) in the chapter “Inhabited Space” in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004).⁹ Nevertheless, Ricœur’s consideration of the question of space is not limited to these texts. Whereas in these works Ricœur’s approach to the notion of space remains largely programmatic, it is our conviction that the concept of space is profoundly intertwined with the recurring topics of his thought, such as the body, language, action, time, and the imagination. Moreover, when considered from this perspective, the changes in method implied by Ricœur’s evolution from an eidetic phenomenology to his hermeneutic phenomenology as he successively deals with the questions of symbol, text, and action undoubtedly entail relevant consequences for a Ricœurian conception of space.

The problem of space in Ricœur’s oeuvre and its resonance with the human and social sciences has begun to be discussed only quite recently.¹⁰ Scholars recognize that the issue of space is intertwined with the major topics that Ricœur develops in his works, such as the body,¹¹ the

⁴ Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).

⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Vol. I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); *Time and Narrative. Vol. II*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985); *Time and Narrative, Vol. III*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1988).

⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁸ Paul Ricœur, “Architecture and Narrativity,” *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 7 (2016), 31-42.

⁹ Paul Ricœur, “Inhabited Space,” in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 147-52.

¹⁰ See Rita Messori, “Mémoire et inscription. Temporalité et spatialité de l’architecture selon Paul Ricœur,” in Andris Orth and Stefan Orth (eds.), *Erinnerungsarbeit. Zu Paul Ricœurs Philosophie von Gedächtnis, Geschichte und Vergessen In Breitling* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2004); Luís António Umbelino, “Herméneutique, architecture et humanisation de l’espace. L’architecture des lieux de mémoire selon Paul Ricœur,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, vol. 91 (2011), 67-81.

¹¹ See Marc Breviglieri, “L’espace habité que réclame l’assurance intime de pouvoir. Un essai d’approfondissement sociologique de l’anthropologie capacitaire de Paul Ricœur,” *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 3/1 (2012), 34-52; Paul Downes, “A Living Spatial Movement of Relation. Reconceptualizing Ricœur’s Oneself as Another and Heidegger’s Being and Time,” *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 11/2 (2020), 111-32; Luís António Umbelino, “Memory of the Body, Temptation of Space,” *The European Legacy*, vol. 20/8 (2015), 844-51.

question of metaphor,¹² narrative and text,¹³ ideology and utopia,¹⁴ memory¹⁵ and recognition.¹⁶ Moreover, the emergent field of environmental hermeneutics has found in Ricœur's thought a significant source of inspiration.¹⁷ Authors in this field have contributed to clarifying the concept of space as related to the notions of nature, environment, landscape, architecture, and urbanism. Although we can recognize a growing interest in the problem of space in Ricœur's thought, we have to admit that the efforts to catch sight of this concept are highly fragmentary. All the recent attempts to think this notion in his work leave ample room for further elaborations.

Driven by the key question "what does it mean to be human?" Ricœur's thought develops as a philosophical anthropology of the human being as an embodied social being, living and interpreting the world with others.¹⁸ Ricœur's sustained attention to the anthropological question—that is, his constant attentiveness to the meaning and the task of human being—is the context in which the problem of space is inserted. This issue of *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies* aims to emphasize the multiple dimensions of the question of space in Ricœur's thought and its resonance with the social sciences and the humanities at large. Accordingly, in what follows, our examination consists of three main tasks connected to Ricœur's different takes on the problem of space.

First, we will analyse the nature of the relationship between space and the lived body in Ricœur's thought. Although Ricœur does not explicitly bring out the question of space in his early phenomenological works, his analyses are profoundly connected to this topic. More precisely, the problem of space is linked here to Ricœur's conception of the lived body seen as the center of orientation of all perceptions; that is, as the 'here' for every 'there' from which we can orient our

¹² See Paul Downes, "At the Threshold of Ricœur's Concerns in *La Métaphore vive*. A Spatial Discourse of Diametric and Concentric Structures of Relation Building on Lévi-Strauss," *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 7/2 (2016), 146-63.

¹³ See Paolo Furia, "Landscape as a Text. Ricœur and the Human Geography," *Discipline Filosofiche*, vol. 30 (2020), 239-60; Christina Gschwandtner, "Space and Narrative. Ricœur and a Hermeneutic Reading of Place," in Bruce Janz (ed.), *Place, Space and Hermeneutics* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 169-81; Nikolaos-Ion Terzoglou, "Architecture as Meaningful Language. Space, Place and Narrativity," *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, vol. 6 (2018), 120-32.

¹⁴ See Héctor Acero-Ferrer, "Imagining Borders, Imagining Relationships. Can We Build Enlarged Communities Through Narrative Imagination?," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society*, vol. 5 (2020), 447-68.

¹⁵ See Stephanie Arel, "The Power of Place. Trauma Recovery and Memorialization," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, vol. 4/2 (2018), 15-32; Francesca D'Alessandris, "La durée dans la dureté. Espaces de la mémoire et mémoires de l'espace chez Paul Ricœur," *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 10/1 (2019), 58-72; Luís António Umbelino, "On Paul Ricœur's Unwritten Project of an Ontology of Place," *Critical Hermeneutics*, vol. 1 (2017), 233-46.

¹⁶ See Sebastian Purcell, "Recognition and Exteriority. Towards a Recognition-Theoretic Account of Globalization," *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 2/1 (2011), 51-69.

¹⁷ See Forrest Clingerman, Brian Treanor, Martin Drenthen and David Utsler, *Interpreting Nature. The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Maria Cristina Vendra, "Interpreting the Natural Environment. Paul Ricœur's Directions for an Eco-Hermeneutic Phenomenology," *Discipline Filosofiche*, vol. 30 (2020), 261-72.

¹⁸ See Johann Michel, *Paul Ricœur, une philosophie de l'agir humain* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006).

experience.¹⁹ In other words, space involves a process of orientation. Ricœur conceives the lived body as the mediator between the intimacy of ourselves and the externality of the world.²⁰ As the origin of our orientation in the world, the lived body is the center from which all spatial directions and distances are gauged. In **Roger Savage's** text entitled "Space of Experience, Horizon of Expectation. Spatiotemporal Metaphors, Philosophical Anthropology, and the Flesh," the phenomenological issue of embodiment is tied to the rise of both geography and history through the mediation of the couple "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation." Geography and history can be seen as two sides of the same coin, equally depending on a phenomenology of the lived body which unfolds both spatially and temporally.

Second, we will deal with the relationships between space and language. By drawing on Ricœur's conceptions of discourse, text, metaphor, and narrative, it is possible to get an idea of certain characteristics of space. The metaphors "landscape as a text" or "city as a text," for instance, emphasize how spatial entities show some text-like quality in that they can be read and interpreted. However, the notion of text seems to be more appropriate to capture the static aspect of spaces, where the notion of event can be helpful in grasping the dynamicity of the processes in which space is shaped. This is why **Francesca D'Alessandris**, in her article "La pensée des lieux de Paul Ricœur à l'épreuve du paysage. Un dialogue possible entre herméneutique, esthétique performative et phénoménologie" ("Paul Ricœur Thought of Place and the Test of Landscape. A Possible Dialogue Between Hermeneutics, Performative Aesthetics and Phenomenology"), takes into account the interplay between text and event in regards to the dialectic between the stability of landscape and the dynamism of morphogenesis and metamorphosis. **Nathan Ferret's** contribution to this issue, "Le jeu est à l'espace ce que le récit est au temps. Une anthropologie ricœurienne du jeu comme *mimésis spatiale*" ("Game is to Space as Narrative is to Time. A Ricœurian Anthropology of Play and Game as Spatial Mimesis"), approaches the problem of space from the analysis of the connection between game, play, culture, and narrative. The author shows that human beings experience space as a playground structured by practical potentialities and symbolic meanings. The role of play is to mediate the relationship between objective space and lived space. In **Paolo Furia's** article, entitled "A Hermeneutic Introduction to Maps," it is not space that has text-like qualities, but maps, understood as specific tools intended for the interpretation of a portion of land, of a region, and, in the last century, of the earth as a whole. Maps, from a Ricœurian perspective, are considered a specific mimesis of spatial reality, endowed with the power of reconfiguring the territory they purport to represent in a neutral and merely objective manner.

Third, we will deal with Ricœur's hermeneutical analysis of the spatiality of the built environment and its links to the recent developments of environmental hermeneutics. Ricœur proposes a close parallelism between narrativity and architecture, i.e., between narrating in time and constructing in space. Whereas narrative time bridges the phenomenological time of personal experience and the cosmological time, built space connects living spaces unfolded by human being's corporeal condition to the three-dimensional Cartesian geometrical space. Following Ricœur's line of thought, it is possible to argue that inhabited space as a built space is the human

¹⁹ See Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 74.

²⁰ See Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 322.

being's most original way of relating to the environing world. There is, then, a special relationship between the practices of inhabiting and constructing. According to Ricœur, like narrative, architecture follows three interconnected steps: prefiguration, configuration, [and] refiguration. Even if Ricœur neither elaborated a philosophy of the environment nor left any major work dedicated to environmental issues, the application of his hermeneutics of built spaces to non-human environments sounds promising. Ricœur's interest in environmental questions is ultimately fragmentary and scattered across a lifetime of writing. However, it is in his mature ethical thought that the philosopher approached issues concerning the urban and the natural environment both indirectly through the study of themes such as responsibility, narrative and memory, and directly in short interviews, which remain mostly unknown, about ecology, bioethics, and the role just institutions for the preservation of life on earth.²¹ In her article entitled "Telling the Story of Space. Between Design and Construction," **Giovanna Costanzo** connects Ricoeur's "Architecture and Narrativity" with, on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's early insights on the lived body and, on the other hand, the debate on modernity and postmodernity. She uses Ricœur's arguments to criticize the irrational use of land, space, and natural resources typical of much modernity. The disembodied and detached gaze of an allegedly self-sufficient Cartesian subjectivity is held responsible for a disrespectful objectification of nature as well as the degradation of public spaces. The overcoming of philosophies of the cogito achieved by Ricœur is therefore considered a precondition for developing the ecological sensitivity necessary to deal with contemporary environmental challenges. **Martino Soares** is on the same page in his article "From Ricoeurian Hermeneutics to Environmental Hermeneutics. Space, Landscape, and Interpretation." He maintains that the application of phenomenology to the analysis of landscapes has the virtue of surpassing modern dualisms (subject-object, symbolic and ecological, sensorial, and factual, culture and nature) and thus opening the way to a comprehensive vision of the relationship between man and the environment.

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²¹ See Paul Ricœur, *La Rinascita del Pianeta. Conversazioni con Paul Ricœur*, ed. Cristiano Casalini and Luana Salvarani (Milan: Medusa, 2014).

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