

Modes of Planetary Relationality

Embodied Imagination and Reflection in the Performance

Dying Together/ Earth



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2020

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Abstract

A planetary awareness is emerging amidst unprecedented times of climate emergency and environmental degradation. A planetary thinking shows that we cannot take for granted our human existence on earth, where planetary entanglements of both humans and non-humans are to be preserved if we want our planet to flourish. According to historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty, the matter is not how to create a sustainable world in which the role of non-human life is to assure extended durability of human life. But instead, how to create a planetary thinking in which habitability is the guiding principle that assures the existence of complex life, including human life. Planetary thinking prompts us to address the question of how to relate to other forms of life; therefore, the planetary is always thinking in and through relations. In this thesis, I intend to reflect on this emergent way of thinking, which I term *planetary relationality*, and to explore its potential in relation to the field of theatre and performance studies. I argue that the theatre allows for focusing more prominently on *embodied* ways of thinking and experiencing planetary relationality. To this end, I focus on the theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth* (2019) by Dutch theatre maker Lotte van den Berg. This is a participatory performance that invites spectators to physically represent beings and things that were present in situations of collective death on earth. In order to show how planetary relationality takes shape in the performance, first, I draw on the ecological approach to theatre by scholar Carl Lavery to argue that theatre and performance can be considered as ecological practices, where spectators are encouraged to develop more interconnected and embodied ways of thinking thanks to the networked quality of the stage in which the human being is always part of a larger assemblage of objects, technologies, and processes. Secondly, for my analysis, I follow the enactive approach to spectatorship, a perspective that shifts the attention from what is represented on stage towards the relationship between what is staged and the modes of perceiving of spectators. To analyze such modes, I use theories of enactive perception to describe how spectators are positioned and addressed by this performance, and subsequently, how they are invited to engage with planetary relationality through acts of embodied imagination and reflection. At its broadest, my research aims to contribute to our understanding of ecological discourses and the practice of performance ecology through an enactive approach to spectatorship.

Keywords: planetary, relationality, political ontology, ecodramaturgy, eco-theatre, performance ecology, enactive perception, embodied reflection, embodied simulation

Table of Content

Introduction	1
Towards an Embodied Understanding of Planetary Relationality	1
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Case Study – <i>Dying Together/ Earth</i>	10
Methodology and Chapter Overview	12
Chapter I.....	14
Planetary Relationality	14
Chakrabarty’s Approach to the Planetary	15
Onto-Political Relationality	23
Performance Ecology.....	30
Chapter II.....	36
Towards an Enactive Approach to Spectatorship	36
Enactive Perception	37
The Enactive Approach to Spectatorship	40
Embodied Simulation	44
Embodied Reflection.....	49
Chapter III.....	53
Spectators’ Embodied Modes of Imagination and Reflection in <i>Dying Together/ Earth</i>	53
<i>Dying Together/ Earth</i>	54
Enacting Imagination in <i>Dying Together/ Earth</i>	57
Enacting Reflection in <i>Dying Together/ Earth</i>	66
<i>Dying Together/ Earth</i> a Place to Think Physically	72
Conclusions	78
From Insights of <i>Dying Together/ Earth</i> Towards Openings of Planetary Relationality	78
Contributions and Limitations: An Invitation for Further Research	80
Appendix 1	85
Leaflet <i>Dying Together/ Earth</i>	85
Appendix 2.....	88
If you live together, you also die together: An Interview with Lotte Van Den Berg ...	88
References	96

Table of Figures

Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 1	59
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 2	61
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 3	63
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 4	64
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 5	67
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 6	69
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 7	71

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The writing of this thesis was motivated after having experienced the performance *Dying Together/ Earth*. Once, someone told me that one could say that beauty is letting experience come to the fore, and, often, that is what artists do: they shake you sufficiently to wake you from the distractions of everyday life and let you come back to who you are. In this sense, I would like to thank Lotte van den Berg, the director of the performance, as well as to the team of performers that made possible a special beauty to emerge. A flux of affects and thoughts was activated during and after the performance, guiding me to different levels of reflection that I share in this thesis. Thanks are also due to my thesis supervisor Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, whose patient support and continuous guidance enabled my process of writing.

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*This thesis is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my mother
Ma, words cannot describe how grateful I am for everything you taught me*

INTRODUCTION

Towards an Embodied Understanding of Planetary Relationality

This world is neither our oyster nor our servant. Rather we inhabit it,
and we are inhabited by its multiple stabilities and volatilities.

- William Connolly, *Facing the Planetary*

Nothing exists by itself, everything interexists, we inter-are with everything on the planet.

- Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*

When we think of the ‘planet Earth’ usually, what comes to mind are the famous images of the ‘blue planet,’ particularly photographic images taken from outer space. Satellite views such as the photographs Earthrise (1968) or Blue Marble (1972) marked a time where scientific practices of sensing and modelling the Earth started to provide technological abstractions beyond our human sensibility. And yet, they also enabled a planetary awareness to emerge (Braidotti 2018; Gabrys 2018; Likavčan 2019). These satellite representations of our planet appear before our eyes and allowed us to create associations of a sublime and interconnected biosphere; a planet that nowadays is undergoing catastrophic times amidst climate emergency. Such awareness may be regarded as the beginning of a planetary thinking, which primary urge is to make visible and tangible that we are not mere observers of a world from a ‘cosmic’ distance. But instead, that we are inhabitants of a planet where various practices of habitation—human and other-than-human—have taken place in the past and that continue to emerge in the continuous present and in the many futures, we could possibly imagine.

In this thesis, I aim to reflect on this nascent way of thinking, which I term *planetary relationality*, and to introduce it in the field of theatre and performance, focusing on processes of embodiment. Mainly, I delve into the participatory performance *Dying Together/ Earth* (2019) by Dutch director Lotte van den Berg, where participants physically represent humans and non-humans in situations of collective death on earth. In this performance, a central question arises: “Can looking at the way we die together give us new

perspectives on the way we live together?”¹ Such looking is in direct relation to the specific audience address of the performance, which is focused on the spectators’ active and physical participation. This form of proceeding aligns with a planetary relationality thought that seeks to show that we are all inhabitants of an interconnected planet. In a similar way, anthropologist Tim Ingold reminds us that:

Rather than thinking of ourselves only as observers, picking our way around the objects lying about on the ground of a ready-formed world, we must imagine ourselves in the first place as participants, each immersed with the whole of our being in the currents of a *world-in-formation*: in the sunlight we see in, the rain we hear in and the wind we feel in. Participation is not opposed to observation but is a condition for it, just as light is a condition for seeing things, sound for hearing them, and feeling for touching them. (Ingold 2011, 129 my emphasis)

In this vein, I will show how the performance *Dying Together/ Earth* can be conceived as a practice where spectators-participants may experience planetary relationality-in-formation in an embodied way. However, before explaining this further, it is essential to say that I derive my understanding of planetary relationality from ideas of historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty, especially his most recent work “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category” (2019). In this article, he presents a non-anthropocentric, non-hierarchical view on life on the planet. Planetary awareness engages with the idea of deep geological time, which allows us to think of ourselves—the human species—as a very tiny part of the history of life on the planet. Furthermore, the planetary is also an issue of human-existential concern, as it calls for thinking about how we—humans—should inhabit the planet and prompts us to address the question of how to relate to other forms of human and other-than-human life. Planetary thinking, therefore, is always a thinking in and through relations. To emphasize this, I put ‘relationality’ next to the planetary, and here I rely specifically on the work of anthropologists Arturo Escobar (2018) and Marisol de la Cadena (2015; 2018), who equally focus on principles of interbeing. In comparison to Chakrabarty, Escobar is even more radical in thinking the consequences of this, taking relationality to the level of ontology. Focusing on the primacy of relations over entities, for Escobar, “*nothing preexists the relations that constitute it*” (Escobar 2018, 101 emphasis in original). That is to say, entities are not and cannot be conceived as bounded, impervious totalities but rather as the

¹ Quoted from the *Dying Together/ Earth* script.

result of particular relations that allow for their emergence. Escobar thus moves beyond the modern dualistic ontology—represented by the pairs object/subject, mind/body, reason/emotion, etc. All in all, I propose to understand planetary relationality as a non-anthropocentric way of thinking about human positionality on the planet, while understanding relationality as the condition of possibility of phenomena and practices to emerge.

Thinking in terms of planetary relationality is relevant in the current age of climate change, where ecological discourses and practices are needed if we want our planet to flourish and be habitable for all beings—human and other-than-human (Escobar 2018; Chakrabarty 2019). However, how can we recognize planetary relationality in human practices? Theatre and performance are practices in which this kind of thinking materializes. In contrast to the technological imageries of the planet, contemporary theatre and performance move beyond visual representations of the planet and can be considered as practices that express forms of thought. Along these lines, authors and editors of the book *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance* (2019) argue that theatre and performance are practices that can be considered as modes of thinking, opening fields of inquiry due to their forms of operating—whether for the possibilities of movement, space, action, image, voice, materials, bodily arrangements, or ideas, questions, and concerns these practices explore. As theatre scholar Carl Lavery, in his contribution to this volume and elsewhere observes, theatre and performance can also help us to think through ecology, this means, a form of thinking that instead of focusing on a supposed separation between human/nature, it is actually focused on noticing wider webs of relations and forms of coexistence. As Lavery asserts, ecological thinking is concerned “to highlight how human beings are always already part of ‘nature’, creatures who have evolved out of the randomness and chaos of life’s impersonal processes (atoms, cells, amoebas, etc.), and whose ability to think, speak and make art are not signs of some brilliant exceptionalism granted by a transcendent sky god, but decidedly immanent to the creative expansion of life itself” (Lavery 2019, 258). In a similar vein, theatre and performance could help us to think about planetary relationality.

To show how planetary relationality takes shape in performance, I aim to analyze the theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth* (2019) by Dutch theatre maker Lotte van den Berg. This is a participatory performance in which temporary situations are staged, experienced, and thought along with the questioning of collective death on Earth. In this performance, spectators are invited to physically represent different elements—human and other-than-human—that may take the form of imagining being a bacterium, a butterfly, a cow, a farmer, a tree, or even the amazon soil. *Dying Together/ Earth* allows spectators to

embody, in an imaginative way, other forms of being-in-the-world, and by enabling that, increase awareness of other life-forms emerges. By “dying together,” spectators may find a sense of shared life, of coexistence, and interrelation with each other. *Dying Together/Earth* presents itself as a place where planetary relationality can be experienced and embodied. By proposing the term planetary relationality, I intend to reflect on how we may think of ourselves and the planet Earth, and to show how this form of relational and ecological thinking takes shape and operates in the theatre performance *Dying Together/Earth*.

In recent years, theatre and performance scholars have engaged with different forms of eco-critical analysis. The ‘ecodramaturgical approach’ is a relevant instance of this interest and focuses on ecology and the environment. Ecodramaturgy is a term coined by Theresa J. May, and it is defined as follows: “Ecodramaturgy is theatre and performance making that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the center of its theatrical and thematic intent” (Arons and May 2012, 4). The authors use this ecodramaturgical approach to investigate “how theatre and performance might shock us into recognition of the inescapable interdependencies and shared contingencies between our species and the millions of micro- and macro-organisms with which we share both a gene pool and a planetary ecosystem” (Arons and May 2012, 6). Although ecodramaturgy acknowledges the interrelation between our species and others, the inclusion of different temporalities on stage –like telling the story of a tree that may be 800 years old-, and the dynamics of climate emergency between the local and the global, it does not take into account what theatre and performance *do* ecologically.

In this line of thought, Lavery has expanded the ecodramaturgical approach by suggesting the idea of the ‘ecological doing’ of theatre. In the special issue of *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* (2016), Lavery opens with “Introduction: performance and ecology – what can theatre do?” In this article, Lavery introduces the notion of ‘ecological doing’ to describe the emergence of performances in which the human subject is no longer the center and ‘nature’ is not at the service of explaining or defending environmental issues. Instead, the ecological doing is about the entanglements that emerge between organic and inorganic bodies, which may take shape by the creation of performances without actors or performances where the working of ‘time ecology’² can be examined and experienced. In a nutshell, the ecological doing of theatre and performance is a mode of operating,

² Lavery (2018a) uses the term ‘time ecology’ to refer to a multiplicity of timescales involving human and non-human entities, such as geochronology, the gestation period of animals, the times of migrations, the cycle of the seasons, and so on.

characterized by the capacity of theatre to affect bodies and create sensations and experiences in actual time and space. According to Lavery, this ecological doing of theatre exposes “the inherent relationality of theatre, the fact that it always takes place between actors and audiences...; the explicitly ‘networked quality’ of the stage, in which the human being is always part of a larger assemblage of objects, technologies, and processes; and... the sense in which theatre’s temporality is fabricated, malleable and multi-scalar...” (Lavery 2016, 231). This ecological approach to theatre and performance or ‘performance ecology,’ as I will be referring from now on, focuses above all on what happens on the stage and in this sense, it provides us with important elements to include in theatrical analyses. However, planetary relationality, when inserted in theatre and performance, would focus mainly on what happens between forms of staging and the audience.

Performance ecology attends to theatre and performance as an ecological practice in and by itself. It shows the intertwined quality of stage, audience, and bodies. It pays special attention to the materiality of bodies—organic and inorganic—as well as to the somatic experience insofar as it enables us to understand, sense, and feel theatre beyond logocentric comprehensions. In this vein, Lavery asserts that “the fundamental concern of scholars is no longer to decipher what the theatre text means but rather to focus on what the theatre medium ‘does’” (Lavery 2016, 230). In this regard, if planetary relationality is brought to the context of theatre and performance, this invites us to look beyond the theatrical text and direct our investigations towards forms of operating, perceiving, and feeling in the theatre. For this reason, and because *Dying Together/ Earth* focuses on audience participation, I will concentrate on the spectator’s engagement. Specifically, I will focus on the embodied ways that audiences of *Dying Together/ Earth* are invited to engage with planetary relationality, through embodied imagination and reflection. The research question that will guide this thesis can thus be formulated as: **how does planetary relationality manifest itself in *Dying Together/ Earth*?** In answering this question, I aim to introduce the term planetary relationality in the field of theatre and performance studies, and slightly adding to the concept, by focusing more prominently on embodied ways of thinking and experiencing planetary relationality. With this in mind, I propose that planetary relationality is a form of thinking and doing that moves beyond a focus on humanity’s existence on the planet Earth, and instead seeks to encompass all forms of life on the planet. How is it manifested in performance? That is the inquiry of this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

The first sub-question that I will tackle in this research is: **what is planetary relationality and why do we need this emergent category?** To answer it, I will base my discussion on the writings of historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty. I will refer to his influential works on ecological thought such as “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (2009), the “Afterword” of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* issue on “Climate Change and the Production of Knowledge” (2017), and particularly in his recent article “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category” (2019). In “The Planet” (2019) Chakrabarty departs from Heidegger’s understanding of the philosophical category of earth or world as a place for human dwelling. The *world* or *globe* is a notion that places the human subject at the center. For Heidegger, the human is the only one who can really dwell on Earth. The human subject gives existential sense to the world. This idea, Chakrabarty points out, sets the ground for postulations around ‘sustainability.’ Even when we think of sustainability as a discourse which concern is how to save and take care of the planet Earth, its purpose, actually, is to further support and endure human needs and aspirations. It can, therefore, be considered as a political idea that puts human concerns first. By contrast, Chakrabarty suggests the notion of ‘habitability’ to acknowledge all life on the planet, and the conditions of living for those forms. However, in order to think in terms of habitability, the notion of the *world* is no longer useful as it is based on a human-centered logic. For this reason, Chakrabarty introduces the idea of the planetary, observing that the *planet* “does not address itself to humans. ... [T]o encounter the planet is to encounter something that is the condition of human existence and yet profoundly indifferent to that existence” (Chakrabarty 2019, 4). From this, it follows that the key term in planetary thinking is *habitability*. “[H]abitability does not reference humans. Its central concern is life, complex, multicellular life, in general”(Chakrabarty 2019, 20). I will rely on Chakrabarty’s distinction between sustainable world and habitable planet, in my use of the term planetary relationality.

Moreover, I will draw on ideas of anthropologists Arturo Escobar (2018) and Marisol de la Cadena (2015; 2018) in order to elaborate on the notion of ‘relationality.’ Escobar and De la Cadena conceive of relationality as an onto-political term. For Escobar, ontology defines what kind of beings exist in a particular worldview and the conditions of their existence, that is to say, how beings and things are enacted by practices and manifested in narratives. The connections between practices and narratives allow worlds to come to existence, so to speak. It is not by the collection of entities that we can access an

understanding of a particular society or worldview but through the relationships that underlie habits, rituals, or stories. In *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (2018) Escobar presents the idea of ontological relationality by introducing the principle of interbeing that shows the primacy of relations over entities. In order to describe this further, I will be referring to the anthropological and ethnographical work of Marisol de la Cadena, who uses (relational) ontology to show how worldviews appear to be shaped by each other while remaining distinct. Her approach, however, cannot wrongfully be considered as a sort of adding up perspectives. Instead, what De la Cadena brings into relationality is the notion of ‘partial connections’ (De la Cadena 2015; De la Cadena and Taguchi 2018), to complicate the idea of a single vs multiple explanations of phenomena by shedding light to the idea that “worlds can be part of each other and radically different at the same time” (Escobar 2018, 216).

Thinking in terms of planetary relationality solicits us to understand life and the history of life on the planet beyond human needs and aspirations, while at the same time, to think in and through relations. However, to think in and through relations shall not be limited to operations of abstract rationality. Escobar asserts that if we want to develop a truly relational thought, it cannot be limited to productions inherent of a logocentric paradigm. For this reason, he stresses the need to look at human experience in a broader sense, one that goes beyond theorizations and includes practices of transformation (Escobar 2018). Therefore, I will position planetary relationality as a form of thinking that emerges from theoretical discussions, but that can be manifested in practices, particularly, in practices that are aware of the human embodied experience.

Subsequently, I will introduce theatre and performance as practices that can provide us specifically with embodied ways of connecting with planetary relationality. This will allow me to answer a second sub-question that points at how planetary relationality may be materialized in performance practice: **how can performances be understood as practices in which planetary relationality takes shape and is experienced?**

Theatre and performance are practices that convey forms of thinking by, for instance, material and bodily stage arrangements. As I already mentioned, ecological approaches to performance, and particularly performance ecology, investigate the specific ways in which the ecological doing of theatre creates entanglements between organic and inorganic bodies, resulting in the emergence of forms of perception, sensations, thoughts, and feelings in the here and now. I will follow the work of theatre scholar Carl Lavery to foreground the networked quality of theatre and performance that enables embodied and affective experiences. Lavery emphasizes that an ecological approach to theatre and performance can

change conventional ideas of the relationship between theatre and ecology. For this author, ecology is not about ‘nature’ or the representations of ‘nature’ in the form of trees, mountains, and animals. Rather, ecology-in the theatre-is a mode of operating that seeks connections through materials, bodies, and spatiotemporal organizations (Lavery 2012; 2013; 2016; 2018a; 2018b; 2019). In the book *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance* (2019), Lavery contributes with the chapter “How Does Theatre Think Through Ecology?” In this text, he argues that most of the ecological analyses of theatre focus either on the content or on the role that site-specificity can play in creating eco-awareness. Moreover, he points out that such eco-critical approaches tend to present a negative understanding of black-box theatre in opposition to, e.g. site-specific performance. Eco-critical authors argue that the traditional arrangement of audience-stage sustains a distance from ‘nature’ by an imposition of an anthropocentric mode of looking. However, Lavery is not interested in continuing such approaches to theatre. Instead, he reclaims that “the act of looking in the theatre auditorium is always-already embodied, an activity that has the capacity... to create... ‘ecological images’ -stage pictures that, in their troubling immediacy or corporeal presentness, radiate beyond their frame and give rise to ecological thought and feeling through their targeting of spectatorial vision” (Lavery 2019, 258-9). It is important to note that, according to Lavery, images are not confined to be visual; they can also be linguistic or sonic. This is relevant because it will allow me to approach *Dying Together/ Earth* as an ecological practice that utilizes linguistic and sonic strategies to build embodied experiences. By following Lavery’s ecological approach, I will argue that theatre and performance are practices where the embodied experience allows us to better understand planetary relationality.

Following from both my discussion of planetary relationality and performance ecology, and given the specific audience address in *Dying Together/ Earth*, it becomes clear that planetary relationality in theatre and performance asks much more attention to the embodied and embedded ways audiences are invited to engage with planetary relationality. In order to make this clear, I will need some theories and concepts that focus on embodied perception. To this end, I will use theories of enactive cognition and perception. The term *enaction* frames the process of perception not as the activity of an inner mind experiencing an outer world, but rather as a process of *embodied action* (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995). *Dying Together/ Earth* also relies strongly on embodied actions, since spectators are asked to position themselves in space and in relation to one another, in response to certain instructions. Philosopher of the mind Alva Nöe explains: “*What we perceive* is determined by *what we do* (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are *ready* to do.”

For instance, “[an] object looms larger in the visual field as we approach it... A sound grows louder as we move nearer to its source. Movements of the hand over the surface of an object give rise to shifting sensations” (Nöe 2004, 1 emphases in original). In short, we act in order to perceive; we act out our perception. In the field of theatre and performance, theories of enactive perception inform the *enactive approach to spectatorship*, which is a way of understanding and explaining how audiences are addressed, and therefore, how audiences experience a particular performance. In this respect, my third sub-question is: **how do concepts derived from an enactive approach to perception help to analyze audience address in *Dying Together/ Earth*?**

The enactive approach to perception will allow me to introduce two analytical concepts to analyze how the audience perceives and engages with the performance and its arrangements. These concepts are ‘embodied simulation’ and ‘embodied reflection.’ ‘Embodied simulation,’ firstly, proposed by neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese (2014; 2017; 2020), presents a neurobiological model that shows that human experience starts from acknowledging the body and actions of others by activating mirror mechanisms embedded in motor, somatosensory, and emotion-related brain networks. Moreover, such activation is also present when imitating or imagining actions of others. The inclusion of imagination in this model is of great relevance as it will allow me to better understand the embodied way in which spectators imagine other life-forms while participating in *Dying Together/ Earth*.

Secondly, ‘embodied reflection,’ proposed by neuroscientist Francisco Varela, philosopher Evan Thompson, and psychologist Eleanor Rosch (1995), describes reflection as an embodied, mindful, and open-ended activity. These authors argue that contrary to logocentric philosophical definitions of reflection as an abstract and disembodied activity, ‘embodied reflection’ is a term that indicates the embodied and embedded qualities of the process of reflection itself, that means that reflection is not a means to describe experience, but rather it is an experience itself that emerges by the meeting between body, mind, and environment. To understand reflection in this sense is relevant for analyzing spectators’ experiences in *Dying Together/ Earth* because it will help me to show how planetary relationality may be thought and experienced throughout the performance.

These concepts will help me to answer my fourth and last sub-question, related to the actual analysis of the performance, which is: **how is planetary relationality thought and experienced in *Dying Together/ Earth*?**

Case Study – *Dying Together/ Earth*

Dying Together/ Earth (2019) is a theatre performance by Dutch theatre maker and director Lotte van den Berg.³ *Dying Together/ Earth* is part of a bigger project called *Building Conversation*, which focuses on the meeting of art, conversation, and society.⁴ *Building Conversation* was founded in 2014, and it departs from the assertion that:

The way we participate in social and ecological structures has to change. There is an urgent need for clear and unflinching reflection on the position we occupy, both in the world and in relation to each other. The increasing inequality between people and between man and nature demands a radical review of the value system our coexistence is based on. (Building Conversation n.d.)

Dying Together/ Earth is part of this exploration and is meant to create ecological structures where conversations, reflections, and interactions take place. Coexistence is at the core of the *Building Conversation* mission, which is the creation of “conscious participation in conversation in a dynamic social structure, while keeping in mind all the living beings with whom we coexist” (Building Conversation n.d.). *Building Conversation* develops practices that aim to create new forms of relationality while expanding our thoughts about ourselves and others. It is important to mention that *Dying Together/ Earth* is second in a series, preceded by *Dying Together/ Humans*.

Dying Together/ Earth is a participatory performance that invites spectators to stage three events of collective death of humans and non-humans. The three events are: first, the break-out of the Mad Cow Disease and the meat-industry in the UK; second, the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, and its transformation into an ecosystem for

³ Concept and direction: Lotte van den Berg (performer) in collaboration with Floor van Leeuwen (performer), Gerindo Kamid Kartadinata (performer), Justyna Wielgus (performer), Matteo Bifulco (performer), Polly Lapkovskaya (composition), Vinny Jones & Breg Horemans (light & stage set), Tobias Staab (dramaturg), Jakob Proyer (head of production), Vincent Beune (technical director), Kate McIntosh (artistic consultant), Alexander Nieuwenhuis, Julien McHardy & Kinan Mohammad (research), Tristan Krap, Forensic scientist, Ars Cogniscendi (special adviser), Jasper van den Berg (campaign image).

⁴ Building Conversation positions its platform as follows: “In Building Conversation, we take our place in an artistic tradition called ‘Dialogical Art’, which derives from the ‘Soziale Plastik’ or ‘social sculpture’ of the influential German artist Joseph Beuys. This was the concept Beuys used to label society as a whole as shaped by its members. The reorganisation of this society into an inclusive coexistence, which Beuys considered to be an urgent matter, was to devote itself fundamentally to questions of education, economy and manners, peace and ecology” (Building Conversation n.d.).

business; and third, the decomposition of a man's body, merging together with the Aokigahara forest in Japan.

Through the presentation of these events of collective death, a compositional process evolves in which a narration of the events and its elements gradually starts to unfold. The narration includes descriptions of a series of concerns about food security, environmental degradation, sociopolitical and economic conflicts, climate change, etc. The performance starts when a performer reads a summary of one situation that may be present in the event of collective death. Then, the performer reads the descriptions of the beings and things involved. Let's see an example. The case that is introduced is the outbreak of the mad-cow disease, some beings and things are described; these might be: a cow, 2 years old, living in a stable in the UK, together with 137 cows; a veterinary; the meat-and-bone meal; food proteins; a girl, 5 years old, who died due to the consumption of meat of a mad-cow; a man, 49 years old, microbiologist, who stated publicly that the disease was capable of jumping species and after that was permanently removed from his research lab... ⁵ After that, the performer asks you—the spectator—if you want to represent the being or thing they have described, you can say 'yes' or 'no.' If your answer is positive, the performer guides you to a particular place in the space and says 'this is where you begin.' The starting point can be standing, sitting, or lying down. You are positioned with a particular focus, looking or not at others, and with different distances between bodies. Then, different situations are read, and you may explore the space at your will. If your answer is 'no,' then you can rest on your spot, and in the following situations, you may be asked again.

The staging of a situation, the invitation to the spectators to represent a being or a thing, and the physical exploration and interactions in the shared space may evoke associations with a therapy method called Family Constellations. This alternative method in psychotherapy was founded in 1978 by Bert Hellinger, and it is performed in the form of a collective therapy. A session starts when the therapist asks the person who will be treated in the session to position people in the group (they can be family members or strangers) throughout the space to represent members or elements of his/her personal situation that is going to be treated. The representatives then move throughout the space, according to how they perceive the situation that is shared by the patient. This dynamic gives the therapist insights into how the patient sees the social fabric in which he/she is part of, and by this staging, the therapist sheds light into the forms of relationships that emerge by means of the

⁵ These descriptions are from the script of *Dying Together/ Earth*, which was generously shared by theatre maker Lotte Van den Berg for this research.

interactions in the space, so adjustments in the interpretation and behavior in real life can be made. However, in the case of *Dying Together/ Earth*, the figure of the patient is present only by its absence. No one brings a situation to be treated; rather, the situation is presented on a bigger scale: Earth.

It is essential to mention that for Van den Berg *Dying Together* has nothing to do with drama therapy. She emphasizes: “I prefer to call it a form of physical thinking. Actually, the performance revolves around the ethical question of how you want to connect with someone, and if we can learn something about how to live together from the way we treat others in the face of death” (de Somviele 2019). The idea of a “physical thinking” will be central to understand it as a practice that involves the encounter of mind, body, and environment; all aspects that the enactive approach to spectatorship takes into account to explain audience address.

Methodology and Chapter Overview

In chapter 1, I will further introduce the term planetary relationality, answering the first sub-question: *what is planetary relationality and why do we need this emergent category?* My discussion will be based on the writings of historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009; 2017; 2019), and on the work of anthropologists Arturo Escobar (2018) and Marisol de la Cadena (2015; 2018), as I already outlined in the section of the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I will address the limitations of thinking in terms of planetary relationality, namely the little attention for embodied experience. This will allow me to tackle the second sub-question: *how can performances be understood as practices in which planetary relationality takes shape and is experienced?* To answer it, I will follow the ecological approach to theatre and performance proposed by Carl Lavery and others (Lavery 2012; 2013; 2016; 2018a; 2018b; 2019). Particularly, I will focus on how this approach understands theatre and performance as eco-practices in and by themselves, that is, the networked-like modes in which they operate, and which involve a focus on the somatic experience.

On the basis of both my discussion of planetary relationality and performance ecology, and because of the audience address in *Dying Together/ Earth*, it becomes relevant to attend to the embodied modes of perceiving of spectators. To do so, I will use the enactive approach to perception and to spectatorship, which I will present in chapter 2. Firstly, I will use a series of interdisciplinary sources from philosophy and cognitive sciences, such as Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1995), Alva Noë (2004), and

Thompson (2007; 2015) to describe enactive cognition and perception. After this, I will describe how the understanding of enactive cognition and perception has informed the emergent enactive approach to spectatorship in the field of theatre and performance. Particularly, I will refer to theatre scholars Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart (2006), Marco De Marinis (2016), Gabriele Sofia (2016; 2018), and Maaïke Bleeker and Isis Germano (2014). These authors allow me to show that an analysis from an enactive approach to spectatorship does not focus on what is re-presented on stage, but rather on the relationship between what is staged and the modes of perceiving of the spectators. This emphasis guides my third sub-question: *how do concepts derived from an enactive approach to perception help to analyze audience address in Dying Together/ Earth?* To answer it, I will introduce the analytical concepts of ‘embodied simulation,’ proposed by Gallese (2014; 2017; 2020); and ‘embodied reflection,’ proposed by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1995).

Finally, in chapter 3, I will use these analytical concepts to answer the final sub-question: *how is planetary relationality thought and experienced in Dying Together/ Earth?* On the one hand, I will use ‘embodied simulation’ (Gallese 2014; 2017; 2020) to describe the positioning acts in this performance as an assemblage that helps spectators to imagine different entities in a particular context of interaction. On the other hand, I will use ‘embodied reflection’ (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995) to interpret spectators’ reflections that emerged by virtue of the actions they decided to do on stage—stand, sit, lie down—as a cognitive process in which body and mind are not and cannot be separated. The modes of embodied simulation and embodied reflection will allow me to show how planetary relationality manifests itself in *Dying Together/ Earth*.

In the performance analysis, I rely on three sources to describe the elements that are at stake in *Dying Together/ Earth*. First, in order to provide a general account of the performance staging, I draw on my own visit, observation, and participation in the performance. Second, I refer to the digital archive of handwritten reflections of spectators that have attended a *Dying Together/ Earth* performance. The reflections can be accessed through <http://www.archiveofreflections.nl/>. By working with this archive, I focus on the spectators’ experience from their own descriptions. The third resource that I use is an interview I conducted with theatre-maker and director Lotte van den Berg in order to address some connections between the performance and planetary relationality.

Planetary Relationality

In this chapter, I introduce the concept of planetary relationality. Firstly, I draw on ideas of historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty, who presents a comparative reading of the notions of the *globe* and the *planet* as two figures of thought that gave rise to two different ways of conceptualizing history. Chakrabarty derives his understanding of the *planet* from debates in the area of geology, biology, climate sciences, physics, and more, referred to as Earth System Sciences. From these debates, the concept of the planetary seeks to take distance from a human-centered view on the world and addresses how to (in)*habit* the planet by recognizing multiple life-forms. In order to emphasize the inherent relationality within the planetary, in the second section of this chapter, I take up the work of anthropologists Arturo Escobar and Marisol de la Cadena. Escobar and De la Cadena conceive relationality as an onto-political notion based on the principle of interbeing and the idea that life results from interrelations and interdependencies. Such an understanding is further expanded by De la Cadena in her ethnographical and anthropological work, where she uses the analytical concept of ‘partial connections’ to show how worldviews appear to be shaped by each other while remaining distinct. The conjunction of the planetary and relationality points to a way of thinking that seeks to encompass *all forms of life* on the planet in a broad sense. However, planetary relationality should not be limited to an abstract and disembodied idea; it may also manifest itself within practices. To show this, in the last section of this chapter and following the ecological approach to theatre and performance that scholar Carl Lavery introduces, I propose that theatre and performance can be practices in which planetary relationality may materialize and be experienced in an embodied and embedded way.

Chakrabarty’s Approach to the Planetary

In the context of current ecological discourses, Chakrabarty has proposed a new humanist category: the planet. In his article “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category” (2019), Chakrabarty departs by asserting that humans have a multilayered and heterotemporal past that can be seen through two regimes of historicity. On one side, the history of the globe is made by the logic of empires, capital, and technology. He identifies this history as the “global regime of historicity,” theorized by humanists and social science historians. Chakrabarty claims that the global regime of historicity suggests a human-centered positionality. Chakrabarty relates this to the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who introduced the words ‘earth’ and ‘world’ as philosophical categories to describe the process of human dwelling (Chakrabarty 2019, 2–4).

On the other side, the history of the planet and the history of life on the planet have been studied by the natural sciences and, more recently, by the Earth System Science (ESS). The ESS is an interdisciplinary science developed in the second half of the twentieth century. It works with elements of geology, biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics, and it treats the planet earth as “a series of *complex adaptative systems* that embody evolutionary processes on different spatial and temporal scales” (Likavčan 2019, 17-18).⁶ These spatial and temporal scales operate on the level of ‘deep history.’ In the influential article “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (2009), Chakrabarty points out that scholars who study climate change and ecological problems, such as Earth-System scientists, distinguish recorded history and deep history. Recorded history refers to the ten thousand years that have passed since the invention of agriculture but more usually to the last four thousand years for which written evidence of human life can be found. For its part, deep history refers to the history that goes beyond these years of written records, which goes over hundreds of thousands of years ago (Chakrabarty 2009, 212–13). Chakrabarty asserts that this distinction is relevant for understanding why climate change constitutes a crisis for humans.

⁶ In the book *Introduction to Comparative Planetology* (2019), researcher and theorist Lukáš Likavčan, illustrates that the Earth-system perspective as follows: “[t]ake the example of the mountain valley. It contains many elements: herbs, grasses, trees, different kinds of mammals (bears, deer, lynxes, rabbits or hares, mice, hedgehogs), birds (eagles, sparrows, falcons), insects (bees, bugs, mantises, ladybirds), spiders, atmospheric gases, several types of soil, minerals and stones, bodies of water and underground flows, and so on. As a whole, they present an ecosystem – an open system in which organic and inorganic inhabitants as well as their collectives metabolise flows of energy, material, and information. This heterogenous ensemble creates a system of interactions between all of its elements, capable of absorbing and responding to external and internal influences (catastrophes, epidemics, changes in populations, etc.)” (Likavčan 2019, 17-18).

Deep history allows geologists and climate scientists to explain why global warming is connected to human actions and what consequences can derive from it. Chakrabarty adds that the effects can only make sense “if we think of humans as a form of life and look on human history as part of the history of life on this planet. For, ultimately, what the warming of the planet threatens is not the geological planet itself but the very conditions, both biological and geological, on which the survival of human life as developed in the Holocene period depends” (Chakrabarty 2009, 213). It is in this sense that Chakrabarty proposes the “planetary regime of historicity” as a point of departure to the understanding of the history of the planet and the history of life on the planet.

Following Chakrabarty, although the history of life on the planet includes the human species, it is not restricted to humans. The planet appears as an impersonal figure, where geophysical processes occur and where humans are but a small part of it. In this sense, Chakrabarty writes that “[t]o encounter the planet is to encounter something that is the condition of human existence and yet profoundly indifferent to that existence” (Chakrabarty 2019, 3). It is not Chakrabarty’s intention to completely withdraw the human from the planet; instead, the encounter with the planet invites us to rethink our human existence from both within and against our needs and aspirations. He affirms that “as evidence gathers that the nature/human distinction is, ultimately, unsustainable and that human activities worldwide may even contribute to the increasing frequency of earthquakes, tsunamis, and other ‘natural’ disasters, the planet as such has emerged as a site of existential concern for those who write its histories in what I have called the planetary or anthropocenic regime of historicity” (Chakrabarty 2019, 4). Chakrabarty prompts us to approach the history of life on the planet in a not human-centered way by understanding our human positionality in relation to other historical forms of life on the planet.

It is important to emphasize that for Chakrabarty, both the global regime of historicity and the planetary regime of historicity stand for human concerns. However, the conception of how humans should dwell on earth comes from different understandings, and thus result in different answers. To further explain this difference, I will first elaborate on Chakrabarty’s reading of Heidegger. Then, I will delve into Chakrabarty’s proposition of the *planet* as an emergent category and describe how these views invite different understandings of how humans relate to the *globe* and the *planet*.

In 1936 Heidegger presented a lecture in Frankfurt called “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where he introduced the word ‘earth’ as a philosophical category. The word earth, according to Heidegger, is associated with the idea of a temple that supports, nourishes, and shelters the blossoming trees and grasses, the bears, the deer, the rabbits, mice, and snakes,

the sparrows and falcons, the bees and spiders, and so on.⁷ As Heidegger writes, “We call this ground the earth. What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation” (Heidegger 2001, 41). This earth, this sheltering temple stands in a face-to-face relationship with humans. Earth is the serving bearer, it is the “ground for humans’ attempt to dwell: ‘Upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world... [t]he world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through the world. . . . The opposition of world and earth is a striving” (Heidegger in Chakrabarty 2019, 2). The idea of the earth as the place for the emergence of the world for humans is fundamental for the formulation and development of Heidegger’s thoughts on the human dwelling (Chakrabarty 2019, 2–3).

Furthermore, Chakrabarty points out that Heidegger was not interested in the planet, or to be more specific, in the modern planetary imagination highly influenced by the early photographs taken from outer space.⁸ For Heidegger, the planet was of no interest to philosophers because it only represented a technological alienation of the human connection with the earth. This Heideggerian understanding of the planet is, according to Chakrabarty, part of the global regime of historicity. As he further explains, “Using Heidegger’s language, we can say that the harder we work the earth in our increasing quest for profit and power, the more we encounter the planet. Planet emerged from the project of globalization, from ‘destruction’ and the futile project of human mastery” (Chakrabarty 2019, 3). In this global regime of historicity, the planet is a category that aligns with those of earth, globe, and world that reference the human.⁹ They are part of the global regime of historicity, focused on creating human institutions and technological means of mastering and appropriation.

⁷ With this list I aim to explain what Heidegger means when saying that: “The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *phusis*” (Heidegger 2001, 41). To translate ‘*phusis*’ as “nature” would be too reductive as ‘*phusis*’ entails a wider understanding of what is alive on earth. Nevertheless, I also do not use ‘*phusis*’ because that would require a longer explanation that exceeds the limits of this text.

⁸ As Tim Ingold asserts, “[I]n Heidegger’s terms, if you were to go up in a spaceship and look out of the window, the one thing you would *not* see is the earth. When, in 1966, the first photographic images of the earth as seen from space were beamed from the satellite *Lunar Orbiter 1*, Heidegger reacted with unbridled hostility. ‘I do not know whether you were frightened’, he remarked to an interviewer, ‘but I at any rate was frightened when I saw pictures coming from the moon to the earth... This is no longer the earth on which man lives.’” (Ingold 2011, 133).

⁹ In *Symptoms of the Planetary Condition: A Critical Vocabulary* (2017), Kári Driscoll reflects upon the word “world” through ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and Gertrude Stein’s book for children entitled *The World is Round*. It is interesting to note how Driscoll traces back the etymology of the word world, he asserts, “The word ‘world’ and its cognates (Welt, wereld, veröld) consists of the Germanic roots ‘wer’ (‘man’; as in ‘werewolf’ and ‘virile’) and ‘ald,’ and means, literally, ‘age of man.’ Thus, in a sense, the concept of the Anthropocene is already implicit in “world” – both

Nonetheless, Chakrabarty aims to take distance from the human-centered global regime of historicity by focusing differently on the planet. To do so, he introduces the planetary regime of historicity drawing on insights derived from astronomical and geological studies and positions human history on a larger temporal scale that exceeds the history of our species. The notion of deep history is central to this task. French philosopher Catherine Malabou observes that Chakrabarty, in contrast to many natural scientists and historians, does not take human existence as a point of departure when thinking about time and history, but, instead, employs “a mode of exploration of deep past (of the extremely deep past) that does not even consider the emergence of life in general as a ‘beginning’” (Malabou 2017, 44).

It is important to note that the ESS emerged in the context of the Cold War and the military space race. In 1983 the NASA founded their first ESS committee to study the planet earth as a whole by different kinds of scientists. These investigations included ecological problems, such as climate change, which led to a “planetary climate science.” As Chakrabarty asserts, the interest in global warming started when scientists James Lovelock and James Hansen were researching Mars and Venus, respectively. In this regard, global warming started as the study of “the behavior of the earth as a planet among other planets (that have also seen warming and cooling); it comes out of what may be called ‘interplanetary studies’” (Chakrabarty 2017, 166). The ESS and their interplanetary studies work towards searching for Earth-like exoplanets in the universe that could support life. This quest has been called the “habitability problem,” and it is central for disciplines such as astrobiology. Chakrabarty asserts that ESS enables “a mode of looking at this planet that... *necessarily has other planets in view* in order to create models of how this planet works,” (Chakrabarty 2019, 10 emphasizes in original) and further adds that,

The important point [...] is that the chief protagonist of the story that ESS tells is not humans or human life but complex, multicellular life in general. In contrast to the story of capitalist globalization, this outlook lays out a perspective on humans and other forms of life without humans being at the center of the story. We simply come too late in the story to be its protagonist. (Chakrabarty 2019, 14)

Chakrabarty emphasizes that humans produce the science of ESS. Still, it is a human version of a non-anthropocentric view, which by stepping outside, gains a whole new perspective

in terms of its anthropocentrism and, more interestingly, the fact that it denotes a temporality rather than a locality” (Driscoll 2017, 253).

about humanity.¹⁰ Such a unique perspective allows us to rethink not only our human positionality temporally—in the face of deep history—, but also influences how stories and histories are told. In this regard, Chakrabarty claims that the *planet*

[is reconstituted] into an abstract figure in the imagination with the help of the sciences.... ESS produces a reconstituted planet, the Earth system, an entity no one ever encounters physically but that is, in Timothy Morton’s terms, an interconnected series of ‘hyperobjects’—such as a planetary climate system—(re)created by the use of big data. (Chakrabarty 2019, 16)¹¹

The increasing development of technology in the construction of satellites, sensors, and ubiquitous computing has allowed various planetary imaginations (Gabrys 2016). The planet has been probed by sensors found in traffic infrastructure, trees in forests and planted in soil underground, or even smartphones. These technological mediations have allowed an image of a “Smarter Planet”¹² interconnected at many levels. Scholar Jennifer Gabrys observes that “[i]n the aspirations of the Smarter Planet vision, networked environmental sensors make it possible to listen in on a planet that has always been ‘talking to us,’ but which we can only now begin to hear” (Gabrys 2016, 7). These technological images, sounds, and ‘languages’ challenge our human-centered view on the planet and its multiple systems—both organic and electronic.

¹⁰ Chakrabarty points out that this view from outside was also an inspiration for the proposition of the Gaia theory by scientists Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock. Chakrabarty quotes Lovelock, “To my mind, the outstanding spin-off from space research is not new technology. The real bonus has been that for the first time in human history we have had a chance to look at the Earth from space, and the information gained from seeing from the outside our azure-green planet in all its global beauty has given rise to a whole new set of questions and answers” (Lovelock in Chakrabarty 2019, 14). This view from space is known as the “overview-effect,” which points at how astronauts have reported a cosmic connection or feeling a sentiment of deep engagement and responsibility, a tenderness to the planet, and an urge to take care.

¹¹ Timothy Morton coined the term “hyperobject” to refer to “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism. Hyperobjects, then, are ‘hyper’ in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not” (Morton 2013, 1).

¹² Gabrys asserts, “As an IBM video pitch for a ‘Smarter Planet’ explains, the increasing instrumentation of the planet is meant to give rise to a ‘system of systems’ that will facilitate heightened levels of observation, responsiveness, and efficiency” (Gabrys 2016, 7).

Going back to the distinction between the globe and the planet, Chakrabarty points out that each of these categories entails very different understandings of how humans should live on earth. The global goes hand in hand with the notion of *sustainability* as the guiding principle of how humans should dwell on earth. Chakrabarty refers to two fundamental texts in European thought: Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) and Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958). He claims that although these texts are separated by almost three hundred years, one inaugurating political thought and the other renewing political philosophy, they both share observations on the European historical process of expansion, trade, mapping, and navigation (of the seas and eventually the air and space). These thinkers’ descriptions lead to an idea of a finite earth of lands and seas waiting to be discovered, mastered, and measured by humans and for humans (Chakrabarty 2019, 6).¹³ This modern logic of a finite earth or globe is the condition of possibility for the notion of sustainability. Chakrabarty asserts that sustainability is a form of thinking that can be traced back to Europe’s history of the agricultural and farming expansion of the 18th and 19th centuries. The observations from soil science and agricultural practices were combined to develop the ideas of circulation and lastingness of essential nutrients to sustain human civilization.¹⁴ This modern conception of sustainability puts human concerns first; it entails that society’s development has to be in accordance with the maximum gain that it can have from nature while keeping biological productions stable for future generations. The human-centered logic of sustainability has become part of developmental discourses. Chakrabarty notes that “the most widely used definition of sustainable development is the one that the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), often known as the Brundtland

¹³ Chakrabarty compares Hobbes’s and Arendt’s descriptions of the European process of expansion. For instance, when Hobbes describes the condition of humans before the rise of the state, he writes that “in such condition [the state being absent], there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth [earth here understood as *land to be cultivated*]; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; ... no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time’ —repeated themselves verbatim as Arendt positioned herself in the late 1950s, observing the same historical process that Hobbes had seen in an earlier phase of its development. ‘As a matter of fact,’ she wrote: ‘the discovery of the earth, the mapping of her lands and the chartering of her waters ...took many centuries and has only now begun to come to an end. Only now has man taken full possession of his mortal dwelling place and gathered the infinite horizons . . . into a globe whose majestic outlines and detailed surface he knows as he knows the lines in the palm of his hand’” (Chakrabarty 2019, 6).

¹⁴ This notion of *sustainability* goes back to the German sense of the word. Chakrabarty asserts that “Paul Warde has written a differentiated history of the idea from the seventeenth century on—*Nachhaltigkeit* (the German word for lastingness or sustainability) is traceable in its earlier forms to the 1650s in texts on the management of agriculture and forestry in England, Germany, and France” (Chakrabarty 2019, 18).

Commission after its chair Geo Brundtland, adopted in 1983 in its publication *Our Common Future*: ‘development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’” (Chakrabarty 2019, 18). The idea of a finite earth waiting to be managed for human interests of power—be it political, economic, cultural, etc.—is the basis for the notion of sustainability. Chakrabarty claims that sustainability is a political idea in the Arendtian sense of politics as “it allows for the emergence of novelty in human affairs in a way that always involves some discussion about the welfare of the unborn” (Chakrabarty 2019, 18). The globe can be politicized because the human is at its center, which means that humans forms and values are at its center. The debates that belong to the global are positioned around discussions on climate justice, climate refugees and their rights, democracy and global warming, climate change and inequality of income, race, gender, and so on (Chakrabarty 2019, 24–25).

The anthropocentrism in sustainability, as Chakrabarty points out, dominated the 20th century and its “mantra of green capitalism” with ideas of the “maximum sustainable yield” adapted from the history of the management of forests and then introduced to the literature of managing fisheries. Chakrabarty illustrates this point by drawing on fisheries scientist Peter Anthony Larkin, who said in 1976 that when he was a student, the dogma of managing fisheries was that,

any species each year produces a harvestable surplus, and if you take that much, and no more, you can go on getting it forever and ever (Amen). [...] Moreover, it was assumed that the animals were well aware of what was being organized for them as their role in the scheme of things. Organisms were allowed to breed with those of their own species, or interact with individuals of other species, but not in ways that might upset the maximum sustained yield. (Larkin in Chakrabarty 2019, 20)

As this example shows, the idea of sustainability is an expression of the human-centered logic that seeks to sustain biology only in relation to capital and humans.

In contrast, the planet operates through a different form of thinking: *habitability*. Chakrabarty changes the equation elements’ position: for sustainability, humans were the central element of a livable world; now, habitability is the necessary condition to all life, including human life. The political aspect, understood as the quest for ideal human forms and values, is not at the center of this discussion; instead, the focus is on multicellular and complex life and the necessary and sufficient condition for all forms of life. Chakrabarty asserts that “the question at the center of the habitability problem is not what life is or how

it is managed in the interest of power but rather what makes a planet friendly to the continuous existence of complex life” (Chakrabarty 2019, 21). When habitability is the guiding principle, instead of sustainability, then the finite human globe figure is no longer justifiable. The quest for profit and power is insignificant in relation to the broader view that deep history enables. It is worth citing Chakrabarty’s elucidation of the planetary at length:

[T]he planetary as such, disclosing vast processes of unhuman dimensions, cannot be grasped by recourse to any ideal form. There is no ideal form for the earth as a planet or of its history or for the history of any other planet. While the planetary mode of thinking asks questions of habitability, and habitability refers to some of the key conditions enabling the existence for various life-forms including *Homo sapiens*, there is nothing in the history of the planet that can claim the status of a moral imperative. It is only as humans that we emphasize the last five hundred million years of the planet’s life—the last one-eighth of the Earth’s age—for that is the period when the Cambrian explosion of life-forms occurred, creating conditions without which humans would not have been. From the viewpoint of anaerobic bacteria, however, which lived on the surface of the planet before the great oxygenation of the atmosphere about 2.45 billion years ago, the atmosphere might look like a history of disasters (as recognized by such human-given names as the Oxygen Holocaust). The planet exists, as Quentin Meillassoux says, ‘as anterior to the emergence of thought and even of life—*posited, that is, as anterior to every form of human relation to the world.*’ (Chakrabarty 2019, 25 emphases in original)

In this quote, we can read a non-anthropocentric approach to the planet. Chakrabarty refers to other-than-human expressions of life on the planet Earth that cannot be seen through a hierarchical frame. The non-anthropocentric standpoint renders visible the interconnection and necessity of all forms of life. Furthermore, in Chakrabarty’s stance, the planetary is a form of thinking that speaks to the human species’ present in an existential and relational tone. In this vein, he brings up some ideas of posthumanist thinker Jane Bennett. The latter has thought about the active participation of non-human forces in events and the complex entangled network of relations across bodies—human and non-human. Nevertheless, for Chakrabarty, the attentiveness to matter cannot by itself address the political; he claims that “[a]ny theory of politics adequate to the planetary crisis humans face today would have to begin from the same old premise of securing human life but now ground itself in a new philosophical anthropology, that is in a new understanding of the changing place of humans

in the web of life and in the connected but different histories of the globe and the planet” (Chakrabarty 2019, 30). In this respect, this new understanding of human positionality should stress its relational quality by cultivating awareness around practices. The planetary is an issue of human existential concern; it prompts us to assume that the anthropocentric understanding of planet earth, like the one represented by the global regime of historicity, is no longer dominant. The quest for power and profit is starting to be questioned if that means the end of all forms of life on planet earth.

Onto-political Relationality

In the previous section, I indicated that the planetary positions humans as part of the web of life and not as the central element. We are interconnected to other-than-human entities as well as to other worldviews, which of a significant number of them may be facing extinction due to our practices of ‘sustainability’ accustomed to only look out for “human needs.”¹⁵ The ESS’s visualizing and investigative procedures have given way to an understanding of the planet as a figure of otherness and as a complex system to take care of. In this sense, Chakrabarty points out that,

Faced with the radical otherness of the planet, however, a deeply phenomenological urge on the part of many scientists is to recoil back into the human-historical time of the present and address the planet as a matter of profound human concern—as a critical question of human futures and as an entity to be governed by humans. But the governance question, whether posed in terms of sustainability or habitability, is at base an existential concern that can only belong to the present. (Chakrabarty 2019, 25)

As Chakrabarty notes, this critical question needs to be positioned in the present. How to “bring down to Earth” this existential question? In order to find some answers to this question, I propose to examine the notion of relationality from an onto-political viewpoint.

¹⁵ Here I use “human needs” in inverted commas to call attention to the limits of referring to the human species as a totality at the political level. Some authors, like Elizabeth Povinelli (2016), Eileen Crist (2016), and Bruno Latour (2017) have referred to this limitation showing that, in relationship with discourses of climate crisis, some groups of humans are often neglected because the “human harm to the Earth” is taken as a result of “human actions” in general, and not as the result of specific practices of specific human societies.

I derive my understanding of political ontology from ideas of anthropologists Arturo Escobar and Marisol de la Cadena. In the book *Designs for the Pluriverse* (2018), Escobar asserts that ‘ontology’ defines what kind of beings exist in a particular worldview and the conditions of their existence, that is, how beings and things are enacted by practices and manifested in narratives. Escobar explains that this understanding of ontology does not take a realist position (which is based on an assumption of a unique underlying reality) nor a subjective one (working for example, with notions that claim that the mind constructs the world), but instead seeks to underscore the existence of multiple worldviews, “while maintaining a nonobjectifying notion of the real” (Escobar 2018, 92).¹⁶ For Escobar, this is a radical ontological politics of difference, one that counteracts a Western onto-epistemic order that assumes that “we all live within a single world, made up of one underlying reality (one nature) and many cultures” (Escobar 2018, 86), and where dualist views—such as nature and culture, the West and the Rest, moderns and nonmoderns, civilized and savages, mind and body, etc.—, have disavowed important dimensions of human experience, like spirituality, non-scientific knowledge, and relationships to other-than-humans, just to name a few.

Moreover, Escobar claims that such a separatist and dualistic worldview compels a modern imagination of “the world as an inanimate surface to be *occupied*; for many relational cultures, on the contrary, humans and other beings *inhabit* the world that is alive” (Escobar 2018, 87 emphasizes in original). Escobar’s standpoint evokes Chakrabarty’s proposition for a habitable planet; however, their ideas operate on different fields and, therefore, entail some nuances that need clarification. Chakrabarty derives his understanding of habitability from Western interdisciplinary natural sciences that acknowledge a radical otherness with non-human entities. Notwithstanding, these views still rest on the principle of one underlying “reality” or “nature.” By contrast, Escobar draws his understanding of habitability –and alterity– through anthropological and ethnographic observations of how practices can unsettle the idea of a single world by showing relational ways of being-in-the-world.

In this vein, Escobar seeks to recover and render visible the logics, practices, and narratives that the capitalist and modernist project has denied by calling upon the notion of

¹⁶ We can better understand the idea of a “nonobjectifying notion of the real” by Escobar’s following explanation: “What can be more real than the world on which we plant our feet, or the surrounding world into which our minds seemingly awake? Fair enough. The issue, however, is how the rationalistic [modern] tradition translates this basic datum of experience into the belief in an objective reality or an outside world, prior to, and independent of, the multiplicity of interactions that produce it” (Escobar 2018, 85). Thus, when the basic datum of experience is taken to be the “real” that is considered an “objective” view, whereas a “nonobjectifying notion of the real” does not take for granted an outside and independent world.

the pluriverse. The pluriverse has its roots in the Zapatista movement, whose popular slogan reads *Queremos un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* (We want a world where many worlds fit).¹⁷ Escobar’s use of the pluriverse operates in the eclectic field of political ecology¹⁸ that seeks to understand “the composition of the more-than-human worlds always in the process of being created by all kinds of actors and processes” (Escobar 2018, 64). In this sense, Escobar takes up an epistemological and ontological position of strong relationality that attends “to a host of factors that deeply shape what we come to know as reality but that social theory has rarely tackled—factors like objects and things, non-humans, matter and materiality (soil, energy, infrastructures, weather, bytes), emotions, spirituality, feelings, and so forth” (Escobar 2018, 63). Escobar’s approach forces us to overcome a modern onto-epistemic order that separates objects from subjects and connects objects with subjects. He reminds us that the essentialist quality we tend to ascribe to subjects, objects, structures, identities, and so forth depends on the disavowal of relationality.¹⁹ In this vein, he asserts that “[s]ome spiritual traditions like Buddhism and animism and many traditional cosmologies have ways to diffuse these essentialisms or hold them at bay... through particular practices and rituals but often through mundane daily practices of interbeing” (Escobar 2018, 212). Escobar presents some ethnographic examples of how ontological relationality operates in practice. One of these examples is the ritual of the *ombligada* performed by afro-communities in the Colombian Pacific. Escobar explains that,

¹⁷ The pluriverse is not limited to the Zapatista project, it is also present within the feminist political struggles that intertwine ideas “from their willingness to ask questions about the situatedness of knowledge, the historicity of the body, and the intersectionality of forms of oppression, to the salience of emotions and affect and the relevance of the voices of women from the Global South” (Escobar 2018, 65).

¹⁸ According to Escobar, the interdisciplinary field of political ecology emerged in the 1970s when ecological frameworks, centered on the study of the relation between humans and the environment, were combined with social theory frameworks, specifically Marxism and systems theory. Then, in the 1990s a poststructuralist approach was predominant as it questioned various regimes of representation and power by arguing that nature has been culturally and historically constructed -by science, patriarchy, whiteness, and colonial narratives-. The idea of “the social production of nature” present in Marxist geography, and the idea of “the cultural construction of nature” of poststructuralist anthropology were highly influential in the field of political ecology in the 1990s, along with ecological economics by framing economic theory through material-energetic analyses and questions of valuation (Escobar 2018, 62-63). This “theoretical eclecticism,” as Escobar says, is part of what characterizes political ecology. The current theoretical developments, which are to be considered as a third phase of the field, are influenced by postconstructivist, posthumanist, and new materialist thought. These approaches seek to go beyond modern dualisms by using different analytical concepts such as ‘assemblages,’ ‘naturecultures,’ or ‘socio-natures.’

¹⁹ The onto-epistemic order can be understood as a dualistic form of relationality, however, Escobar’s point is to show a radical relationality that goes beyond modern divides.

The ritual of *la ombligada* (*ombligo* means “navel”) refers to the act of burying the umbilical cord and the placenta after a child is born near the house or under a tree by the edge of the forest (for girls and boys, respectively). The navel of the newborn is subsequently filled with a pulverized natural substance—animal, plant, or mineral—in such a way as to transmit the substance’s properties to the individual. In so doing, the newborn is deeply connected to the territory and made to partake in some fashion of the rest of the natural world. (Escobar 2018, 257) ²⁰

This brief description of *la ombligada* indicates how a bond between territory and people emerges. The afro-communities’ particular worldview, expressed in their understanding of the territory, comes into existence in the interconnection between other-than-humans, materiality, and spirituality. By performing this ritual, a sense of territory can emerge; otherwise, the child would not bond to the land where s/he was born, and the land would remain as simple soil. This example shows how “shifting our existence—our bodies, minds, and souls—into a relational ontology challenges any objectifying notion of a real” (Escobar 2018, 212). The modern onto-epistemic order is insufficient to explain why a relationship between an umbilical cord, a pulverized natural substance, and the earth is needed to create a sense of territory. The modern onto-epistemic order understands territory as a place to master and occupy, whereas the relational perspective attends to the ontological relations that give way to a worldview. In this sense, relationality fundamentals itself on the principle of interbeing. This principle understands that life is interrelation and interdependence through and through. Life is a constant process of mutual constitution that shows that “*nothing preexist the relations that constitute it*” (Escobar 2018, 101 emphasizes in original). This principle reveals the primacy of relations over entities, and in this sense, the notion of relationality is also an ethical and political practice of alterity, involving a deep concern for practices and experiences.

Similarly, anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena is interested in showing how a relational ontology operates. However, her approach goes a step forward; she aims to understand how worldviews “relate to each other and of the limits of modern knowledge’s ability to understand what makes the modern and the nonmodern different yet not entirely separate, partially connected yet also divergent in relation to each other” (Escobar 2018, 216). De la Cadena’s insights derive from her ethnographical work with Andean indigenous peasants Mariano Turpo and Nazario Turpo. Mainly with the understanding of ‘earth-

²⁰ See Escobar (2008) for a description and analysis of this ritual.

beings.’ For Andean peasants, earth-beings are sentient beings. Still, the modern mentality hastens to translate them into “sacred entities” or “beliefs” because it can only see them as mere objects or independently existing beings (De la Cadena and Taguchi 2018). De la Cadena writes about her ethnographic experiences and reflections in her book *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds* (2015). She shares a beautiful anecdote that may help us understand her ontological approach to the relationship between worldviews. She writes:

As part of the inaugural ceremonies for the NMAI [National Museum of the American Indian] in Washington, D.C., the indigenous curators were invited to a panel at the World Bank, and Nazario Turpo was of course among them. Nazario gave his presentation in Quechua and requested funding from the Bank to build irrigation canals in his village. The water was drying out, he explained, “due to the increasing amount of airplanes that fly over Ausangate, making him mad and turning him black.” I do not know who told him what, but later at the hotel he explained to me: *Now I know that these people call this that the earth is heating up; that is how I will explain it to them next time.* And half-seriously, half-jokingly we talked about how, after all, in Spanish to heat up, *calentarse*, can also mean to be mad. In the end, I was sure that Nazario’s will to understand “global warming” was far more capacious than that of the World Bank officials, who could not even begin to fathom taking Ausangate’s rage seriously. Nazario certainly outdid them in complexity; he had the ability to visit many worlds, and through them offer his as well. (De la Cadena 2015, xxii emphases in original)

In this anecdote, De la Cadena illustrates how different ontologies are at stake. On the one hand, there is the world of the World Bank, and on the other hand, the indigenous world of Nazario. However, De la Cadena goes beyond this dualistic view; she uses the notion of ‘partial connections’ to analyze how entities, and therefore, worldviews appear to be shaped by each other and, at the same time, remain distinct. De la Cadena asserts that Nazario had the ability to visit many worlds while offering his as well because he recognizes how these understandings of climate change enact a connection from which both—indigenous and non-indigenous—emerge while maintaining differences vis-à-vis each other (De la Cadena 2015,

33).²¹ In this sense, partial connections “provides a conceptual means to understand the ontological complexity of ‘really existing’ partially connected worlds, of how worlds can be part of each other and radically different at the same time” (Escobar 2018, 216). The relational condition that underlies the partial connection between the World Bank and Nazario’s view can be positioned in

a politics of reality between what we call “modern” and that which refuses to be only such—which we could call “amodern,” where the latter exceeds the former which discounts it (if it ever counts it.) Within the partial connection, the state can define for its public what the connection is about: it can define the connection as being about wholes and parts and cancel that which it considers (a part that) does not belong to the whole (and therefore is not!) (De la Cadena and Taguchi 2018).

In the case of the anecdote that De la Cadena presents, the World Bank’s delegates represent the figure of the “modern,” they are the ones that decide what connections can define or not a reality, namely “global warming.” On the other hand, Nazario’s understanding of Ausangate’s anger (or the effects of global warming on the “sacred mountain” if we were using a modern translation of it) would be representing the figure of the “amodern.” In this respect, Escobar acknowledges the relevance of De la Cadena’s approach asserting that “[a] timely question for all those worlds that never wanted, or no longer want, to abide by allegedly universal rules is that of how to relate with dominant worlds that do not want to relate” (Escobar 2018, 217). In other words, Nazario’s view partially connects to the dominant World Bank’s view (that does not want to take the earth-being’s anger seriously) by recognizing that while they are connected to one another, they diverge at the

²¹ The notion of “partial connections” was firstly proposed by anthropologist Marilyn Strathern as a concept to think through relations, and was then introduced to STS (science and technology studies) by Donna Haraway. De la Cadena asserts that the ideas of these women thinkers were fundamental for her use of partial connections as her unit of analysis. She claims that “Haraway’s ‘cyborg’ was...useful—her ‘one is too few, but two [are] too many’, which according to Marilyn Strathern inspired *her* ‘more than one, less than many.’” De la Cadena further adds that “[m]ore than one, less than many—partial connections—allows us to think machine-human, or human-animal as they become together. ... Human-animal might be not only each of them... The phrase opens space for what is neither animal nor human” (De la Cadena and Taguchi 2018). This idea can be further expanded in Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” (1991) where she expresses that, “[t]o be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. *One is too few, but two are too many.* High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. ...There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic” (Haraway 1991, 177–78 my emphasis).

same time. Partial connections enable us to understand that there is “more than one” world (as a single totality) and “less than many” worlds (because it is not the collection of separate worlds) in the changing relationships within the pluriverse.²²

De la Cadena’s operationalization of partial connections in the example of climate change illustrates how relationality is at work amidst worldviews. Her particular approach to practices and narratives shows us that the relations precede entities, events, or worldviews, not the contrary, where supposed totalities are usually taken for granted. This anthropological and ethnographical perspective also aligns with Escobar’s pluriverse, which aim is to unsettle modern dualisms by “venturing into the positive project of how the world can be—and be understood—otherwise” (Escobar 2018, 96). Furthermore, and going back once more to the planet and the planetary, it may be argued that thinking in terms of the planetary can be seen as part of this project of understanding the world—or planet in the case of this text—otherwise. Thus, by conjoining planetary and relationality, it becomes explicit that planetary relationality is a mode of thinking that moves beyond a focus on humanity’s existence on planet earth, and instead seeks to encompass all forms of life on the planet relationally. However, how can we translate such a mode of thinking to actual practices? According to Escobar, the project of reimagining and reconstructing life-worlds has been limited by the operations of abstract rationality,²³ which neglect a fundamental aspect of the human condition: *experience*. Escobar asserts that it is insufficient to only theoretically point at the limitations of modern dualistic frameworks that favor the mind’s role over the body and disavow non-logocentric manifestations of human experience. Therefore, he argues that

it is necessary to step out of the (purely) theoretical space into some domain of experience (political, contemplative, even policy or design oriented, or what have you)—in other words, it is imperative to engage with (or perhaps contribute to

²² Escobar claims that, “[i]t is necessary to start by emphasizing that radical difference is not something ‘indigenous people have’ but designates relational existence under conditions of partial connection, where every world is more than one (not complete or total unto itself) but less than many (that is, we are not dealing with a collection of interacting separate worlds); all worlds are, in short, within the pluriverse” (Escobar 2018, 216).

²³ This observation includes Escobar’s work as well, showing the limits of abstract rationality that still is based on modern onto-epistemic productions, like his book itself –and even, perhaps this thesis. He writes, “I argue that the reliance on long-standing forms of rationality and logocentric analysis remains central to critical academic production (this book included!) and that, despite its remarkable productivity, it has consequences for finding our way beyond the dominance of dualist ontologies” (Escobar 2018, 97).

creating) worlds where it is impossible to speak of nature and culture as separate [...] Said more simply, theorists cannot maintain both feet in the academy and purport that they/we are bringing about a different world; they/we need to put one foot in a relational world (or worlds)—to practice what we preach. (Escobar 2018, 103 emphases in original)

With this elaboration, Escobar prompts us to address the question, “what would it mean to develop a personal and collective practice of interbeing?” (Escobar 2018, 103). This question is directed towards thinking practices of transformation, capable of going beyond theorizations. Escobar asserts that to develop such practices is a task to all of the disciplines that aim to build interpretations of cultural practices, knowledge production, and forms of sociability. In the next section, I present theatre and performance as practices that can provide us specifically with embodied ways of connecting with planetary relationality.

Performance Ecology

In this section, I introduce theatre and performance as practices that can provide us with material, corporeal, and affective means to better understand planetary relationality. It is important to remember that one of the central aims of this thesis is to position planetary relationality in the field of theatre and performance by showing, specifically, how it may operate in theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth*. To do so, I elaborate on an understanding of theatre that can be called the ecological approach to theatre and performance, or as I will be referring from now on, performance ecology.

As an approach, performance ecology does not focus on the relations between humans and the natural environment or sustainability issues; instead, it points to theatre as ecological itself, meaning that theatre can be conceived as a continuous entanglement of humans, objects, and processes. Theatre emerges as a web of relations and works with forms of co-existence, which de-centers the human and creates connections with both organic and inorganic matters (Lavery 2018b; Morton 2010). In the article “Introduction: performance and ecology—what can theatre do?” (2016), theatre scholar Carl Lavery describes theatre as a performative medium that invites spectators to engage with embodied, ephemeral, and affective modes of operation in actual time and space. In other words, Lavery characterizes theatre as the entanglement of forms of organization between organic and inorganic bodies, the assemblage of objects and technologies, or the fabrication of spatiotemporal experiences, and not, for instance, as the manifestation of a theatrical text.

According to Lavery, the attentiveness to form is not new in theatre studies, academics like Bonnie Marranca (1996), Elinor Fuchs (1996), and Stephen Bottoms and Matthew Goulsh (2008) may be positioned as dominant voices within ecological readings of theatre. However, their approaches tend to focus on environmental issues or the role that site-specificity can play in creating eco-awareness (Lavery 2019, 258).²⁴ Although these perspectives are relevant for the field, Lavery asserts that it is necessary to take up an extended understanding of ecology, one that involves an understanding of theatre and performance as eco-practices in and by themselves, that is, as “forms of ecological perception, which encourage spectators to develop more networked and interconnected ways of thinking” (Lavery 2019, 261). In this spirit, Lavery has identified such eco-practice in performances without human actors in, e.g., the work of German theatre maker and composer Heiner Goebbels *Stifters Dinge*. The performance *Stifters Dinge* is characterized by Lavery as an ecological performance dependent on the practice of deceleration. This is a performance without human actors, where an assemblage of boxes, pianos, ponds, images, and recorded voices works for 70 minutes. By incorporating slow-moving non-human objects and materials, spectators are invited to experience time differently; the attention is directed towards the multiple rhythms created by the material assemblage. Thus, the spectators become subjects to time as opposed to subjects of time (Lavery 2018a, 80–82). As Lavery asserts, this artwork is “already ecological, on account of its strange, non-reified temporality—its ability to escape any kind of temporal schematization... [T]he artwork’s immanentism ecology means there is no need to use it for mechanistic ends by fashioning an environmental message, as we see in various forms of eco-activist art... The more effective

²⁴ The attention towards environmental issues of concern is also present in scholarly theatre traditions such as ‘eco-theatre.’ In 1996, theatre scholar Downing Cless proposed the term ‘eco-theatre’ to name a movement that flourished in the 1980s and 1990s in the USA in which the incorporation of local communities, audience participation, and documentary references of environmental topics (such as logging, deforestation, pesticides, endangered species, and environmental justice) played a central role. Furthermore, Cless asserts that these explorations had similarities to Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and were highly influenced by the Deep Ecology movement, which embraces the idea that “humans are but one small (some even say inferior) strand in the web of life” (Cless 1996). The combination of these domains resulted in the development of “Forum Theatre techniques” in which audience participants played out parts in different scenes of the performances. Cless relates that these techniques were adopted by two thinkers of the Deep Ecology movement, John Seed and Joanna Macy, who in 1988 designed a workshop called “The Council of All Beings” in which “participants speak for particular life-forms (mainly animals) about the woes of environmental degradation and possible extinction” (Cless 1996). In this workshop, humans had the opportunity of taking the “voices” of animals which, according to Cless, was a form of inter-species communication. In this sense, it is possible to see that ‘eco-theatre’ started as a term to denote theatre about nature and the environment.

approach is simply to allow the work to operate autonomously, to exist as an ecological force field in and by itself” (Lavery 2018a, 81).

Moreover, the example of ecological performance *Stifters Dinge* can be conceived as an ‘ecological image’ (Lavery 2013; 2019). For Lavery, ecological images—which are not restricted to be visual, they can also be linguistic or sonic—are stage arrangements that involve strong material immediacy or corporeal presentness. Ecological images aim to create forms of perception, sensations, feelings, and thoughts that are interconnected and networked, in short, ecological. Furthermore, ecological images are not limited to offer information about environmental issues; instead, they seek to encourage spectators to experience and think in interconnected ways. Therefore, ecological images intend to “contest theatre criticism’s long-standing tendency to isolate history from natural history and to perpetuate the view of human beings as consummate agents, able somehow to exist apart from the materiality of their environments” (Lavery 2019, 261). This observation calls to mind the planetary, where human existence is not essential to a habitable planet, but habitability is central to human existence. By creating ecological images in the theatre, a performative eco-practice in and by itself emerges. Lavery clarifies that ecological images “[do not] have to be images of ‘nature’ per se, they should nevertheless be images of matter, compositions that affirm their dependence on the earth” (Lavery 2019, 261), that is, their reliance on livable conditions provided by the planet Earth, not by humans alone. Therefore, ecological images in theatre seek to convey a form of thinking that is not anthropocentric and non-hierarchical. Ecological images show the planetary by casting protagonists, not the humans alone, but the material conditions surrounding them.

Furthermore, theatre and performance are practices that produce sensations and transmit forms of thinking. Performance ecology acknowledges that a series of material—whether visual, sonic, or linguistic—exchanges occur between the stage and the audience. As Lavery asserts, “ecological images give spectators time to reflect on *how* they are seeing as well as *what* they are seeing. Audiences are thus allowed to drift, to be distracted, to follow different rhythms and to set off on heterogeneous lines of flight” (Lavery 2019, 261 emphasizes in original). Lavery says that this form of operating opposes spectacular images that try to capture and colonize the spectator’s attention. The ecological doing of theatre aligns with Escobar’s invitation to develop practices of transformation that do not favor the role of the mind over the body and instead focus on *experience*. By creating a multiplicity of rhythms and temporalities, ecological images allow spectators to access experience differently than through abstract rationalizations. In this sense, the ecological doing of theatre is to “provide a space for the imagination to drift and to make associations between disparate materials

and heterogeneous formations” (Lavery 2019, 261). In this given temporal space, a sense of embodied and affective relationality emerges.

Lavery provides an insightful example of such bodily engagement in “Bringing It All Back Home: Towards an ecology of place” (2012), co-written with Wales-based movement artist and choreographer Simon Whitehead. In this text, Lavery and Whitehead discuss how one might perform an ‘ecology of place.’ Their understanding of what a ‘located ecology’ might be is based on ideas of cultural geographer Nigel Thrift, who defines place as a “spectral gathering..., conjured via an embodiment which is folded into the world by virtue of the passions of the five senses, and constant, concrete attunements to particular practices, which always involve highly attuned bodily stances” (Thrift in Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 111). Lavery and Whitehead do not focus on the idea of ‘spectrality,’ but rather on how bodies practice places. To begin with, Lavery presents the etymology of the word ‘ecology,’ which is composed of two Greek words, *oikos* (house) and *logos* (science, law). From this, Lavery suggests that ‘ecology’ might be understood as a domestic science or as a way of being at home, and points out that this interpretation of the word has been widely expanded by eco-critical discourses—especially by deep-ecologists and eco-phenomenologists—that call for projects and actions to take care of our shared home or world. These interpretations are mostly based on a Heideggerian thought that, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, regards the world as a place to be dwelled by humans, and as Lavery himself points out, this may result to be environmentally and socially disastrous because “such thinking tends to place the [human] subject at the very centre of the world by assuming that the human being is the only creature that can dwell poetically” (Lavery 2018b, 12).

In addition to that, Lavery shows that the Heideggerian perspective on dwelling is interested in taking care of the world, yes, but the limits of this view lie on the understanding of the *oikos*. For Heidegger, man has forgotten how to dwell on earth, resulting in a forgetfulness of Being and, therefore, in a state of homelessness. In order to overcome this homelessness, Heidegger’s methodological strategy is to attend to poetry, suggesting that through “the expressive powers of poetic language... our homelessness can be overcome[d] through a type of speaking and listening that returns us to the source of Being itself” (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 113). However, according to Lavery, the predominant role that Heidegger assigns to language and poetry undervalues the materiality of the body, and, as a result, “[he] finishes by elevating the human being... as the species who has the closest relationship to Being. There is little in Heidegger that troubles the boundaries of the human, nothing that intimates a porous space for ‘animal becomings’” (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 113). Lavery concludes his critical reading by asserting that if humans remain attached to

the disembodied and transcendent lures of language, then it would be very difficult to understand and perceive that we—humans—belong to earth as an entity among others. Therefore, he calls for rethinking what it means to ‘become’ at home—or in terms of planetary relationality: how to inhabit the planet—by looking to “other art forms, practices and, ultimately, ontologies that, while being just as concerned with the ecological affordances of ‘homecoming’, place more emphasis on the materiality of the ‘molecular’ body, the body that we share with other animals and elements on earth” (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 113). The shift from language to the materiality of bodies as a means to becoming at home aligns with how we may inhabit the planet, and therefore, experience planetary relationality. The conditions for habitability allow us to inhabit planet Earth and not the supposed human mastering of the world. However, we are still on a planet inhabited by humans and guided by human concerns; therefore, it is essential to attend to practices capable of connecting our somatic experience with planetary relationality.

I would like to go back to Lavery and Whitehead’s article to refer to Whitehead’s movement practice briefly. After Lavery’s critique of Heideggerian homecoming, Whitehead connects the idea of *oikos* with his artistic work. He starts by saying that, for him, home starts with the body. He describes that one of his most important influences comes from artists of Judson Dance Theatre, who invented postmodern dance principles in the 1960s. Whitehead refers to Steve Paxton and his artistic research in Contact Improvisation practice to point out that the body is always part of the environment. Whitehead has a triadic understanding of ‘home,’ where the first home is the body; the second one the territory where we live; and the third home, as he says, is “the home you discover when you start interacting with the assemblage of body and environment to produce something new. For me, that’s the creation of a dance piece” (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 114). Moreover, Whitehead introduces a series of performances he has developed in different time-periods to show how his idea of home is set into motion, so to speak. His early work (1995-8) took place in the Llŷn Peninsula, where he created a series of solo and collaborative dance pieces. One of these, called *Salt/Halen* (1996), is a piece that connects different materials and experiences expressed through the body, sound, and light. Whitehead describes that this performance involved a process of daily walks along the coastal tide line, the recollection of materials he found on the walks—which included sound recordings taken on site, and which were then mixed lived by sound artist Barnaby Oliver—, and the composition of texts and images inspired by his perceptions of the landscape and fragments of dreams that began with the daily walks. These elements were experienced and collected during the winter, which gave Whitehead a particular understanding of the place he was inhabiting. In

performance, he used the found objects as an unstable surface to create movement of matter and reflect light, and he read aloud the texts while jumping up and down in the space. What is interesting about Whitehead's work is the attention he gives to the process of creation, and particularly how he sees the relationship between his body and the sense of home above mentioned. He writes:

Through walking the landscape, I allowed it to express itself through me, in a way. The repetition of walking creates a rhythmic force-field or energy that produces a sense of immersion through the beat of the body. Every time you go for a walk, you allow the place to enter you differently. Home is layers of sedimentation in the body. Touching and being touched by the landscape, and what's in it. This is very different from Heideggerian philosophy, where all the energy seems to lie in language. (Lavery and Whitehead 2012, 115)

The experience that Whitehead narrates can be seen as the process of a–performative–practice that converges in an ecological form of thinking; it allows to create and represent networks and assemblages between bodies–organic and inorganic–, while attending to the embodied process of the artist who feels, sense, and experience beyond the limits of abstract rationality. Lavery and Whitehead's embodied ways of ecological doing show how planetary relationality may manifest itself in performance practice. In this thesis, I am interested in ways that *spectators* can be engaged in such ecological doings. Spectators' embodied experience may inform similar understandings of home. In order to examine this, I will now shift the attention towards somatic experiences within spectatorship to analyze spectator's embodied processes. In the next chapter, I will introduce the enactive approach to perception and to spectatorship to present some analytical tools that will help me analyze how planetary relationality manifests itself in the theatre performance *Dying Together/Earth*.

Towards an Enactive Approach to Spectatorship

In the previous chapter, I argued that planetary relationality is a non-anthropocentric and non-hierarchical way of thinking that calls for a habitable planet for all life-forms and worldviews. Planetary relationality, however, is not a static and accumulative view on the multiplicity of human and other-than-human entities. Rather, planetary relationality attends to the networks, assemblages, and partial connections that enable objects, narratives, sensations, and experiences to emerge. Importantly, planetary relationality also constitutes a form of experimenting and creating connections through practices. I showed that such practices could be theatre and performance, where specific ecological forms of operation create material, corporeal, and affective entanglements that convey forms of thinking and experiencing. In this chapter, I aim to introduce the enactive approach to perception and the enactive approach to spectatorship in order to construct a framework that will help me to analyze the spectators' embodied reflections and experiences regarding planetary relationality in the performance *Dying Together/ Earth*.

The enactive approach to perception emerges from the field of cognitive science. *Enaction* refers to the process of perception not as the activity of an 'inner mind' experiencing an 'outer world,' but instead as a process of *embodied action*, as I will show in the first section of this chapter. Theories of enactive cognition and perception have informed analytical approaches in the field of theatre and performance studies. In the second section of this chapter, therefore, I introduce the enactive approach to spectatorship by referring to the work of theatre scholars Marco de Marinis, Bruce McConachie, F. Elizabeth Hart Gabriele Sofia, Maaïke Bleeker, and Isis Germano. Lastly, in the third and fourth sections of this chapter, I introduce two analytical concepts derived from theories of enactive cognition, namely, 'embodied simulation' and 'embodied reflection.' These concepts are the analytical tools that I later use in the analysis of the theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth*. The concept of 'embodied simulation,' coined by neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, allows us to understand how acts of imagination are a product of active embodied (simulation) processes, and not of disembodied exercises. The concept of 'embodied reflection,' for its part, was proposed by neuroscientist and biologist Francisco Varela, philosopher Evan Thompson, and psychologist Eleanor Rosch and points to an understanding of reflection as

an embodied activity. Through the concept of embodied reflection, these thinkers promote an understanding of reflection as an embodied, mindful, and open-ended activity, rather than a disembodied and abstract process. In brief, I will use the enactive approach to spectatorship, and the analytical concepts of ‘embodied simulation’ and ‘embodied reflection’ to analyze audience address in *Dying Together/Earth*, and show how planetary relationality manifests itself in embodied thought and experience.

Enactive Perception

The enactive approach to perception is developed within the multidisciplinary field of cognitive science.²⁵ This approach emerged in the 1990s in connection with embodied and dynamical understandings of the mind. It is important to mention that the enactive approach is preceded by two major theories about human cognition: the cognitivist and the connectionist approach to the mind. The cognitivist approach was developed from the 1950s to the 1970s and was based on functionalist theories of philosophy of the mind and representational semantics. Cognitivism refers to the mind by using the metaphor of a digital computer. The mind is like a symbol-manipulating machine, with an input from the outside world followed by internal processing.²⁶ Thought corresponds to non-conscious, skull-bound, symbol manipulation, positioned in a central cognitive module of the brain separated from the systems for perception, emotion, and motor action (Thompson 2007, 5–7). The connectionist approach to the mind, for its part, emerged during the 1980s and bases its models of cognitive processes on the field of cybernetics. This approach works with the development of artificial neural networks, which are virtual systems implemented on a digital computer. The artificial neural network is composed of layers of neuron-like units that are linked by numerically weighted connections. The mind is a trained neural network that converts numerical (rather than symbolic) representations into numerical output

²⁵ Cognitive science is a modern scientific research field that since the middle of the 20th century has investigated the elements that allow the process of cognition. The investigations have been developed from different disciplines that together constitute cognitive science, such as psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, computer science, artificial intelligence (AI), and philosophy (Thompson 2007).

²⁶ It is worth noting that philosopher of the mind Evan Thompson asserts that this kind of physical symbol system is a culturally specific form of human activity. He refers to cognitive anthropologist Edwin Hutchins, who has argued that “a confused metaphorical transference from culture to individual psychology lies at the very origin of the cognitivist view. Cognitivism derives from taking what is in fact a sociocultural activity–human computation–and projecting it onto something that goes on inside the individual’s head. The cognitive properties of computation do not belong to the individual person but to the sociocultural system of individual-plus-environment” (Thompson 2007, 7).

representations (Thompson 2007, 8–9). Although connectionism is based on numerical representations rather than symbolic, it shares with cognitivism the idea that cognition is “the solving of predefined problems (posed to the system from outside by the observer or designer) and that the mind is essentially the skull-bound cognitive unconscious, the sub-personal domain of computational representation in the mind-brain” (Thompson 2007, 10). This shared focus results in the disavowal of both conscious experience and phenomenological approaches to understanding the mind.

Unlike the cognitivist and connectionist approaches, the more recent embodied and dynamical approach to the mind argues that cognition cannot be conceived as a disembodied process or as a form of abstract mental representation, but rather should be seen as a dynamic (nonlinear) interaction between brain, body, and environment. In *The Embodied Mind* (1991), Varela, Thompson, and Rosch build on embodied dynamicist approaches to the mind, phenomenological ideas of human subjectivity and experience, and the Buddhist tradition of meditative practice and pragmatic philosophical investigation to propose an interdisciplinary understanding of the mind. The enactive approach to perception is one of their principal contributions. It departs from central insights of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s early work on embodied perception,²⁷ which leads Varela, Thompson, and Rosch to sustain that “perception consists in perceptually guided action” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 173).²⁸ This means that perception is not a process of the mind forming a mental representation of a pre-given world, but rather a process in which the perceiver’s *embodied actions*, in a specific situation or environment, are guides to a perceiver-dependent world. Varela et al. propose the following characterization of *enaction*:

²⁷ It is worth referring to some parts of Merleau-Ponty’s observations that Varela, Thompson, and Rosch follow. In *The Structure of Behavior* (1963) Merleau-Ponty writes: “The properties of the object and the intentions of the subject [...] are not only intermingled; they also constitute a new whole. When the eye and the ear follow an animal in flight, it is impossible to say ‘which started first’ in the exchange of stimuli and responses. Since all the movements of the organism are always conditioned by external influences, one can, if one wishes, readily treat behavior as an effect of the milieu. But in the same way, since all the stimulations which the organism receives have in turn been possible only by its preceding movements which have culminated in exposing the receptor organ to external influences, one could say that *behavior is the first cause of all the stimulations.*” [italics added by Varela, et.al] (Merleau-Ponty in Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 173–74).

²⁸ The enactive approach also draws on a second assertion from psychology: “cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided” (Varela et. al 1995, 173). This point is based on Jean Piaget’s understanding of how sensorimotor intelligence develops into the child’s conception of the world, in which the simplest act of recognition of an object is possible only by means of the child’s own actions. Therefore, there is a construction of the phenomenal world – its laws and logics – through cognitive structures of recurrent patterns (“circular reactions” in Piaget’s language) (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 176). However, for the purposes of this text, I will not further develop this aspect.

By using the term *embodied* we mean to highlight two points: first, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context. By using the term *action* we mean to emphasize once again that sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition. (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 172–3)

Perceiving is not merely receiving sensory stimulation. It is something we do. Following philosopher of the mind Alva Nöe, we can say that we make sense of sensory impressions through our ‘sensory-motor skills,’ that is, through our practical experience with movement. In this sense, *enaction* is how we act out our perception and how we make sense of it. Nöe asserts that “[t]o be a perceiver is to understand, implicitly, the effects of movement on sensory stimulation” (Nöe 2004, 1). That means that the agent does not discover the world, but rather constitutes a world. Nöe illustrates this through an engagement with evolutionary work on perception, particularly through studies on vision that claim that this sense might have developed as a mechanism of motor control. He gives the example of the phototactic water beetle in which the absorption of light guides the modulation of swimming behavior. In normal conditions, the organism would tend to go upward to the air it needs to survive. However, if a light source is placed at the bottom, the organism would swim towards it and would die (Nöe 2004, 18). This shows that the organism perceives in order to act, and acts in order to perceive. The light gives the organism the necessary information to make sense of its environment, and from there, it can perceive and act. But, to perceive the light it has to move, to act. In the case of human experience, we can say that, for example, objects become bigger in our visual field as we approach them. Sound changes depending on our proximity to the source. The shape and texture of an object might change depending on the guiding movement of, for instance, our hands touching. We move to perceive and by perceiving we move. Perceiving is the combination of sensory-motor skills and the sense we make of it. The enactive approach to perception leads to the crucial insight that “knower and known, mind and world, stand in relation to each other through mutual specification or dependent co-origination” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 150). The world, in other words, is not pre-given but articulated in specific situations where brain, body, and

environment meet. All in all, we enact our world.²⁹ This understanding of enactive cognition and perception has significantly informed the field of theatre and performance. In the next section, I address this relationship in more detail by introducing the enactive approach to spectatorship.

The Enactive Approach to Spectatorship

As already described, the enactive approach to perception overcomes representational models—such as those of cognitivism and connectionism, that propose a view of a pre-determined outer world versus an inner mind—by introducing an understanding of the world as something that is co-constituted by the perceiver. This understanding has been developed in theatre and performance studies, where insights of cognitive sciences allow us to first, rethink “our assumptions about perception, creativity, imagination, identity [and] representation” (McConachie and Hart 2006, xi). And second, to consider the theatrical event not as an object, but rather as a dynamic relationship between actor, spectator, and stage (Sofia 2018).³⁰

According to theatre scholar Marco de Marinis, the logo-centric paradigm, which marked theatre studies since Aristotle, started to change during the twentieth century. At the root of this change was the understanding of the body not as an object of study but as “the ‘constitutive dimension’ of every cultural and social phenomenon, particularly of each single aesthetic experience” (De Marinis 2016, 63). Such attentiveness towards the body enabled the emergence of different disciplines and approaches interested in breaking down the long-standing dualism between mind and body present in theatre studies. De Marinis observes that disciplines that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, such as

²⁹ One of the objections that this approach has received is that it constitutes as a form of behaviorism. However, as philosopher of the mind Alva Nöe points out, “behaviorism makes the mistake of thinking action as a simple effect of perception; the behaviorist ignores feedback from output to input. Behaviorism, as such, is a ‘linear or one-way view of the primary causal flows’. ... [but perception and action] may be related constitutively by dynamic patterns of circular input-output-input loopings” (Nöe 2004, 235). This clarification shows that embodied dynamicism focuses on self-organizing dynamic systems rather than on physical symbol systems.

³⁰ According to theatre scholar Gabriel Sofia, the enactive model of human cognition and systems theory enables a broad understanding of the networked quality of the theatre. In the article “Systems Theory, Enaction and Performing Arts” (2018) Sofia describes systems theory is an epistemological theory that studies phenomena through the relations that produce it. Systems theory is often referred to research on quantum physics which takes radical distance from the presumption of purely objective phenomena because its procedures involve both the observer and the environment in which the observation occurs. Thus, the distinction between subject and object collapses. This paradigmatic shift has affected several research areas, including theatre studies. In the systemic paradigm, then, the spectator is considered as co-creator of the theatrical event.

theatre anthropology and ethnoscenology,³¹ enabled to understand that “above and beyond being human thinking beings (endowed with a neocortex), in the theatre we are (or at least we should return to being) also ‘animals,’ better still ‘living organisms’ (equipped with, among other things, an archaic brain and an enteric nervous system) and we should also behave as such” (De Marinis 2016, 71). In this vein, in recent years theatre scholars Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart have proposed to integrate cognitive studies into theatre theory to study how cognitive operations of human perception systems underpin the act of spectating, and how that, in turn, provide us with a framework that challenges traditional logo-centric theatre theories as well as their purely semiotic interpretative practices (McConachie and Hart 2006; McConachie 2008).³²

The notion of an *embodied mind* shows that first, cognition and perception result from the experience of having a body with various sensorimotor capacities. And second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in biological, psychological, and cultural contexts (Varela et al. 1995), has allowed theatre scholars to approach in a more encompassing way the theatrical event by attending to both the verbal expression and non-verbal action that occur in it. In the article “Perceiving and Believing: An Enactive Approach to Spectatorship” (2014), theatre scholars Maaïke Bleeker and Isis Germano propose an approach to spectatorship that combines Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor with phenomenological investigations by Merleau-Ponty and theories of enactive perception to understanding how forms of staging and spectators’ modes of perceiving co-constitute each other in the theatrical event.

Notably, the enactive approach to spectatorship that Bleeker and Germano propose aims to show how “modes of staging (willingly or unwillingly) imply positions, both in concrete embodied space and with regard to the ways in which our perceptions of things include attitudes toward them: assumptions, expectations, beliefs, desires, and fears” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 365). Bleeker and Germano refer to observations of Hans-Thies Lehmann who in *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) claims that the potential of different forms of staging is fundamental to understanding how “the political and the ethical character of theatre is not a matter of representation, but of perception, and how this comes to the fore

³¹ De Marinis mentions three important initiatives that incorporated the connection between theatre studies and scientific research, namely, the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), founded by Eugenio Barba in 1979; xHCA (Questioning Human Creativity as Acting) developed in 1995 by theatre scholars and pedagogues John Schranz and Ingemar Lindh, and cognitive scientists Richard Muscat and Glyn Goodall; and Ethnoscenology, developed in Paris in 1995 by Jean-Marie Pradier (De Marinis 2016).

³² For instance, Lacanian phycoanalysis, Saussurean semiotics, and Derridian deconstruction.

prominently in what he describes as the transformation from dramatic to postdramatic theatre” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 365). To delve into this political and ethical aspect of theatre, and to address a shift from what is represented on stage towards the modes of perceiving of the audience, Bleeker and Germano propose an enactive approach to spectatorship informed by theories of enactive perception that show that “it is from the ways in which our bodies enact perceptual encounters with their environment that a sense of the world encountered, together with a sense of self, emerge in relation to each other” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 365). Therefore, Bleeker and Germano’s enactive approach to spectatorship concentrates on theatrical audience address and the embodied modes of perceiving of the audience.

Bleeker and Germano point out that traditional staging in modern Western theatre is characterized by a clear-cut distinction of stage/auditorium, which creates “a view into another world that, like the *finestra aperta* of perspectival painting, seems to exist independently from [the] viewers” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 373). In contemporary performances, however, spectators are confronted with ambiguous experiences that question the traditional staging of modern Western theatre. Bleeker and Germano assert that contemporary performances “do not reflect a unitary worldview that allows the world to be grasped as picture. They do not provide the spectator with a sense of mastery over what is seen, but instead confront the spectator with the fact of her being implicated in her perception of what she is confronted with” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 374). Bleeker and Germano’s enactive approach to spectatorship shows that such implication is achieved in theatre performances that *position* spectators in ways that destabilize habitual modes of perceiving. To illustrate it, these authors discuss two theatre performances, namely, *The Funeral* (2014) by Dutch director and visual artist Dries Verhoeven, and *NATURE or NURTURE* (2010) by Dutch director Alexandra Broeder. In what follows, I briefly describe Bleeker and Germano’s discussion of *The Funeral*, where they focus firstly, on how spectators are addressed and positioned, and secondly, on how this address and position invites spectators to enact their perception.

The Funeral is a theatre performance organized in a series of ten funerals of ideas, values, or concepts that were once important to Western society but are no longer present in the way they once were. The first service opened the Spring Festival for Performing Arts,³³ and its topic was the *Public Support of the Arts*. It was followed by the funerals of *The Center*

³³ This is an international festival that focuses on crossovers between dance, theatre and performance. The Spring festival takes place two times a year (the ten-day Spring Performing Arts Festival in May and the three-day Spring in Autumn in the fall) in Utrecht, Netherlands.

of the World, Our Postcolonial Guilt, Multicultural Society, The Welfare State, Our Privacy, Eternal Loyalty, The Enfant Terrible, Our Innocence, and, finally, *Our Belief*. According to Bleeker and Germano, the funeral ceremonies call to mind the historical relationships between Western theatre and the Church, which are “usually accounted for in terms of the ways in which both are staged (in the sense of involving prescribed actions, costumes, props, and texts unfolding according to a prearranged scenario), and how Western theatre as we know it can be traced back to stagings of scenes from the Bible [...] as a means to communicate what is in the Bible to an illiterate audience by representing it visually” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 364). Bleeker and Germano emphasize that Verhoeven’s funerals are not about communicating a biblical story, that is, on what is represented in front of an audience. Instead, the funerals are “constructed to position spectators in relation to what is performed, and how these positions mediate in modes of enacting perception” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 364). The structure of the funerals invites spectators to be active participants in the services. The performance positions spectators in a way that invites them to actively enact their perception; for example, in the case of *Our Innocence* spectators are welcomed in the church, where the performance/liturgy will take place, by receiving a leaflet that tells who the pastor and deacon are, who plays the organ, what prayers will be recited and readings given, what songs sung and rituals performed. As the service begins, the pastor welcomes the audience and then, throughout the ceremony, he asks them to stand, sit down, kneel, recite texts, sing, and even to receive Communion. According to Bleeker and Germano:

The point of the performance is not that we necessarily have to behave in the ways we are being asked to or imagine that we really are at the funeral of a dear one (if and to what extent we do so is up to us), but that we become aware of how what is presented places us in a position in relation to what is happening, and how this invites us to enact our perception of the event from that position. (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 367)

This way of embodied engagement destabilizes conventional modes of perception in theatrical events. *The Funeral* implicates and confronts spectators by the specific audience address, which for the case of *Our Innocence*, occurs in a church and involves some of the cultural embodied codes that historically characterize the rituals that happen in that place. This form of proceeding incites spectators to engage with the performance in an embodied and active way, in short, to enact their perception. Furthermore, such implication is

accentuated by making the spectators say things—as in the confessions—, sometimes because of the pastor’s suggestions in his reflections on the concept that is being buried, or sometimes because relatives speak about their loss. However, Bleeker and Germano argue that “unlike in most religious services, these various positions and the views they enact do not add up to a unified whole; moreover, they do not necessarily confirm what we already know or want to believe” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 369). Bleeker and Germano’s enactive approach to spectatorship shows how we can think of the spectator as not merely someone who is present in a particular time and place, but someone who is in a mutual constitution with the staging she is being part of.

The enactive approach to spectatorship can be used to analyze contemporary theatre performances like the one that I introduce and characterize in the last chapter of this thesis, namely, *Dying Together/ Earth*. This participatory theatre performance presents situations of collective death by asking spectators to position themselves in space and in relation to one another, in response to certain instructions. This is a performance that, somewhat similar to *The Funeral*, destabilizes habitual modes of perception. In *Dying Together/ Earth*, spectators are invited to imagine and physically represent different beings and things. For instance, a person may be representing an anaconda while another person may be representing a 200 meters long liana or a purple orchid. These persons will explore their positions on the shared stage by, e.g. approaching or taking distance from each other. In line with Bleeker and Germano, *Dying Together’s* invitation to participate and to represent a being or thing can already be regarded as a form of positioning. The enactive approach to spectatorship will be relevant for the analysis of audience address in *Dying Together/ Earth* because it is in the relationship between the embodied engagement of spectators and the dramaturgical distribution of bodies on stage where the performance takes place. Before delving into the analysis of the performance, however, in the next sections I first present two analytical concepts that stem from theories of enactive perception, and that will help me to analyze audience address in *Dying Together/ Earth*. These concepts are ‘embodied simulation’ and ‘embodied reflection.’

Embodied Simulation

In the already discussed article “Perceiving and Believing” (2014) Bleeker and Germano offer a combination of phenomenological investigations by Merleau-Ponty and theories of enactive cognition to show how our own bodily experiences influence how we perceive the

bodies of others. Firstly, these authors address Merleau-Ponty's early observations on the possibility of interpersonal understanding, which are based on "the capacities of the body to see other bodies as themes of possible activities for its own" (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 378). Merleau-Ponty explains this as follows: "I can perceive, across the visual image of the other, that the other is an organism, that the organism is inhabited by a 'psyche,' because the visual image of the other is interpreted by the notion I myself have of my own body and thus appears as the visible envelopment of another 'corporeal schema.'" (Merleau-Ponty in Bleeker and Germano 2014, 378). Subsequently, Bleeker and Germano assert that this idea is supported by the neuroscientific discovery of the mirror-neuron system by Vittorio Gallese and Giacomo Rizzolatti, and particularly, by Gallese's neurobiological model called 'embodied simulation,' that shows that human experience is the result of the interaction between action, perception, and cognition.

The neurobiological theory of 'embodied simulation' emphasizes the sensorimotor³⁴ nature of human cognition. Cognition is characterized as being multimodal, entailing the activation of motor, somatosensory,³⁵ and emotion-related brain networks. The activation of these networks is done by motor neurons, which not only allow movement, but also help to map the space surrounding our body (peri-personal space) whose limits are defined by the motor potentialities of our body; the objects around us that we can see and manipulate; and, the actions of others that we may observe. The mechanisms that the brain executes when mapping action and movement are defined as "mirror mechanisms" (Gallese 2020). The discovery of the mirror mechanisms was an inspiration for Gallese to study simulation theories through an embodied and dynamic approach, which resulted in his proposition of the embodied simulation theory.

According to Gallese, the embodied simulation theory "proposes that our social interactions become meaningful by means of reusing our own mental states or processes in functionally attributing them to others. [S]imulation is conceived as a non-conscious, pre-

³⁴ According to the dictionary of the American Psychological Association (APA), 'sensorimotor' is the "adjective [that] describes activity, behavior, or brain processes that involve both sensory (afferent) and motor (efferent) functions" ("Sensorimotor – APA Dictionary of Psychology" n.d.). These activities and processes occur in the brain area called the 'sensorimotor cortex', which is the "areas of the cerebral cortex that are concerned with somatosensory and motor functions" ("Sensorimotor Cortex – APA Dictionary of Psychology" n.d.).

³⁵ According to the APA dictionary, the somatosensory system is defined as "the parts of the nervous system that serve perception of touch, vibration, pain, temperature, and position nerve fibers from receptors for these senses enter the dorsal roots of the spinal cord and ascend mainly through tracts in the dorsal columns to the ventroposterior nuclei of the thalamus, from which they are relayed (directly or indirectly) to the somatosensory areas of the parietal cortex" ("Somatosensory System – APA Dictionary of Psychology" n.d.).

reflective functional mechanism of the brain-body system, whose function is to model objects, agents and events” (Gallese 2014, 3). Gallese proposes that such a non-conscious and pre-reflective mechanism can be understood as a form of ‘intercorporeality,’ which is the source of knowledge we directly gather about others, as well as “the mutual resonance of intentionally meaningful sensorimotor behaviors. Our understanding of others as intentional agents does not exclusively depend on language, but also on the relational nature of action” (Gallese 2017, 44). On that account, intercorporeality also enables an understanding of intersubjectivity.

In this vein, following Varela, theatre scholar Gabriel Sofia explains that the enactive paradigm allows us to understand how subjective experience is connected to the experiences of others. Varela emphasizes that although experience is a personal event, that does not imply it is private. As Varela asserts, “[a]n investigation of the structure of human experience inevitably induces a shift to considering the several levels on which my consciousness is inextricably linked to those of others and the phenomenal world in an empathic mesh” (Varela in Sofia 2018, 199). Sofia claims that such connection recalls enaction theory, “according to which there is no ‘pre-determined’ world, because the world itself is constituted, modified and perceived by the subject through a circular process of perception-action” (Sofia 2018, 199), and further he adds that this can also be understood in the theatre applying studies of intersubjectivity that show how spectators become co-creators of the theatrical event. Such co-constitution indicates that “the world perceived as ‘already constituted’ is an effect due to the fact that the subject has always been experiencing a context shared with other subjects, who interact with the world through the same motor routines of the subject” (Sofia 2018, 200). In other words, subjects (spectators and actors) do not “share” a pre-given world, but rather co-constitute a world through intercorporeality processes.

Furthermore, the notion of embodied simulation has been examined by several theatre and performance scholars to argue that when observing someone performing an action, expressing an emotion, or undergoing a somatosensory stimulation, in short, experiencing a live performance, it may activate processes of embodied simulation.³⁶

³⁶ For example, Bleeker and Germano point out that Bruce McConachie refers to social psychologist Paula Niedenthal, “whose research has shown that in situations in which empathy is encouraged, the imitation and embodiment of other people’s (emotional) behavior is heightened. He argues that Niedenthal’s research suggests that the resulting attunement of our bodies to the bodily states and emotions of other people would be activated even more strongly in the theatre than in everyday life” (Bleeker and Germano 2014, 379). Another example is Lorraine Dumenil’s article “Theatre and Science: Reflections on Theatrical Efficacy in Antonin Artaud” (2018) where she explores how

However, Gallese takes this argument even further by pointing out that mirror mechanisms triggered by perception are just one form of embodied simulation. In his recent article “A Bodily Take on Aesthetics: Performativity and Embodied Simulation” (2020) he asserts that “embodied simulation can also occur when we *imagine* doing something or imagine perceiving something” (Gallese 2020, 91, my emphasis). Gallese explains that:

When we imagine a visual scene, we activate the same cortical visual areas of our brain normally active when we do perceive the same visual scene. Similarly, mental motor imagery and real action both activate a common network of cortical and subcortical motor centers such as the primary motor cortex, the premotor cortex, the supplementary motor area (SMA), the basal ganglia and the cerebellum (Gallese 2020, 91)

Based on these observations, Gallese sustains that both motor experience and motor imagination are forms of embodied simulation. The functional mechanisms that underpin the connection between action, perception, and cognition in visual experience as well as in processes of imagination qualify as forms of embodied simulation. Gallese, moreover, states that “when indulging in visual or mental motor imagery we re-use our visual or motor neural apparatus to imagine things and situations we are not actually perceiving or doing,” and he further adds: “[w]e are open to the world because of the motor potentialities our bodily nature entails” (Gallese 2020, 92). From this, it may be argued that both perceiving and imagining are actions that entail (visual or imaginary) motor, somatosensory, and emotion-related brain networks.

Furthermore, Gallese points out that both visual and mental imagery are not exclusively symbolic representations. These actions cannot be understood as merely picture-viewing. But rather, as philosopher of the mind Evan Thompson explains, mental imagery or visualizing is the activity through which “we visualize an object or scene by *mentally enacting* or entertaining a *possible perceptual* experience of that object or scene” (Thompson 2007, 269 my emphasis). Mentally enacting an experience, as we have seen in relation to the embodied simulation theory, does not constitute an abstract and disembodied process of meaning-making, but one enabled and conditioned by an embodied level of sensory-motor acts. In this vein, Gallese adds that the neurobiological mechanisms that deal

Artaud’s model of the plague and the idea of visual contagion, of touching at a distance, can be thought through the model of embodied simulation.

with the real world, usually overlap with those active when we imagine fictional worlds through images and words. He explains that “when we read or listen to narratives we literally embody them by activating a substantial part of our sensory-motor system. The activation of motor representations in the brain of the reader or listener has been demonstrated at the phono-articulatory level, as well as during the processing of action-related linguistic expressions (words and sentences) and of morpho-syntactical aspects of language” (Gallese 2020, 93). In this sense, embodied simulation theory can be used both to better understand how we perceive the world and how we imagine it. This insight, as well as the emphasis on the motor representations activated by language, will be relevant for the analysis of spectatorship in *Dying Together/ Earth*, where acts of imagination are triggered in spectators’ embodied motor, somatosensory, and emotion-related brain networks.

As a final observation, it is relevant to note that one of the possible objections to embodied simulation theory in processes of imagination is that humans can make a clear distinction between fiction and reality. “We respond differently to imagined and real scenarios”, writes Gallese, “no one rushes out of the movie theatre in panic after watching a house on fire on the movie screen. The same applies to the literary world of fiction: we weep for Anna Karenina, while being aware she doesn’t exist” (Gallese 2020, 95). So, how to maintain that both visual and mental imagery are forms of embodied simulation? Gallese proposes the hypothesis of ‘liberated embodied simulation’ to give a possible solution to the distinction between real and imagined scenarios. Liberated embodied simulation can be experienced when contemplating a painting, reading a novel, or watching a film, because there is a temporal suspension of the active occupations of our everyday life, thus liberating new simulative energies. Gallese describes that we can experience liberated embodied simulation when relating to the world of fiction in the sense of creating a sort of “safe intimacy with a world we not only imagine, but also literally embody with augmented intensity” (Gallese 2020, 95). Such enhanced intensity, Gallese indicates, is possible by the immobility that the aesthetic experience demands. Our “being still” boosts our embodied simulation. In brief, liberated embodied simulation is a form of embodied simulation that can be used to understand aesthetic experience.

All in all, embodied simulation theory entails at least three characteristics. First, it shows the workings of neurobiological mirror mechanisms which help us to understand intersubjectivity in terms of intercorporeality. Second, embodied simulation is also involved in mental imagery processes, in which our sensory-motor system is activated in order to mentally enact fictional worlds. And, third, embodied simulation can be the basis to think about liberated embodied simulation, which emerges when aesthetic experience temporarily

frees us from being in the grip of our daily occupations. As I show in the next chapter, the mental process that spectators of *Dying Together/ Earth* activate while imagining a particular representation of a being, a thing, or a situation, emerges from the activation of embodied simulation processes of visualization. The process of visualization “is not a disembodied exercise of abstract sensorimotor skill, but rather a genuine sensorimotor act” (Thompson 2007, 298). Embodied simulation theory will allow us to understand how, through acts of imagination, planetary relationality may be better understood in *Dying Together/ Earth*.

Embodied Reflection

In *The Embodied Mind* (1991) Varela, Thompson, and Rosch also introduce the notion of ‘embodied reflection.’ As pointed out in previous sections, *The Embodied Mind* presents an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the mind involving embodied dynamicist explanations of the mind, phenomenological approaches to human subjectivity and experience, and the Buddhist tradition of meditative practice and pragmatic philosophical investigation. These authors are interested in examining reflection as a form of experience itself. They point out that theoretical reflection is an activity that has been present in most of the Western tradition of philosophy, where reflection is often understood as a vehicle to describe experience, and not as a form of experience itself.

To explain embodied reflection, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch depart from phenomenology as the Western philosophical tradition that studies human subjective experience. In this vein, they assert that “even philosophers who critique or problematize reason do so only by means of arguments, demonstrations, and... linguistic observations” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 20).³⁷ Varela, Thompson, and Rosch point that Merleau-Ponty’s early work already reveals an awareness of the limits that theoretical reason imposes. In the preface of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes the following meditation:

³⁷ Varela, Thomson, and Rosch show how this limitation is present since the foundational ideas of phenomenology by Edmond Husserl. The authors refer to Husserl’s phenomenological method (known as “bracketing” or *epoché*) and assert that the philosopher developed his approach from his own abstract philosophical introspection, arguing that, “[t]he irony of Husserl’s procedure... is that although he claimed to be turning philosophy toward a direct facing of experience, he was actually ignoring both the consensual aspect and the direct embodied aspect of experience” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 17). The authors suggest that Husserl’s turn to experience and to the things themselves was entirely theoretical, abstract, and disembodied.

When I begin to reflect, my reflection bears upon an unreflective experience, moreover my reflection cannot be unaware of itself as an event, and so it appears to itself in the light of a truly creative act, of a changed structure of consciousness, and yet it has to recognize, as having priority over its own operations, the world which is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself (Merleau-Ponty in Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 3)

This quote is reminiscent of the enactive approach to perception discussed above, in which body, mind, and environment constitute each other. Merleau-Ponty's work also helps Varela, Thompson, and Rosch to elaborate on his critique on science and phenomenology³⁸ as two approaches that explicated "our concrete, embodied existence in a manner that was always after the fact" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 19). That is, science and phenomenology "tried to grasp the immediacy of our unreflective experience and tried to give voice to it in conscious reflection. But precisely by being a theoretical activity after the fact, it could not recapture the richness of experience; it could be only a discourse about experience" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 19). Consequently, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch call for a change in the understanding of reflection from an abstract and disembodied process, to an embodied activity by proposing a methodological exploration of the Buddhist tradition of meditative practice and pragmatic philosophical investigation.

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, indeed, ground their investigation on the tradition of Indian philosophy, and particularly on the Buddhist method of mindfulness meditation, in order to understand *reflection* as an *embodied, mindful, and open-ended* activity. They emphasize that in the Indian tradition, philosophy has always been tied to methods of meditation, and not as a purely abstract occupation.³⁹ Varela, Thompson, and Rosch assert

³⁸ According to Merleau-Ponty's understanding, on one side, science studies the mind as a scientific object; and, on the other side, phenomenology studies the mind as an experiencing subject. Therefore, this poses a dualism between an objectivist and subjectivist understandings of the mind, usually referred as "the fundamental entre-deux between science and experience, experience and world" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 15). By pointing at this dualism and following Merleau-Ponty's insights, Varela, Thompson and Rosch seek to overcome the entre-deux via the interdisciplinary understanding of the mind that they propose.

³⁹ It is important to note the relevance of introducing a non-Western tradition of thought in academic debates as the one presented here. For Varela, Thompson, and Rosch "the rediscovery of Asian philosophy, particularly of the Buddhist tradition, is a second renaissance in the cultural history of the West, with the potential to be equally important as the rediscovery of Greek thought in the European renaissance. Our Western histories of philosophy, which ignore Indian thought, are artificial, since India and Greece share with us an Indo-European linguistic heritage as well as many cultural and philosophical preoccupations" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 22).

that the current folk meanings ascribed to the word *meditation* are understood as being a practice of concentration on only one object, a state of relaxation, a dissociated state in which trance phenomena can occur, or as a mystical state. And yet, they claim that these meanings have nothing to do with the sense of *mindfulness*, which implies “that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience; mindfulness techniques are designed to lead the mind back from its theories and preoccupations, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one’s experience itself” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 22). To become mindful is to be present with one’s mind and body, not as a dissociation but as a continuous interaction between mind and body. Moreover, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch point out that in scientific investigations and theoretical reflections, Western scientist and philosophers tend to ask “what is the mind?” or “what is the body?” but in the course of the investigations “we often forget just who is asking this question and how it is asked. By not including ourselves in the reflection, we pursue only a partial reflection, and our question becomes disembodied; it attempts to express, in the words of the philosopher Thomas Nagel, a ‘view from nowhere’” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 27). These disembodied ways of proceeding sustain the division between mind and body. By contrast, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch call for a change of these abstract activities called “reflection,” by proposing the term ‘embodied reflection.’ These authors offer the following definition of embodied reflection:

By *embodied*, we mean reflection in which body and mind have been brought together. What this formulation intends to convey is that reflection is not just *on* experience, but reflection *is* a form of experience itself – and that reflective form of experience can be performed with mindfulness/awareness. (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 27 emphases in original)

Embodied reflection might be approached from two points: first, as a way of developing a skill and second, as a way of developing daily awareness. On one side, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch give the example of learning to play a musical instrument, like the flute, in which the physical act of coordination of the position of the fingers, the breathing, and the mental intention is trained until a basic skill is acquired. At the beginning, the person who is learning to play the flute knows what to do mentally, but is physically unable to do it until, after a process of practice and training, a specific kind of mind-body unity is achieved. However, this approach to a form of embodied reflection is limited because it does not take into account the context from where it emerges, namely, contemplative traditions. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch assert that contemplative traditions agree that meditative practices

are about being present, and not about training meditative virtuosity and the development of a higher or more evolved spirituality (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 28–29).

On the other side, embodied reflection and its method of mindfulness meditation can be understood within the framework of contemplative traditions. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch assert that contemplative traditions never describe meditative practices as a way to achieve a sort of skill, but rather as the letting go of habits of mindlessness. For a person to engage with embodied reflection, s/he has to start from learning to letting go habits that do not allow her/him to be in the present moment. The first great discovery that a person experiences when developing embodied reflection is “the piercing realization of how disconnected humans normally are of their very experience. Even the simplest or most pleasurable of daily activities—walking, eating, conversing, driving, reading, waiting, thinking, making love, planning, gardening, drinking, remembering, going to a therapist, writing, dozing, emoting, sightseeing—all pass rapidly in a blur of abstract commentary as the mind hastens to its next mental occupation” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 25). In this sense, the *mindful and open-ended embodied reflection* does not aim to take distance from everyday life activities; quite the contrary, it aims to cultivate presence in every situation a person experiences. Once the person starts to realize how disconnected s/he is from the very experience of daily life, then an embodied reflection can start to unfold. According to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, such a disconnection from everyday life resonates quite strongly with the abstract attitude Merleau-Ponty ascribed to science and philosophy. They add that, “[the] abstract attitude is the spacesuit, the padding of habits and preconceptions, the armor with which one habitually distances oneself from one’s experience” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 25). The next step in the process of embodied reflection would be to “take off” the spacesuit, the armor of habits and preconceptions that do not allow one to fully experience the present moment.

Embodied reflection, then, is a call for a change in the understanding of reflection: from an abstract and disembodied activity to a mindful open-ended embodied reflection. By cutting the chain of habitual thought patterns and by taking off the spacesuit of the abstract attitude, an embodied and open-ended reflection can emerge and be “open to possibilities other than those contained in one’s current representation of the life space” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 27). As I show in the next chapter, *Dying Together/ Earth* invites spectators to engage with such open-ended reflections, through active and embodied participation.

Spectators' Embodied Modes of Imagination and Reflection in *Dying Together/ Earth*

In this chapter, I present the analysis of theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth* to show how *Dying Together/ Earth* can be understood as a performance in which planetary relationality materializes, and how this is achieved through a particular form of audience address, which emphasizes the embodied experience of the spectator. This chapter is structured into four parts. In the first section, I present a general description of the performance. Here I will also rely on my personal visit to the performance, in Rotterdam.

In the second and third sections, I use the analytical concepts of 'embodied simulation' and 'embodied reflection,' respectively, to examine how spectators of *Dying Together/ Earth* experience the performance in an embodied way and how this invites a kind of thinking that connects to planetary relationality. In addition to my analysis of the performance, I rely on written reflections by spectators, which are collected in an online archive. The reflections that I will be referring to were written by participants at the end of the performance. Spectators were invited to write down, in the present tense, the moment of the performance that stayed with them the most. It is noteworthy that at the moment when participants write down their thoughts, the team of performers takes out to stage three tables where they place other written reflections of past performances of *Dying Together*. The pieces of this physical archive can be picked up before, while, or after the present participants write down their own reflections. After participants have finished writing down their thoughts, they are not shared but collected to add them in the archive of reflections for future presentations and to upload them in the digital archive, which everyone can access. In this sense, the archive of reflections is built by anonymous contributions and enables the creation of a bigger constellation between past, present, and future participants, creating a wider network in time and space that entangles with and yet overcomes the presentness of the performance.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The digital archive of reflections of *Dying Together* can be accessed through the website <http://www.archiveofreflections.nl/>

In the last section, I refer to some fragments of an interview I conducted with performance director Lotte van den Berg, to conclude with some of her insights about *Dying Together* and show the relationship between the idea of collective dying on earth, the performance audience address, and the notion of planetary relationality.

Dying Together/ Earth

In November 2019, I went to the theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth* in the City Theatre in Rotterdam, Netherlands. When I arrived at the theatre, a group of performers guided us to the doors of an empty room. It looked like a dance rehearsal space—no chairs for the spectators, not front stage for the performers. A white light illuminated the whole room, there were no spotlights to point at any sort of space organization. The performers welcomed us by giving a sign that we could enter the space and then gave us a leaflet that said:

Find a place in space, alone, to read this text ⁴¹

It is the beginning of *Dying Together/ Earth*. People enter the space, walk around, take distance from their friends, sit alone on the floor, and start to read the leaflet in silence. The text presents a series of reflections around the meaning of the word “togetherness” in different real-life and imaginary scenarios of collective death, such as the following:

Togetherness is first of all a realization:
We are in this together.
Whether we like it or not.
Whether we have chosen for it or not.
Whether it kills us or not.

If a wildfire moves with the speed of 100km/h without differentiating between its victims, burning alive both trees, animals and people;

What kind of togetherness is that?

These words are the introduction to what is about to begin. The leaflet finalizes by announcing we will pay attention to three situations of collective death, namely, the meat

⁴¹ The following quotes with this font are part of the script of *Dying Together/ Earth*. I decided to keep the original font that the theatre company uses, in order to evoke part of their style.

industry in the UK and the break-out of the Mad Cow disease; the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, and its transformation into an ecosystem for business; and the decomposition of a man's body, merging together with the Aokigahara forest in Japan.

After some minutes pass and everyone has finished reading the welcoming leaflet, a verbal introduction is done.⁴² The performers tell us which day it is (November 7th, 2019), what time it is (20:30), where we are (Theatre Rotterdam), and how many we are (80). They have positioned the here and now. Lotte van den Berg, who is part of the team of performers, then says:

First of all and most important, you're here for yourself. This is a place to think physically, by positioning and re-positioning your body in space. Use the space in a way that fits you.

She continues the introduction by saying that tonight we are going to make three constellations, based on the situations of collective deaths already pointed out in the welcoming leaflet. To do so, we will map the situations in the theatre with our own bodies. They will ask us to represent beings and things that died or were related to the event of death. In order to understand how we are going to bodily represent that, they—the team of performers—will introduce us to the constellation practice they have developed, step by step. This constellation practice is based on the idea of forming patterns in space while relating to each other by positioning and repositioning our bodies in space. They add:

The word constellation (con-stellare) is first used to talk about the way stars are interrelated; forming patterns that we see from afar. In the same way all beings and things on earth are interrelated; forming constantly changing patterns in space.

They start with a summary of the situation. The performers then read the descriptions of the beings and things involved in it. Then, they ask us if we want to represent the being or thing they have described, you can say 'yes' or 'no.' If your answer is positive, then the performer guides you to a particular place in the space and says 'this is where you begin,' the starting point can be standing, sitting, or lying down. You are positioned with a particular focus, looking or not at others, and with different distances between bodies. If your answer is 'no,' then you can rest on your spot and in the following situations, you may be asked again. They

⁴² See the whole text of the welcoming leaflet in appendix 1. *Leaflet Dying Together/ Earth*

also mention that we are not supposed to talk during the constellations. Let's look at an example. We are in the second situation of collective death, which takes place in the Amazon rainforest. A performer reads that we are going to focus on a small city called Rio Branco and points at three moments in time where different activities took place there. First, in the 19th century, people used to extract rubber from trees. Then, in the 1970s and onwards, forests were removed to construct mega-farms for cattle. And in recent years, many soy plantations were introduced, occupying the southern area of the city. After reading this information, some beings and things are described and then represented by people, such as:

A tree, 70 meters tall, communicating with the other trees in the forest via its roots and the fungi network between them.

An amoeba, a microscopic being living in the soil, that moves by constantly changing its shape.

A sloth, a very slow and big mammal, that sleeps while hanging in a tree, and moves only when necessary.

A girl, 9 years old, part of the Huni Kuin people, that lives together with a few adults and a lot of kids in the forest.

A bulldozer, designed in the US and made in Brazil, where it now functions as a logging machine for 3 years.

The stage gradually starts to be filled with monkeys, insects, people, things, an anaconda, soy plants, trees, glyphosate, the ING bank, a spider... the team reminds us that it is impossible to have an overview of the situation, we are immersed in a very particular position, the one we have agreed to represent. We are standing in different positions in the theatre room when a performer starts to read a scripted situation that focuses on a particular moment in time. We are in the Amazon rainforest, and it is a warm day. It's getting dark. The bulldozers are parked in the middle of the forest. Then, they say: Explore the way you relate to each other. Some people start to walk, others rest in their spot, some people look at each other, others wander around, others jump, others lie down on the floor... it is the Amazon, after all, I think. There is no way to know who or what is representing the other people. The only thing I know is that I am standing still, I do not feel the need to move, after all, I am A tree, 350 years old, communicating with the other trees in the forest via its roots and the fungi network between them. And in front of me, is that a monkey? Or perhaps

a spider? There is a woman who moves her arms and fingers in front of me, like trying to tickle. I smile and continue to see how the Amazon emerges in front of me.

Enacting Imagination in *Dying Together/ Earth*

In this section, by using the analytical concept of 'embodied simulation,' I describe how spectators enact their imagination in *Dying Together/ Earth* and how, by doing so, it allows them to engage with planetary relationality in an embodied way. As described in the second chapter, embodied simulation entails three features. First, based on the function of neurobiological mirror mechanisms, embodied simulation introduces the notion of intercorporeality to demonstrate how our own bodily experiences influence how we perceive the bodies of others. Second, embodied simulation is also a form of mental imagery processes comprising the activation of our sensory-motor system to mentally enact fictional worlds. And, third, embodied simulation can evoke an aesthetic experience of 'liberated embodied simulation,' that is, a form of experience that temporally suspends the mind from being occupied by everyday life activities (Gallese 2014; 2017; 2020). In what follows, I analyze *Dying Together's* spectatorial address by looking at these aspects of embodied simulation. Then, I point to the connections between embodied simulation processes and planetary relationality.

Let's start by observing how in *Dying Together*, the performers invite spectators to literally become part of the narration by positioning and repositioning their bodies on stage, and how can we understand this through the notion of *intercorporeality*. This form of staging is new to most of the audience; people look around and try to imitate those who are already part of the representations. For instance, in the case of the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, a performer invites us to focus on a particular moment. This moment is five years after the forest was taken down and in which the land was occupied by thousands of soy plantations. He narrates a series of consequences of these transformations, for example, that the nocturnal frog has lost its fertility, the colony of the bee died out, and hundreds of indigenous people and activists were killed. Since some participants are already busy with a being or thing to bodily represent, the performer finalizes by saying that now we can explore the way we relate to each other. Everyone starts to move along the space, some people decide to lie down, others sit down and look at each other, others seem to try to reach some-body else by eye contact or physical contact. I can see that a performer asked a white man to represent a girl, 9 years old, part of the Huni Kuin people, the

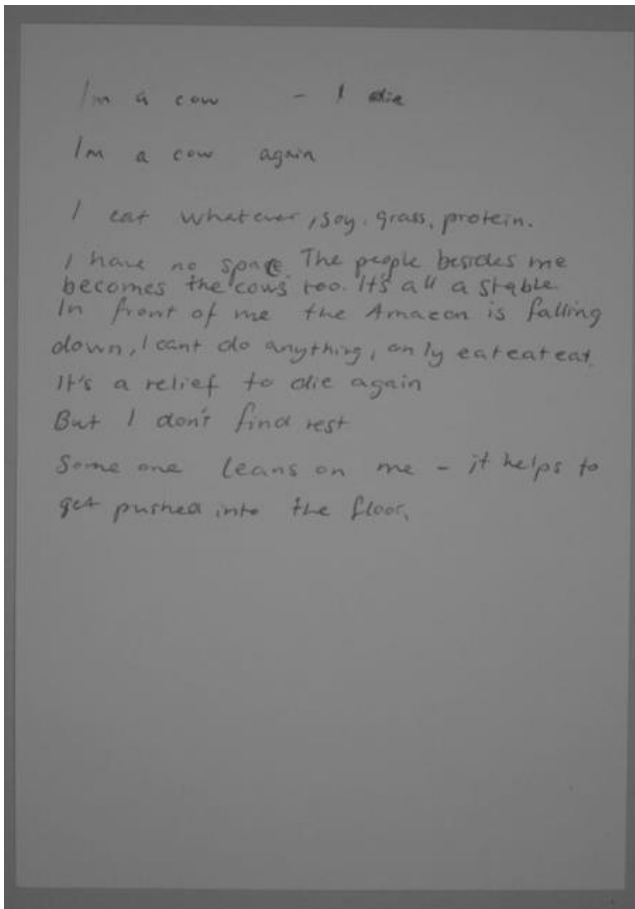
spectator seeks to have eye contact with a young woman, who I knew was representing a railway through the Amazon financed by Chinese banks, cutting the territories of 19 different indigenous tribes. Still, at that same moment, a middle-aged woman is trying to catch the attention of the Huni Kuin girl. This woman is representing a dog, that lives together with the Huni Kuin people in the forest. At that moment, I remember that I am representing a tree, 350 years old, and I realize that I have a close view of this particular dynamic because of my very specific location in the theatrical stage, even though there is still a lot happening around me that I cannot identify.

Because the staging process is gradual, some people are still without a role to fill in, and they are just listeners of the narrations and observers of those who are already representing someone or something. *Dying Together* disturbs the traditional form of perceiving in the theatre, firstly, because it does not divide the stage from the auditorium. Secondly, because it does not build an overview or a whole picture to be grasped by all the audience, but instead focuses on creating particular spots from where to perceive and imagine a specific event of collective death on earth. This unusual procedure gives way to the emergence of multiple viewpoints of the theatrical event, where many can eventually meet but also where many others will remain unknown to some participants. In this sense, *Dying Together* starts to shift our habitual mode of experiencing a theatrical event, which is usually characterized by a logocentric logic in which one has an overview of everything that happens on stage, and instead, leads the attention to one's own experience. It is important to remember that enactive perception explains that to be a perceiver is to understand the effects of movement on sensory stimulation, that is to say, perceiving is not to simply to receive sensory stimulation but to act it out and make sense of it (Varela et al. 1996; Nöe 2004; Thompson 2007). In the case of *Dying Together*, spectators enact their perception by activating neurobiological mirror mechanisms that allow them to understand the unfolding of the performance through movement, through acts of positioning and repositioning. In other words, processes of embodied simulation enable spectators to make sense of the theatrical event and the situations of collective death it proposes. In theatre scholarship, this has been studied by showing that when a spectator observes an actor who is performing an action, expressing an emotion, or experiencing a somatosensory stimulation, s/he activates processes of embodied simulation, creating empathic links. However, in the case of *Dying Together*, this is not only experienced when observing others but also when physically interacting with them. The empathic links emerge when participants of *Dying Together*

enact their perception by positioning and repositioning themselves in space according to the particular narrated situations.

The interaction between spectators can be analyzed through the notion of intercorporeality. Intercorporeality is a feature of embodied simulation, as it demonstrates how subjective experience is connected to the actions that others perform, creating an empathic mesh and forms of intersubjectivity. The process of intercorporeality arises from the activation of somatosensory mechanisms when we interact with other bodies and gather information about them from their actions. In the case of *Dying Together*, such a process is activated when the performers invite spectators to bodily represent a being or thing in space together with other bodies that also are representing things and beings. To illustrate this and other points of analysis, I will focus on spectators' experiences, by using some written reflections by participants of *Dying Together*.

The next written reflection is an example of how spectators of *Dying Together* may experience intercorporeality, as it describes an instance in which bodies interact with each other while gathering information from their actions.



I'm a cow – I die
I'm a cow again
I eat whatever, soy, grass, protein.
I have no space. The people besides me
Becomes the cows too. It's all a stable.
In front of me the Amazon is falling down,
I can't do anything, only eat eat eat.
It's a relief to die again
But I don't find rest
Someone leans on me – it helps to
get pushed into the floor.

Reflection - *Dying Together/Earth 1*

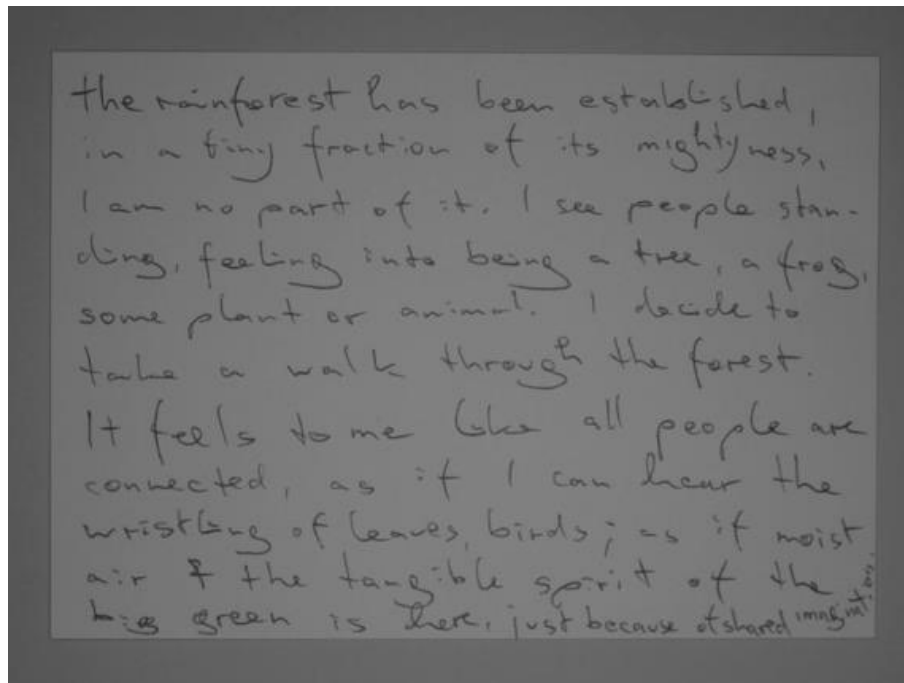
This reflection belongs to the situation of collective death in the Amazon rainforest. The construction of mega-farms for cattle has caused significant damages to the Amazonian ecosystem. The spectator represents *a cow that dies*,⁴³ but soon after s/he is again representing *a cow that eats, eats, and eats*. However, this cow is not by itself, the spectator describes *the people besides me becomes the cows too*. This description shows how the spectator enacts his/her perception of the event of collective death from the particular position of representing a cow among cows. The spectator describes that somebody else *leans on* him/her, showing that they are physically interacting to represent the act of dying, of falling into the floor. The positioning of many bodies/cows with no space and the repositioning of those same bodies/cows that are dying and lying on the floor show that perception emerges as the result of spectatorial action. There is a constant interaction between spectators' bodies representing, in this specific case, dying cows in the Amazon. The performance emerges through the accumulation of such intercorporeal events.

Notwithstanding, it is essential to remember that this spectator represents a singular viewpoint on the situation of collective death. In that same moment, other participants are representing a jumping spider, a purple orchid, a frog, an anaconda, a soy plant, or a bee. In the moment of representation, the spectators are being positioned in a network that they cannot oversee. The experience of a unique positionality confronts spectators to how to relate to that specific position and to other participants present in the same space. Furthermore, it enables to consider the spectator as a co-creator of the theatrical event because “the subject has always been experiencing a context shared with other subjects, who interact with the world through the same motor routines of the subject” (Sofia 2018, 200). In other words, subjects/spectators do not “share” a pre-given world, but rather co-constitute a world.

Besides intercorporeality, embodied simulation is also concerned with processes in which our sensory-motor system activates to *mentally enact fictional worlds*. As Gallese observes, “[w]hen we imagine a visual scene, we activate the same cortical visual areas of our brain normally active when we do perceive the same visual scene” (Gallese 2020, 91). Such activation can be triggered by linguistic expressions as well, for instance, when we hear the narration of a story. In *Dying Together*, this occurs when a performer creates a narrative by reading a particular situation of collective death and describing the beings and things that

⁴³ From now on, I will use italics when referring to specific parts of the spectators' written reflections.

are part of it. The spectators then process this narrative through their phono-articulatory system and which is expressed and enhanced by the intercorporeality that takes place in the shared space. In this sense, hearing a story is a form of enactive simulation that stimulates the imagination. The next reflection allows us to better understand how spectators mentally enact and imagine the situations that are narrated in *Dying Together*.



The rainforest has been established, in a tiny fraction of its mightiness, I am no part of it, I see people standing, feeling into being a tree, a frog, some plant or animal. I decide to take a walk through the forest. It feels to me like all people are connected, as if I can hear the wristling of leaves, birds; as if moist air and the tangible spirit of the big green is here, just because of shared imagination.

Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 2

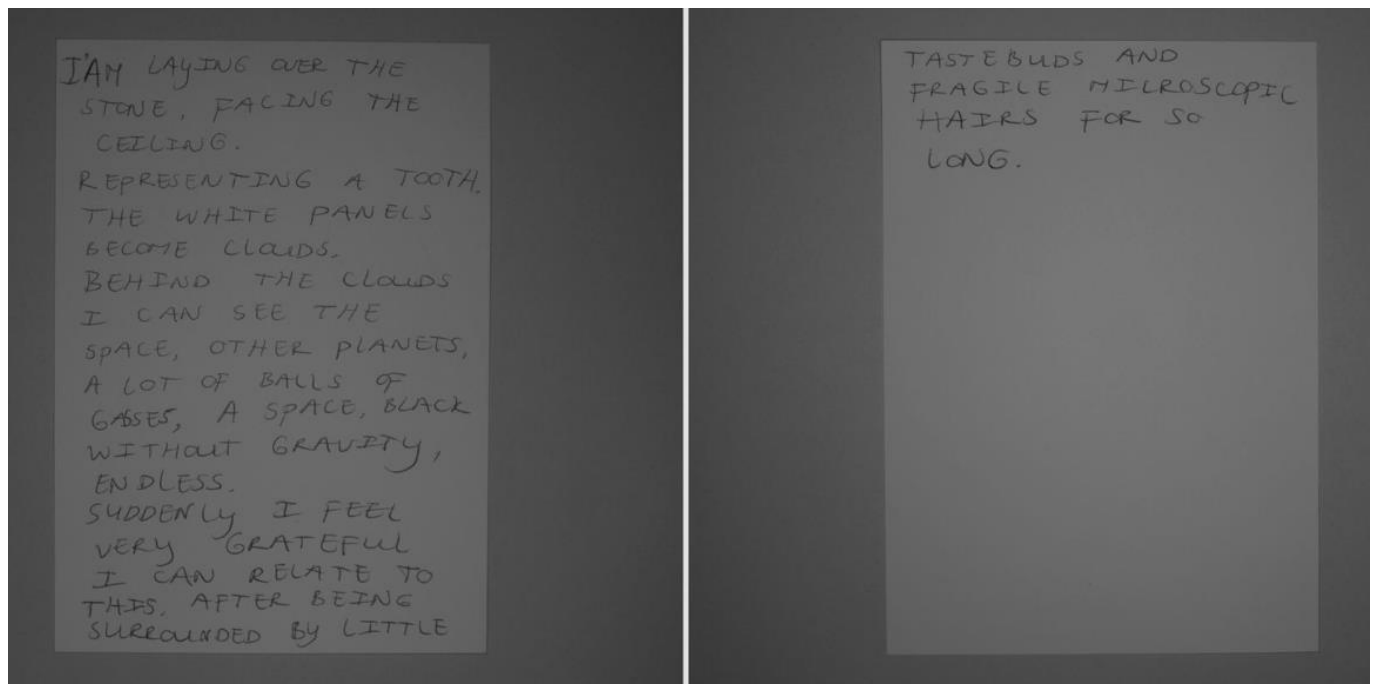
The spectator starts saying, *the rainforest has been established*, this indicates that people have responded to the invitation to imagine a rainforest. In the performance, this happens when a performer has read the summary of the situation. The performer narrates: we look at the current transformation of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. The Amazon rainforest exists for at least 55 million years, changing its size and shape during glacial periods of drought. It covers a huge part of the South American continent and is so big that as an ecosystem it is able to create its own climate. The voice invites spectators to pay attention to the current transformation of the Amazon rainforest fills the theatrical space. Afterwards, the spectators start to enact their imagination, and this is observable in

the case of the spectator who even when s/he writes that *I am not part of it*, s/he continues the reflection informing that s/he has decided to *take a walk through the forest...* while imagining to be *hearing the birds* and even feeling a glimpse of *the tangible spirit of the big green*. The spectator knows that the event is occurring in the Amazon rainforest because the oral narration and the embodied representations of participants have established it. On top of that, her/his taking a walk is also imagined; s/he may be walking through the theatre space, but her imagination leads her to describe it as walking in the rainforest.

Moreover, the reflection refers to the intercorporeality between participants, s/he writes *I see people standing, feeling into being a tree, a frog, some plant or animal... It feels to me like all people are connected... just because of shared imagination*. The embodied responses that this written reflection points to, like a person standing representing a tree, show how participants enact their imagination while making it visible through the corporeal interactions. The person representing a tree imagines with the help of his/her sensory-motor system—hearing and understanding a proposed event—and then that mental image is shared with the other participants via his/her bodily positioning. Therefore, the participant's suggestion of *feeling the tangible spirit of the big green just because of shared imagination* arises because many people are responding to the invitations by taking a position in the room, and by participating in this shared event. The acts of imagination are personal, but that does not imply that the experience cannot be shared. In this case, it becomes clear how intercorporeality functions with acts of imagination. In short, acts of imagination are recognized as shared imagination because spectators know what the instructions are while seeing other participants taking up the invitation, and then following instructions to take a position in the room. By acting out a situation, participants enact their perception and imagination.

The last quality that embodied simulation theory proposes is that of liberated embodied simulation. It is important to remember that liberated embodied simulation is presented as a means to understand how people respond to fictional scenarios as opposed to real ones. The fictional worlds are understood as the ones that artistic practices create, such as literature, cinema, or theatre. Liberated embodied simulation can be experienced when a person undergoes an aesthetic experience, e.g. contemplating a painting or reading a novel, and the “liberation” occurs because s/he temporally suspends the activity of daily occupations. Additionally, the liberation can also be a result of the immobility that some aesthetic experiences demand, enabling the emergence of new simulative energies that augment the intensity of embodied imagination. The immobility, however, does not mean that the person is a recipient of an outer world. Instead, and according to the enactive

approach to perception, the perceiver acts out his/her perception co-constituting a world. To better understand how this form of liberated embodied simulation operates in *Dying Together*, let's look at the next written reflection:



I am laying over the stone facing the ceiling. Representing a tooth. The white panels become clouds. Behind the clouds I can see the space, other planets, a lot of balls of gasses, a space, black without gravity, endless. Suddenly, I feel very grateful, I can relate to this, after being surrounded by little taste buds and fragile microscopic hairs for so long.

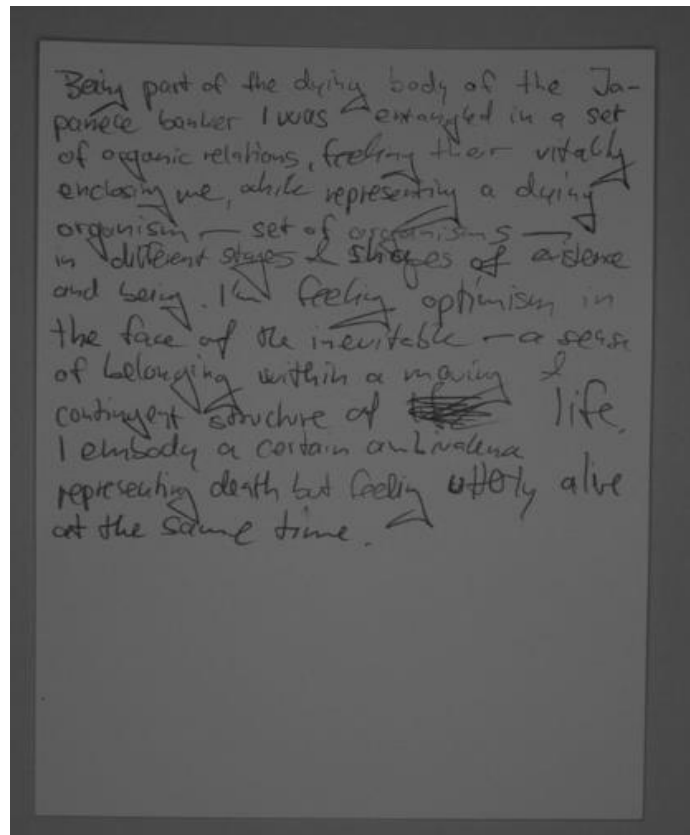
Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 3

This reflection points to the third scenario acted out in *Dying Together/ Earth*, relating to the decomposition of the Japanese dead man's body merging together with the Aokigahara forest. We can know this because the participant expresses that s/he is *representing a tooth*. The opening phrase that says *I am laying over the stone facing the ceiling* is highly significant. From this, we know that the participant is lying on the floor, meaning that s/he is in a bodily position from where actions are more limited than if s/he were in a standing position. It is noteworthy that the participant's laying position is an unusual bodily position for a spectator in the theatre, and therefore, this also points to a form of disrupting habitual forms of perception within the theatrical space. The participant is looking up to the room's ceiling, where white panels are hanging from the grid creating a kind of diffuse light, and then new simulative energies emerge, we can observe that apparently, the position and

situation for this spectator in this moment leads him/her to not only represent something, but to let the imagination flow, to see how *the panels become clouds and behind the clouds planets and an endless space*. The liberated embodied simulation occurs thanks to the uncommon position of the participant's body that allows him/her to *temporarily* release the active interaction with the other participants representing the *little taste buds and fragile microscopic hair*, for example, and concentrate in the origination of new figures in his/her embodied imagination. From this written reflection, we can see how a form of liberated embodied simulation operates in *Dying Together*, where imagination is also enacted in a liberated way.

The previous examples that I used to show how spectators are involved in embodied simulation processes in *Dying Together* are descriptions that emerged from particular positions on stage, allowing us to better understand how through incorporeality and enacting imagination audiences engage with the performance. The performance invites spectators to imagine different entities in a particular context of interaction. Moreover, this audience address fully relies on relationality because it deals with networks of interaction, rather than with static situations. This relationality can also be understood as planetary relationality, as the last example shows.

Being part of the dying body of the Japanese banker I was entangled in a set of organic relations, feeling their vitality enclosing me, while representing a dying organism -set of organisms- in different stages & shapes of existence and being. I'm feeling optimism in the face of the inevitable - a sense of belonging within a moving & contingent structure of life. I embody a certain ambivalence representing death but feeling utterly alive at the same time.



Reflection - *Dying Together/Earth 4*

Spectators represent a diversity of beings and things during the constellation of the Japanese man's dying body. Participants representing body organs, the drug that slowly moved along organs, a front tooth, bacteria, maggots, and many more, come together to physically represent the decomposition of a body and subsequent fusion with the Aokigahara forest. These mentally enacted images of the multiple parts of a human body like skin cells, microscopic hairs, stem cells, a thighbone, bacteria living in the gut of the man, gut muscle cells, adrenaline hormone, etc. and the forest entities that merge with them call to mind the principle of interbeing of planetary relationality. The event of a death is, in fact, possible by the relations that constitute that event. The spectator writes *I was entangled in a set of organic relations, feeling their vitality enclosing me while representing a dying organism—set of organisms*. This written reflection refers to the bodily sensations of proximity between participants and the set of organisms they represent, revealing that such an awareness can be understood as an embodied form of planetary relationality. The spectator continues to say that the group of dying organisms are present *in different stages and shapes of existence and being...* We can observe that the figures that the spectator imagines emerge from an embodied process that we can recognize as an embodied understanding of relationality. The spectator acknowledges the relations that constitute that event while continuing to experience his/her own particular position.

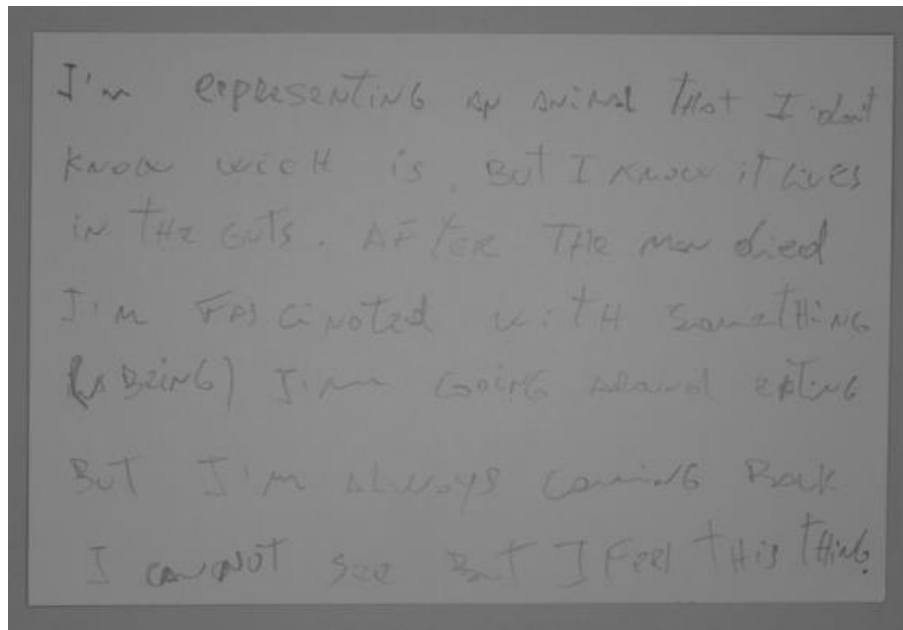
Furthermore, it is noteworthy that at the end of the performance, some participants reported that the constellation of the Japanese man's dying body was comforting because it gave them a whole new perspective of how death is also a collective act. These thoughts can be interpreted through the notion of habitability in planetary thinking, which seeks to accommodate complex and multicellular life in all its variety. The spectators represented a dying human body, and yet they also represented the dynamic loops of ending and emergence of life; that is, the end of one life is also the start of other life. We live together with some entities that we learn to recognize—other humans for instance—but we could also cease to exist with other entities that we are not always conscious of their existence—microorganisms, animals, plants, etc. In this sense, the habitability of the planetary becomes visible by the recognition of complex and multicellular life, beyond human life alone.

In this section, I have shown via the analytical concept of 'embodied simulation' how spectators enact their imagination in *Dying Together/ Earth*. The performance invites spectators to experience the theatrical stage differently; it shifts traditional arrangements by including a multiplicity of perspectives to be explored. In the next section, I continue to demonstrate this, but this time through the concept of 'embodied reflection.'

Enacting Reflection in *Dying Together/ Earth*

To begin with, let's briefly remember two pivotal points of the notion of 'embodied reflection.' First, according to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1995), embodied reflection understands *reflection as a form of experience itself* that, on the one side, body and mind are not separated but conform a unity, and on the other side, it can be performed with mindfulness/ awareness of the present moment. This takes us to the second point, that is that the understanding of 'mindfulness' is derived from techniques of contemplative traditions, such as Buddhist meditation, designed to lead the mind back from abstract and theoretical preoccupations, to the situation of one's experience itself. That means that the aim of these techniques is not to disengage us from everyday life activities, but rather to teach us how to *cultivate presence* in every situation we experience. Therefore, embodied reflection is a call to let go of habits and preconceptions that do not allow us to fully experience the present moment, which may be as simple as eating, walking, conversing, gardening, or writing. Those habits and preconceptions that disconnect us from daily activities are caused by mental occupations and ignore the somatic experience. In what follows, I show how *Dying Together* addresses spectators through embodied experience, which invites embodied reflection. Then, I point to the connections between these forms of embodied reflection and planetary relationality.

As we already saw, *Dying Together/ Earth* gradually builds different situations of collective death by addressing the embodied experience of the spectator. In this section I connect this embodied experience to *embodied reflection*. The spectator physically responds to the performers' invitation to participate by taking up a position in the room. That position, however, is not only a physical position on the stage but also corresponds to a question, namely, that of how to physically represent a being or thing. In this sense, the question of how to physically represent something becomes an experience in itself that takes shape through the positions, movements, and interactions that the spectator does in the theatre room. In the case of the Japanese man's dying body, the spectator is invited to represent, for example, a round-shaped bacterium, living in the gut of the man, that grows 30 times its size, and bursts open into hundreds of clones, or a plant eating bacterium, living in the gut of the man. The next written reflection shows us how a spectator physically represents one of these entities.



I'm representing an animal that I don't know which is, but I know it lives in the guts. After the man died I'm fascinated with something (a being) I'm going around it, but I'm always coming back. I cannot see but I feel this thing.

Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 5

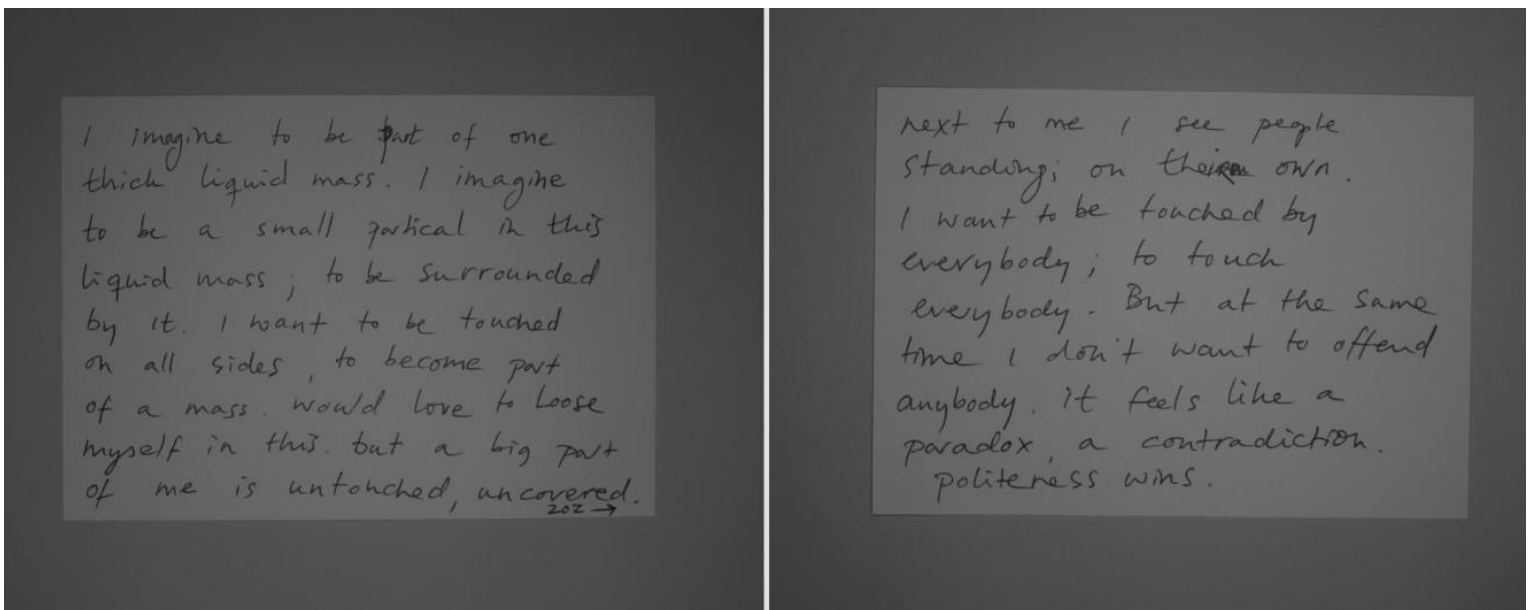
The reflection shows that the spectator is feeling something s/he does not know, and for this reason, the reflection might seem abstract. The description, however, entails some elements that can be understood as embodied reflection. First, we know that a performer read to the spectator a description of a being, then the spectator agreed to represent it. In this case, after the spectator had accepted to physically represent a being, from the written lines we can derive that s/he probably forgot the specific description, yet what stayed was the idea and feeling of movement connected to this organism that lives in the gut, and the question of how to represent that movement or organism physically. It is important to remember that Varela, Thompson, and Rosch emphasize that when scientific investigations or theoretical reflections investigate either the mind or the body, they tend to formulate questions such as “what is the body?” while disregarding “who is asking” and “how it is asked.” In this written reflection the “what is the body” is not the central aspect since this person does not (need to) know “what” kind of microscopic being that lives in the guts s/he is representing. Instead, the focus is on “how” is s/he going to behave, move, and interact with other bodies to represent what this microscopic being does. This is also the case in the next lines where the

participant writes, *I'm fascinated with something (a being) I'm going around it, but I'm always coming back...* the participant is aware of the here and now by paying attention to her/his own movements and possible interactions with other bodies. This person adds, *I cannot see but I feel this thing*, showing that this reflection is not *on* the experience, but it is a form of experience itself. The participant feels him/herself as a particular being because of the physical actions s/he is performing. S/he is present in mind and body as a unity, and not as an abstract position that tries to bring to mind what that microscopic being is.

Another instance of embodied reflection can be observable when a spectator is asked to represent, e.g. a heart muscle cell, that is part of the man's heart. Here, again, the case is that of the Japanese man's dying body, where different people represent heart muscle cells when the man is dying. A performer invites us to focus on how adrenaline rushes through the bloodstream; his heart beats fast, his breathing accelerates, the big amount of oxygen in his body makes his thoughts go fast and his legs shake. Let's remember that the spectators are representing each of these elements, therefore, when the performer invites to explore how to relate to each other in the space, people start to walk in different speeds or decide to fall onto the floor and stop moving. This brief description of the situation shows that *Dying Together* invites spectators to let go of theoretical preoccupations because the point of attention is not to decipher scientifically and describe what a heart muscle cell is, for example. Rather, the point is to focus on the experience itself by bodily representing someone or something. In this sense, the embodied practice that the performance instigates allows spectators to concentrate on their own experience and to reflect on it. We can better understand this form of embodied reflection if we keep in mind that our knowledge of heart cells is usually based on the type of descriptions and representations that we may find in medicine books in which a static, colorful, and often unrealistic representation is depicted. In the performance, by contrast, the idea of heart cells is accessible through movement, interaction, imagination, and embodied reflection. Therefore, the understanding of what is a heart cell can change from being an illustration in a medicine book to a more vivid and especially 'enacted representation,' one that entails movement and actual interaction with other cells, organs, bacteria, hormones, etc. This enaction can be regarded as an example of embodied reflection because it is not centered on preconceptions about what a heart cell is, but instead focuses on how a heart cell interacts in a larger living system.

A last aspect of embodied reflection relates to being present through mindfulness. Varela et al. argue that the point of mindfulness "is not to disengage the mind from the

phenomenal world. The goal is not to avoid the action but to be fully present in one's actions, so that one's behavior becomes progressively more responsible and aware" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1995, 122). This form of being present and aware is noticeable in many written reflections where participants share the affects that emerged during the performance and that are expressed in participants' fears, and desires. When spectators enact their perception from a particular position that emerges from representing a being or thing, they become aware of that position and reflect from it. The following reflection is an example of how this becoming aware of a position occurs.



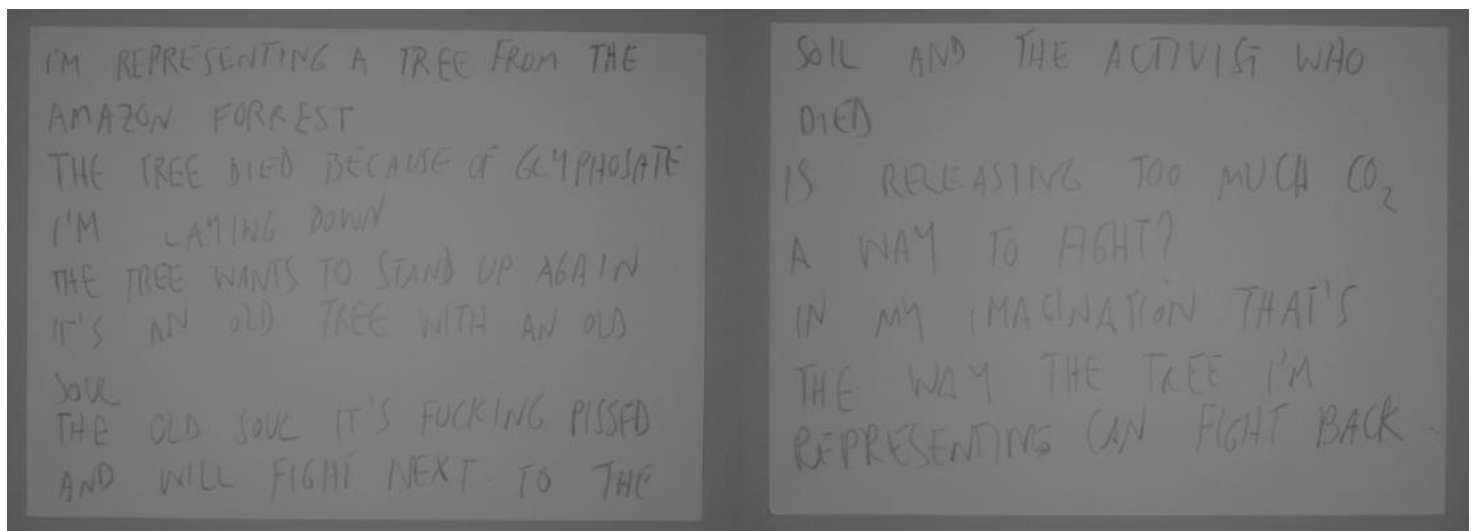
I imagine to be part of one thick liquid mass. I imagine to be a small particle in this liquid mass; to be surrounded by it. I want to be touched on all sides, to become part of a mass. Would love to loose myself in this, but a big part of me is untouched, uncovered. Next to me I see people standing; on their own. I want to be touched by everybody; to touch everybody. But at the same time I don't want to offend anybody. It feels like a paradox, a contradiction. Politeness wins.

Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 6

In this reflection, the participant starts by imagining and representing *a small particle in a liquid mass*, s/he feels the strong desire *to be touched on all sides, to become part of a mass*. Similarly to the previous reflections, this one does not focus on “what” that small particle is, but rather on “how” that particle behaves within its liquid environment. The spectator becomes aware of his/her own present position—of bodily representing a particle within a

liquid mass—seeing that s/he *would love to loose her/himself in this*, that is, s/he wants to cease the separation with others, s/he wants to physically interact with the other people representing an element within that liquid mass by touching them and being touched by them. The participant, however, also becomes aware that the desire for touch is limited by his/her fears given that s/he *doesn't want to offend anybody*. The oscillation between the desire of touch and the worry of offending somebody else leads the participant to say that *it feels like a paradox* and that *politeness wins*. This indicates that even if s/he decided not to touch other participants, s/he reflected in an embodied way—from her/his particular position—both on the desire of touching others and on the possibility of doing so. In short, this written reflection shows how the spectator was fully present in her/his own position and how that allowed her to embodied reflect from and on her/his experience.

Dying Together/ Earth allows spectators to cultivate different forms of embodied presence, and hence of embodied reflections. The performance invites spectators to imagine and reflect from and on different situations of interaction between humans and other-than-humans. Importantly, this performance accentuates the idea of *Earth* along with concerns of environmental degradation, food security, sociopolitical and economic conflicts, climate change, and so forth. Many of the written reflections manifest an emphasis on these issues of concern that can connect to planetary relationality, as the last example shows.



I'm representing a tree from the Amazon forest. The tree died because of the glyphosate. I'm laying down. The tree wants to stand up again. It's an old tree with an old soul. The old soul it's fucking pissed and will fight next to the soil and the activist who died. Is releasing too much CO₂, a way to fight? In my imagination that's the way the tree I'm representing can fight back.

Reflection - Dying Together/Earth 7

The participant's embodied reflection starts by *representing a tree from the Amazon forest*. S/he is representing an old tree with an old soul that is *fucking pissed and will fight next to the soil and the activist who died*, this reveals anger and thoughts on how to relate to its dying. The spectator is *laying down*, like a dying tree, but soon after s/he *wants to stand up again*, this tree is physically figuring out how to deal with the act of dying. The different elements of this reflection show a constant entanglement between the sensory-motor capacities and the present desires to move and stand up that the participant has. The embodied reflection is a form of experience itself that nonetheless can coexist with the participant's desires. In this case, the participant presents an embodied reflection of his/her position in relation to other bodies representing trees, the glyphosate, the soil, the activist. In this way, a sense of planetary relationality starts to emerge since there is a mutual constitution between the entities in this dying process. The reflection says that the tree is dying because of the glyphosate,⁴⁴ and that a way to fight is by *the release of too much CO₂*. Let's remember that the case of the Amazon rainforest focuses on deforestation processes, which also includes induced fires to tear down the trees and construct mega-farms for cattle and natural fires caused by global warming. In this respect, although the reflection says that the tree is dying because of the glyphosate and that the response to that is the release of CO₂, it is possible to consider that the release of CO₂ is caused by the bigger event, namely, the fires in the Amazon. Despite that the participant's reflection might be "incomplete" or with a little lack of context, s/he acknowledges the interconnection between the tree and the threats to its life like the fire and the glyphosate. This form of interpretation is reminiscent of the aims that the planetary poses in contrast to the global. The global way of thought

⁴⁴ Glyphosate is the name of a powerful herbicide developed by Monsanto in the 1970s to use on corn, soy, and cotton crops to control genetically modified fields resistant to other types of herbicides. However, the use of glyphosate has been proven to have carcinogenic effects on humans, for this reason, there have been numerous lawsuits against Monsanto. Glyphosate-based herbicides are still used in many parts of the world.

would seek to manage the tree as a resource for further human development. In comparison, the planetary would seek to safeguard habitability as the guiding principle for all forms of life. The participant's embodied reflection can be regarded as an instance of planetary thinking because it allows him/her to become aware of that specific situation of representing a dying tree, where the perspective does not focus on how to profit from the tree's raw material or the clearing of land for cattle. Instead, the focus is on representing a tree that *wants to stand up again and be next to the soil and activist*, and by doing so, the perspective shifts towards the relationship between these entities. However, the reflection also evokes the global that deals with capital and technology by referring to the glyphosate as a means to control nature. This reflection of a participant-tree allows us to see how planetary relationality is present in this embodied reflection. It is a form of bringing together in thought and body a reflection about the planetary.

The various scenes and reflections discussed demonstrate that spectators of *Dying Together/ Earth* both enact their imagination and reflection in an embodied and embedded way. Therefore, *Dying Together/ Earth* shows that planetary relationality can take shape in the performance by virtue of the embodied experiences and the different modes of participation, imagination, reflection, and awareness that emerge.

Lastly, the written reflections that I brought to this analysis are part of a bigger archive. Participants wrote down thoughts of many kinds, in different languages, drawn in concrete or abstract ways, and forms of manifesting gratitude to the performers for creating and sharing this performative practice. There is still much to be explored both in the performance and in the archive.

***Dying Together/ Earth* a Place to Think Physically**

In the previous sections, I already showed how planetary relationality manifests itself in the performance. The spectators' modes of perceiving, imagining, and reflecting allowed me to refer to the inherent relationality of the forms of operation of *Dying Together/ Earth* as well as to some of the fundamental ideas of the planetary. Now, in this section, I will connect these findings to an interview that I conducted with theatre-maker and director Lotte van den Berg.⁴⁵ In the lines that follow, I focus on the idea of collective dying on earth and its relationship with planetary relationality. Subsequently, I present what Van den Berg terms

⁴⁵ See the entire interview in appendix 2. *If you live together, you also die together: An Interview with Lotte van den Berg.*

“physical thinking,” a notion that refers to how spectators of *Dying Together* enact their perception.

To begin with, I asked Lotte van den Berg: What is *Dying Together*? She answered:

Dying together for me, as a project, is circling around the notion of connection and how we are connected or disconnected as a society, as a collective. I think there is a very vivid idea that we are not connected enough or that we are disconnected from each other socially. Somehow for me, it is always important to, again and again, remember myself that I am already connected. [...] It is important to start to realize and to remember that I am already connected to other people around me, and all the things around me, the ecology, nature, well everything actually, that I am part of that... But, [we think that we are] apart from others...[and that] happens... in the narration we have about ourselves... And that, in relationship to dying, I started to question [this Western idea] that death is something you do alone. Like this is as if a given rule. That it is a soloist act, and I started to question that, maybe also to provoke it a bit, with the title to start. But then also with the whole performance and with the exploration and the research we shared with audiences—Is it actually so that death is a soloist act, that dying is a soloist act?

From this quote, we could gather that for Lotte van den Berg, the question of connection does not depart from a sort of void where everything and everyone is disconnected and is seeking for reasons to connect. Instead, she reminds us of our inherent bond with the people and nature that surround us and shows that such a remembering may begin with paying careful attention to the narrations we have about ourselves. In *Dying Together/ Earth* the cultivation of presence through the embodied representations is already showing how the narrations we have about ourselves can be expressed in non-hierarchical and non-anthropocentric ways. Moreover, the intercorporeal events within the performance are also moments that allow spectators to feel and remember the essential interconnectedness we experience on the planet when living but also when dying. This latter point directly relates to the idea of collective death. Van den Berg says:

We very quickly aim to this vision that death disconnects us from the people around us and the living world and everything, but also there you could turn it around and say: death is actually something that connects us. We all die, and it is also something that equalizes... so I die and the cow I see also dies, so in that sense, this also connects

us, it's something we go through, all. And it also connects us to our body again, as a human animal. So it connects me to my presence, to my heart, to my blood, and my flesh. But then also, when dying, it connects me to the earth, to the sky. So I really wanted to provoke this idea that in death "we are alone," because I think—for me in a way already before this performance—looking at dying, at my own mortality, is a way to bring me back to some kind of essence of life, actually... [T]his whole thinking of death... relates to the mortality we share with animals and plants, and actually with everything that is alive. So, that also for us seemed like a beautiful entrance to provoke other thinking and feeling about our place as human beings in the world.

Van den Berg reminds us that we humans are also embodied animals, as we have seen in the analysis above, that we are not very different from the cow that also dies, or the earth and sky that are present in the moment of living and dying. Since Van den Berg actively seeks to acknowledge other forms of life beyond that of humans, these *other ways of thinking and feeling* can be understood as planetary relationality. In line with Van den Berg's remarks, the performance *Dying Together/ Earth* calls for a non-hierarchical view on our position on planet earth that recognizes multiple life-forms and possibilities of connection. Moreover, the constellation technique described above enables spectators to experience a non-hierarchical and embodied viewpoint of our place as humans on the planet. The implementation and subsequent exploration of the constellations in *Dying Together* generates what Van den Berg calls "physical thinking," and which can be understood as embodied modes of enacting perception, imagination, and reflection, as presented in the previous sections. It is worth citing Van den Berg's elucidation about "physical thinking" at length:

What you can notice in the performance, or if you join constellation work, is that there is something within you that is very able to focus on this specific role or being, or perspective, whatever you call it, I don't really mind. [Take for instance 'water'], if I am asked—do you want to represent water? And I say 'yes,' I take up the task to represent water, and what happens within me is that I focus with everything I am on water, so it's the memory, but it's also the body that has felt water in many different ways: in the rain, in the shower, when swimming, when crying... so we are able to pay attention to this, only this. When somebody asks me—do you want to represent water? What is given to me is a specific focus, and it's like a gift, I think. So, I say 'yes' and then, for a moment, I allow myself to drop all the other: connection to earth,

connection to you, connection to my mother, to myself, to my profession, all of these other connections I drop and I only pay attention to this one.

Because normally, I can read within myself many perspectives, and many roles, and many functions, and many representations. I'm representing an artist, a feminist, a mother, a white woman. So normally, I can read within myself, with my body, and in my thought, and my feeling many representations. But then when somebody comes to me and says—do you want to represent water, or the mother, or... and I say 'yes,' I allow myself to only focus on that part, which makes it a strong focus. And then, we appear to be very good at it. [...] I think that is something that can surprise ourselves, that we feel like –Wow! I can really trigger this focus. I can really pay this attention. And I can really connect to water in so many ways. To the water I felt, I experienced as a child, to the scientific information I have about what water is, to what I read in the newspapers, to the moment I experienced this, to the water that is in my body. There is so many in me that can connect to water, and it's nice to have a moment in which you allow yourself only to be busy with that. And then if you say 'yes,' you, with everything you are, connect to that. So you don't become it, you don't start future telling, you don't know actually what happened to the men, but you do know what within you connect to him, what within you connects to being a father, what within you connects to the fear of losing a child, what within you I don't know, whatever...

Van den Berg's explanation of what "physical thinking" means to her entails different layers. First of all, she says that when doing constellation work or joining a *Dying Together* performance we "drop" the connections we are used to, for instance, the connection to our mother, sister, or dog, the connection to our profession, political affiliations, or philosophical inclinations. When we join *Dying Together*, and we accept to represent someone or something, we drop those individual connections that we have with beings, things, and ideas. This first layer can be understood as a form of embodied liberation as it allows us to release the active occupations we have in everyday life and only focus on that moment of embodied representation and embodied imagination. After this liberation occurs, a second layer emerges, even though we have dropped all that, paradoxically, we can read within ourselves many perspectives, roles, functions, and representations that we are used to. All of these perspectives, roles, functions, and representations are built within our body, our feelings, and our thoughts. We then acknowledge that, whether consciously or not, and drop it, suspend it. Then, a third layer appears, a strong focus on the new thing to be

represented emerges. We are very capable of connecting differently to the being or thing we are asked to represent. We could add that to connect differently or to perform a “physical thinking” can be expressed by enacting our perception, for instance, when the spectator enacts imagination of being “water” through a mode of embodied simulation or reflection.

Furthermore, by deploying the constellation technique within the theatre, Van den Berg and the team of performers invites us to look at events of collective death from different embodied perspectives. They ask us to position and reposition our bodies on the theatre stage while thinking about the multiple standpoints of understanding, imagining, and reflecting on a situation of collective death. To create a constellation between human bodies can be thought of as a way of creating ‘ecological images’ (Lavery 2013; 2019). As discussed in the first chapter, ecological images are stage arrangements that involve corporeal presentness and construct forms of perception, affects, and thoughts that are interconnected and networked. Moreover, ecological images aim to transmit ways of thinking and which for the case of *Dying Together* is expressed in the spectators’ embodied modes of imagination and reflection on collective situations of death. This form of creating entanglements is not, however, a form of adding up entities, but instead of looking at the connections and networks that emerge. As addressed in the previous sections, the networked quality of *Dying Together* starts from the invitation of exploring the physical representations of beings and things in the shared space, from both an inside perspective—the spectator’s embodied experience—and in relation to other participants. That means that we are not going to have an account of all of the entities that are represented, we cannot have an “overview,” the theatre space is inhabited by both performers and spectators representing animals, humans, plants, insects, and bacteria. However, participants do not necessarily know who or what is other people trying to bodily represent. On top of that, the distinction between stage/auditorium is blurred when we start to change positions on the theatrical space, and when we move with our bodies, creating a particular inside perspective that allows us to look at things differently, one could say interconnected, ecological.

Importantly, as discussed with Lavery, the ecological doing of theatre is to provide a space for the imagination to make associations between materials and heterogeneous formations. In this sense, it can be argued that we experience *Dying Together* when our bodies are positioned on stage and are given the time to inhabit the space in relationship with other bodies. Hence, we can assert that this form of positioning and repositioning can be considered as a form of relationality since spectators’ can explore the theatre room with other bodies, and by doing so, finding *more than one* interpretation because of the multiple possibilities or participants standpoints and experiences that emerge. But *less than many*

because the performance operations do not seek to add infinite entities and explanations, but rather to show the relations and associations that it can create, and ideas and sensations it can transmit. *Dying Together/Earth* is not teaching us scientific information about organisms, plants, or insects. Neither is it telling us how to name and understand a particular situation of collective death. Instead, *Dying Together* invites us to engage with genuine thought, to sustain judgments, to bear in the question, and to look, feel, imagine, and reflect from and on different embodied perspectives a phenomenon to discover what it can tell us about itself. But perhaps more importantly, about ourselves and our place on planet earth, that is, of planetary relationality.

CONCLUSIONS

From Insights of *Dying Together/ Earth* Towards Openings of Planetary Relationality

In this thesis, I proposed the term planetary relationality to describe a form of thinking that calls for a habitable planet for all life-forms on Earth. My aim, moreover, was to show how this form of thinking can materialize in theatre and performance practices. In this spirit, I analyzed the theatre performance *Dying Together/ Earth* (2019) by Dutch director Lotte van den Berg to show how spectators can engage with planetary relationality through embodied modes of perception, imagination, and reflection. The question that guided my research was: how does planetary relationality manifest itself in *Dying Together/ Earth*?

As address in chapter 1, I derive my understanding of the planetary from ideas of historian and postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty invites us to move beyond the assumption of a world that supports and endures human needs and aspirations, to a non-anthropocentric understanding of a habitable *planet* that embraces all expressions of life. Since Chakrabarty's notion of the planetary draws its insights from interdisciplinary sciences that understand the planet Earth as a complex and interconnected system, one can point at the inherent relationality of this term. To further accentuate this relationality, I drew on the work of anthropologists Arturo Escobar and Marisol de la Cadena. Establishing this dialogue was important, for it allowed me to present the onto-political understanding of relationality that shows the primacy of relations over entities and acknowledges that multiple worldviews can connect while remaining specific.

Planetary relationality is not only a mode of thought but can also manifest itself in practice. Subsequently, it can take shape in theatre and performance practices. Drawing on Carl Lavery's performance ecology, I showed that theatre can be understood as an eco-practice in and by itself, one that moves beyond a human-centered perspective and instead highlights the networked quality of the stage in which the human being is always part of a larger assemblage of objects, technologies, and processes. This, in turn, may invite the audience to become (somatically) aware of the close relationship with our surrounding environments, an awareness that aligns with planetary relationality.

Dying Together/ Earth invites spectators to embody, in an imaginative way, other forms of being-in-the-world, for instance, being a cow, a tree, a bacterium, or a spider in events of collective death on Earth. These forms of physical representation allow spectators to have an embodied experience of “stepping into the shoes” of other humans and non-human organisms, enabling the audience to take up and experience multiple perspectives. To show how *Dying Together* addresses audiences and emphasizes embodied engagement, I utilized two analytical concepts, derived from theories of enactive perception, namely, ‘embodied simulation’ and ‘embodied reflection.’

Embodied simulation, first, allowed me to propose that spectators can enact their imagination. First, by experiencing processes of intercorporeality among participants, for instance, when acting out a particular situation of collective death the spectator became aware of his/her own bodily representations through acts of positioning and repositioning and this awareness, in turn, influenced how s/he perceived the physical representations of other participants. Besides intercorporeality, I also indicated that spectators mentally enacted fictional worlds when hearing the narrations that performers of *Dying Together* read during the performance. The acts of imagination were singular to each participant, but they were shared with the others by taking a position in the theatrical space, and by participating in the shared events. This dynamic showed how hearing and acting out a narration collectively opens up a shared space to imagine together. Lastly, embodied simulation allowed me to show how spectators of *Dying Together* can also experience liberated embodied simulation, meaning that they could temporally suspend the active occupations of everyday life, thus liberating new simulative energies that gave way to imagination.

Secondly, through the concept of embodied reflection I proposed that participants of *Dying Together/ Earth* experienced reflection not as a vehicle to describe an experience, but rather as a form of experience itself. *Dying Together* invites spectators to cultivate presence in the here and now during the unfolding of the performance, resulting in experiences of embodied and mindful reflections. For instance, the physical representation of heart cells or microbes that live in the human guts allowed spectators to write down reflections, not about the thing or being itself, but rather about their embodied and situated positions where body, mind, and environment meet, in these cases, to make sense of the theatrical event.

Moreover, embodied reflection and embodied simulation allowed me to demonstrate how planetary relationality can be experienced through embodied engagement, that is, by perceiving, imagining, and reflecting on the diversity of life. *Dying Together* invites spectators to experience that diversity. However, one could point at a paradox: thinking and

imagining being another human or other-than-human, and yet from the own human body. The performance, in this sense, would seem to constitute an impossibility or a contradiction. Some of the spectators' written reflections, however, showed that that is not the case. In *Dying Together*, spectators experience various viewpoints of humans and non-humans, showing that planetary relationality takes shape through a "multispecies perspective," which one can certainly regard as an ecological perspective. The performance enables audiences to experience and practice with that perspective. Thinking and experiencing planetary relationality means that the protagonists of planet Earth are no longer "humans" or human life but complex, multicellular life. In *Dying Together*, then, multiple beings and things enter the stage. Multiple temporalities. Multiple rationalities. And multiple embodied experiences of imagination and reflection.

Contributions and Limitations: An Invitation for Further Research

Planetary relationality is a concept that offers a way of responding to the current age of climate change, usually referred as the 'Anthropocene,'⁴⁶ in the sense that it allows us to question our human positionality on the planet Earth. It is worth mentioning that in the special issue "Climate Change and the Production of Knowledge" (2017) of *The South Atlantic Quarterly (SAQ)* the scholars and editors Ian Baucom and Matthew Omelsky assert that the epochal naming of the 'Anthropocene,' "did not suddenly change the material conditions of everyday life. What it changed, or has sought to change, is our cosmology, the way we conceive of ourselves as being-in-the-world" (Baucom and Omelsky 2017, 11). This new cosmology, Baucom and Omelsky point out, has a double effect. First, it allows us to think about our human place in geological deep history, which is the history that goes over hundreds of thousands of years ago before written evidence of human life. Subsequently, this enables to recode humanity's role on earth, creating a "new order of time consciousness" (Baucom and Omelsky 2017, 12), that manifests itself through new modes of living and

⁴⁶ In 2000, in the "Global Change Newsletter" of The International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), chemist Paul J. Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer coined the term 'Anthropocene.' Ever since, ecological discourses have proliferated around this term. The 'Anthropocene' designates a new geological epoch that temporally follows the Holocene, one in which different processes on Earth are profoundly altered by human action, thus affecting life support systems. Crutzen and Stoermer point out that these transformations started in the 18th century with the Industrial Revolution and the invention of the steam machine and became intensified in the postwar period (1950) with the use of fossil deposits of coal and oil as fuels. The period ranging from 1950 to these days has been named as the "Great Acceleration," as an evocation of the well-known analysis by Karl Polanyi about the "great transformation" (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Espinosa 2017).

thinking in the world. In that regard, *Dying Together/ Earth* offers a (material) repositioning of humanity's role on earth, one that also invites us to think and experience other temporalities of multiple beings and things. This aspect of time consciousness may be reinforced in future investigations where more emphasis could be added to experiencing time within planetary relationality in theatre and performance practices and how that could result in a new embodied experience of time consciousness.

Additionally, Baucom and Omelsky argue that discourses around climate change—whether in terms of ‘Anthropocene’ or not—affects both how we think and how we organize that thinking. Climate change, to put it differently, has created a new epistemological landscape, one that reframes how knowledge is represented and disseminated. The concept of planetary relationality is part of this new epistemological landscape. Planetary relationality prompts us to think differently about our human place on the Earth, it questions the modern notions of ‘world’ or ‘globe,’ and it calls for a strong onto-political sense of relationality between all forms of life. Furthermore, planetary relationality does not only express itself as a form of thinking but also as a form of practice that can be experienced, for instance, in theatre and performance. Indeed theatre and performance constitute privileged practices where people can engage with planetary relationality, in a materially, corporeally, and affect-oriented way, which enables fruitful understandings and reflections on the current age of climate change.

In the specific case of this thesis, I showed how embodied modes of perception, imagination, and reflection allowed spectators to engage with planetary relationality. *Dying Together/ Earth* is a participatory work that engages with debates around ecological issues in combination with innovative forms of audience address. This performance, therefore, is a particularly clear example of taking up positions and multiple embodied perspectives facing the diversity of life in a non-hierarchical way. However, in order to expand the understanding of how planetary relationality takes shape in theatre and performance, it would be interesting to explore and analyze other participatory works with a similar agenda of planetary relationality but perhaps operating with different techniques and forms of audience address.

The second observation derived from this research concerns the emergent enactive approach to spectatorship. This analytical approach allowed me to focus on the audience address that *Dying Together* deploys and its connection with the modes of perceiving of the spectators. The advantage of following this approach is that it allowed me to combine both an ecological approach to theatre that highlights the role of somatic experiences and the spectators' reflections. It is clear that the access to the spectators' written reflections was a

possibility that the performance itself provided me with, and that is noteworthy because it allowed me to understand, to a certain extent, how spectators interpreted their own embodied experience within the performance. In this sense, having other voices reflecting from and on the performance gave me multiple perspectives to think-with, not as the representations on stage but instead, as the meeting between the forms of staging and the spectators' modes of imagining and reflecting.

Additionally, some of this research findings could be taken as points of departure to inform current investigations of theories of enactive cognition; for instance, Vittorio Gallese is researching the neurobiological and bodily roots of intersubjectivity, empathy, aesthetic experience, and different kinds of psychopathological conditions.⁴⁷ In this respect, theatre and performance practices and studies could shed light on research in the field of cognitive neurosciences, creating cooperative contributions that aim to better understand processes of cognition and perception in close engagement with artistic practices. For instance, in *Dying Together/ Earth* the processes of intercorporeality could offer some insights to the study of bodily roots of empathy involving embodied forms of imagination and reflection on planetary relationality, mainly, by “stepping into the shoes” of both other humans and non-human organisms as described above.

The third and last aspect takes us back to present meditations about the ecological crisis. In this thesis, I did not elaborate on the prolific, creative, and pertinent work of scholars within the humanities and social sciences that attend to the current Anthropocene, and the hunting menace of the sixth extinction.⁴⁸ However, I bring up this topic because *Dying Together/ Earth* conjures up associations and thoughts regarding togetherness and death. It invites one to wonder whether death is the separation from other humans and other-than humans and the end of everything, or is it rather another form of togetherness and a continuation of some sort of co-existence? These questions belong to philosophical queries that exceed the framework of this thesis. However, as closing reflection, I would like

⁴⁷ See, for instance, the article: “Brain, Body, Habit and the Performative Quality of Aesthetics.” To be published in: I. Testa & F. Caurana (editors), *Habits: Pragmatist Approaches from Cognitive Neuroscience to Social Science*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

⁴⁸ See, for example: *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (2015) by Isabelle Stengers; *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Neoliberalism* (2016) by Elizabeth A. Povinelli; *The Ends of the World* (2017) by Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro; *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2017) by Bruno Latour.

to suggest a couple of associations between the thoughts about togetherness and death that *Dying Together/ Earth* evokes and some reflections by feminist thinker Donna Haraway.

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) Haraway asserts that we are living in disturbing times, troubling and turbid times, on a damaged earth that is calling for a response. Haraway says that “[t]he task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places” and further she adds, “staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (Haraway 2016, 1). Haraway’s call to be in the present moment while acknowledging the intertwined quality of life and death is strongly experienced in *Dying Together/ Earth*. The practice that this performance introduces allows spectators to cultivate presence in their mortal places, to be aware of the unfinished configurations of matters and meanings, and to imagine and reflect on other ways of being-in-the-world.

Haraway invites us to learn how to “stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (Haraway 2016, 1). To stay with the trouble, according to Haraway, we need to learn how to make oddkin, collaborations and combinations, she claims “[w]e become-with each other or not at all” (Haraway 2016, 4). She points out the need for developing reflexive, critical, imaginative, and collective ecologies of practices that aim at the cultivation of response-ability. The current Anthropocene is for Haraway a time of multispecies–human and other-than-human–, where issues like mass death and extinction, onrushing disasters, and unprecedented times of looking away are urgently asking for answers (Haraway 2016, 34–35). Collective knowing is the necessary condition to develop a sensible attitude for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on planet Earth, and by doing so, creating forms of response-ability. For Haraway, such a sensible attitude emerges from being mindful to our senses, to matter, to material semiotics, and to the mortal and thick copresence of beings–human and other-than-human. This is precisely the case in *Dying Together/ Earth*, where our senses become mindful and particular attention towards material and bodily copresence emerges, and this happens since the beginning of the performance, wherein the welcoming leaflet a question stands out: can looking at the way we die together give us new perspectives on the way we live together? After experiencing the performance, and reading and

analyzing the spectators' written reflections, I can affirm that *Dying Together/ Earth* teach us a practice of being genuinely present, cultivating awareness of not only our positions in the theatrical space but also in relation to a damaged planet that calls for collaborative thinking and feeling practices capable of showing us how to stay with the trouble.

On a final note, I would like to go back to Lotte van den Berg's "physical thinking," which invites us to drop the habitual connections we have with our daily life in order to focus on the here and now of the performance, thinking, imagining, and reflecting physically on concerns of environmental emergencies and on beings and things that are often disregarded in the haste of everyday life. This relates to Haraway's notion and practice of *tentacular thinking*, which is a collective mode of thinking, a way of connecting thoughts and issues that, at first glance, seem disconnected and unrelated. Drawing on ideas of ethnographer Marilyn Strathern, Haraway stresses that "[i]t matters what ideas we use to think other ideas" (Strathern in Haraway 2016, 34). And further, she adds, "[i]t matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories" (Haraway 2016, 35). Haraway repeats: Think we must; we must think, as a mantra that is calling attention to the thinking practices we have engaged with and we should engage with now and in the future. In this spirit, it can be argued that *Dying Together/ Earth* and this thesis are interconnected forms of tentacular thinking. In the performance, various embodied modes of perception, imagination, and reflection meet while giving way to the emergence of collective and collaborative practice. Moreover, this thesis allows us to understand that *Dying Together/Earth* is a practice where planetary relationality can manifest itself. The contributions that I present in this thesis constitute a basis for building future investigations concerning planetary relationality and its modes of manifestation in artistic practices.

Appendix 1

Leaflet Dying Together/ Earth

Find a place in space, alone, to read this text

A group of people run from wildfires near the Greek coast. They find themselves trapped near a steep cliff and hold each other knowing that the fire will come rapidly. They are found, burned alive, embracing each other.

This is called togetherness.

At a cattle farm in the UK a few animals become sick. The sickness spreads to people. A young man dies. It is decided that thousands of cows need to be killed. Their bodies are burned to make sure the sickness doesn't spread further.

This too is a form of togetherness.

If all life on earth dies out. Wild animals, birds, insects, human beings, trees, worms, coral, bacterias. All bodies, small and big lay spread over earth's surface, some buried, most not, some warned, most unaware, but all decomposing. Remaining visible in the earth layers for millions of years to come.

This too would be a form of togetherness.

Togetherness is first of all a realization:

We are in this together.

Whether we like it or not.

Whether we have chosen for it or not.

Whether it kills us or not.

If a wildfire moves with the speed of 100 km/h without differentiating between it's victims, burning alive both trees, animals and people;

What kind of togetherness is that?

If a rainforest with all the animal and plant life in it, is cut down and destroyed as a side effect of global food production;

What kind of togetherness is that?

If a mite living on the left eye-lash of a man dies a day after him, because she can no longer feed itself with his skin cells;

What kind of togetherness is that?

You could say we all die together;
it's only time separating the moment in which it happens.

You could say death is equalising;

The fact that we all die makes us even.

But what if it's not only about the fact that we die, but also about the way we die and the awareness there is given to our deaths.

Can looking at the way we die together give us new perspectives on the way we live together?

Tonight we will pay attention to three different situations of collective death.

- The meat-industry in the UK and the break-out of the Mad Cow Disease
- The deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, and its transformation into an ecosystem for business
- The decomposition of a mans body, merging together with the Aokigahara forest in Japan

If you live together, you also die together: An Interview with Lotte van den Berg

What is 'Dying Together'?

If you live together, you also die together. In the performance, we zoom-in to this act or moment of dying together to learn something or to get new insights into how we live together, so for me, they are constantly connected. From this idea that in a moment of crisis you learn the most about how you function as an individual, or as a group, or as an organism. Dying, of course, doesn't always need to be referred as a crisis, but it can be that in the moments of collective death, that we look at and explore, are very often moments of crisis, on many different planes.

Dying together for me, as a project, is circling around the notion of connection and how we are connected or disconnected as a society, as a collective, and I think there is a very vivid idea that we are not connected enough or that we are disconnected from each other socially, and somehow for me, it is always important to, again and again, remember myself that I am already connected. So that it is not a question of how could I or how should I connect myself to others, but that it is important to start to realize and to remember that I am already connected to other people around me, and all the things around me, the ecology, the nature, well everything actually, that I am part of that.

But, something in our thinking started to think us apart from others, or started to some kind of segregation that is not maybe really happening, but it happens in our thinking, in the narration we have about ourselves... And that, in relationship to dying, I started to question this idea, which I think is a very Western idea, is that death is something you do alone, dot. Like this is as if a given rule. That it is a soloist act, and I started to question that, maybe also to provoke it a bit, with the title to start with, but then also with the whole performance and with the exploration and the research we shared with audiences – Is it actually so that death is a soloist act, that dying is a soloist act?

We very quickly aim to this vision that death disconnect us from the people around us and from the living world and everything, but also there you could turn it around and you could say: death is actually something that connects us. We all die and it is also something that equalizes... so I die and the cow I see also dies, so in that sense, it's also that connect us, it's something we go through, all. And it also connects us to our body again, as being an animal too, no? A human animal. So it connects us, it connects me to my presence, to my heart, to my blood, and to my flesh. But then also, when dying it connects me to the earth, to the sky... so I really wanted to provoke this idea that in death "we are alone," because I think -for me in a way already before this performance- looking at dying, at my own mortality, also for me is a way to bring me back to some kind of essence of life, actually.

And then, when I started to explore the first case [in Dying Together/ Humans] this whole idea came as an intuitive insight and that connected to the copilot that committed suicide by flying this plane towards a mountain top, that is the first case in the first part of Dying Together/ Humans. It was a lot in the media and people were somehow trying to understand why did he do this, why he didn't committed suicide alone? Why he chose to die with others or to murder others? And somehow, the quick answer was: he wanted to die famous. And I thought, that's too easy.

I started to wonder, and probably that tells more about myself and not about him, but I was starting to wonder like it could also be a desperate act for connection? A desperate longing, not to die alone but at least to die with others. So to feel disconnected in life to decide to commit suicide and then to do this with others. And it's not to say that is good but at least to try to look at in a different way, and then when we start to exploring it and also using this constellation technique, and first asking the performers for a moment to represent with their own body these other perspectives, I had the feeling that I could share these different perspectives on what happened, so no the mainstream media perspective seen as the murdered but to somehow focus on the connection that also happened between this people, both in the seconds before, the minutes before the crash, but also after the crash. I noticed that it worked, I noticed that I could invite others in this maybe different way of looking at it.

When we started exploring further, we also found that the crash forced bodies together. So at the moment of the crash, there was, on a molecular level, there was a change of the DNA. And so what happened is that people got the same DNA, the crash in a way created a group DNA, a new DNA, which made it impossible to – and this is rather miraculous – identify the remains on a personal level. So these remains were so small, and they did not carry any more the individual DNA. So the crash forced bodies together, literally. And that is why in the end they decided to make a communal grave – which is a beautiful word for it – on the spot where it happened or close to the place where it happened, and most of the remains are buried there. The rest of the remains that were bigger or that did not have this DNA changed, so they could be identified, they were sent to the 17 countries where the people were from, so that the families could bury them. That also for me, this image of the remains of bodies, and a few sent, and other together in this communal grave, there is so much on the level of imagination, there are so many images about who we are together, what we are together, this aim to bring people back to their individuality, to bring people back to their families, back to the cities they lived in, but at the same time in a way the communal grave in which also this moment in which they actually die together, became something new together, well becomes tangible. And then, again, were people who refused to come to the burial, to the service. There was a big service for all the people who were family of the people that were buried in the communal grave. And then there were family members who refused to go there because they said – “there will most likely also be remains of the pilot, and we don’t want our family member to be buried together with the murdered.” All these levels of questions circling around how individually are we, how on ourselves are we, how contained are we, or how connected are we, how collective beings we are... yeah, how do we relate, actually. That’s where it started. It started in me when, somehow, intuitively, and I don’t want to claim any truth in that, but this is what I did, I somehow tried to connect to this copilot.

In the beginning, somehow I felt guilty for thinking all these provocative thoughts, it was like if I wasn’t allowed to think it, also in relation to collective dying. And I also started to see these examples of collective dying everywhere! I thought, there is so much collective dying happening, in wars, there was a lot of suicide bombing by then, so it was around 2016 or 2017 that I started to wonder about it... and suddenly I thought there’s a lot of moments in history when collective dying happens. Of groups in the same moment, or in groups by the same

cause... and then I started also to somehow use this slightly different view on what actually happens there, when looking at suicide bombing, and then I thought there are strangers, people living in the city, walking through the streets, sitting in a bus, they don't know each other, and suddenly this moment of explosion, this moment of dying connects them.

How did you pass from humans to animals, microbes, things, and this kind of interconnections?

How did you pass from Dying Together/ Humans to Dying Together/ Earth?

That happened later. I first stick to humans, and then later on, through this suicide bombing, I realized that we learn somehow to immediately disconnect the victims from the victimizer, so somehow they died through the same cause, which is happening in this suicide bombing, but we disconnect them immediately. So there's like an attempt to do as if they are not connected in this moment of dying, as if they were not connected. But I think this is something that you try to disengage it from each other, but there will always be a force that somehow puts them back to the same moment, in which they actually were clothe in that same act. And then, I also started to think about this different way that there is dealt with the body afterwards, so the one gets this beautiful state burial, and the other one is forgotten, or sent away... so these different ways of dealing with bodies, with people after they die, and also with totally different values we give to the death of somebody and not to the death of another. The social inequality that also becomes visible when looking at moments of collective death, and the way we respond to it, and of course the tragedies [are] still happening with people dying in the Mediterranean sea, and we know it, but we don't want to look at it. We see it, but we do as if we don't see it. That also makes us connected. It is not only that people that die together actually are connected to each other, but is also everybody around it... in a way George Floyd who died and we all saw it, we are all connected to that one moment, it is also a moment of dying together.

So, at first, it was totally entangled and busy with the human perspective and the differences within the human family. And then, at first, we weren't thinking of doing a second version, it was actually after performing Dying Together/ Humans that we started to think that one, we would like to really look at this as a practice, we want to do this more often, we can also look at other cases, so we very strongly felt this is just the beginning. And that was also when there was more

attention to the ecological challenges and problems, of ecosystems dying, so then we thought we can actually also use this practice to look at these cases, and then we decided to make a second version of Dying Together, Dying Together/ Earth in which we wanted to focus also on other entities than the human entity.

I was already busy doing that, with Building Conversation we did Parliament of Things in which we challenged people to speak and to think and feel from non-human perspectives. We started doing that already in 2015, 2016 so I was already way longer somehow connected to the discourse of Latour for example, where the agency also of the thing, the animal, the plant, plays an important role. So we also already in Humans had a few things, for example, the door that locked the cockpit from the rest of the plane so people couldn't come to the copilot who was about to crash the plane, so there was already parts of it. So it felt that the natural step to diving deeper and not to only look at the inter-human connections, but also [that] we are already connected to everything, actually, that is not only human beings that die, and it's also this whole thinking of death connects us, yeah, of course, immediately also relates to the mortality we share with animals and plants, and actually with everything that is alive. So, that also for us seemed like a beautiful entrance to provoke other thinking and feeling about our place as human beings in the world.

How did you choose the geographical places of the events of collective death for Dying Together/ Earth? Is there a reason for choosing the UK, South America, and Japan?

It was part of our collective research. When starting Dying Together/ Earth I already knew a bit more about how we wanted to work, so there were two researchers that were already connected in Dying Together/ Humans but now started from the begging, so I looked with them possible cases, there were a lot, we didn't immediately aim for these three. For example, we already looked at pandemics but we decided not to do it because there was not a big one. We looked at many in different ways. Actually, Amazon came late, because first, we thought we need to look at Argentina and the soy agriculture connected to pesticides, and we looked at many documentaries about the solar villages in the middle of these soy plantations, where a lot of people had cancer because of the pesticides. So we made a whole case around a specific case in Argentina, where there is a village surrounded by soy plantations... and then, in summer

there was a big burning of the Amazon, and that's when I thought – we have to relocate the soy plantations and to also add the layer of wood cutting. So we re-wrote it to another place, and it was only two weeks before the premiere that we added the UK case with the meat industry... so a lot of different cases passed by.

For me, it was very important to really do the research also with the performers, that they not only come in the end and then do the script, but they were also all connected to certain parts, or perspectives... it was also in *Dying Together/ Humans* that we all read all these articles, and we saw these films, or we really did an extensive research with each other, also to become aware of the difficulties around certain perspectives, or how to deal with them, so to go through that process.

It was the idea of one of the researchers, Julien McHardy, super nice and funny guy, who said maybe we should also look at the human body as an ecosystem in itself, and then I came up with the Aokigahara forest in Japan, where people commit suicide... That is the case where we used most imagination, because the other cases we really wanted it to be true, with the research, we didn't want to make it up. But to stick with the human body, we had to make up things.

In a conversation we had before this interview, you used the metaphor of the camera diaphragm to point at the different focusses that happen during the moments of representation or of 'physical thinking', could you tell me more about this?

What you can notice in the performance, or if you join constellation work, is that there is something within you that is very able to focus on this specific role, or being, or perspective, whatever you call it, I don't really mind... but if we stick to the water, if I am asked – do you want to represent water? And I say 'yes', I take up the task to represent water, and what happens within me is that I focus with everything I am on water, so it's the memory, but it's also the body that has felt water in many different ways: in the rain, in the shower, when swimming, when crying... so we are able to pay attention to this, only this, it's in a way of what's given to me. When somebody asks me – do you want to represent water? What is given to me is a specific focus, and it's like a gift, I think. So, I say 'yes' and then, for a moment, I allow myself to drop all

the other: connection to Earth, connection to you, connection to my mother, to myself, to my profession, all of these other connections I drop and I only pay attention to this one. Because normally, I can read within myself many perspectives, and many roles, and many functions, and many representations actually... I'm representing an artist, a feminist, a mother, a white woman, so normally I can read within myself, with my body, and in my thought, and in my feeling many representations, but then when somebody comes to me and says – do you want to represent water, or the mother, or... and I say 'yes,' I allow myself to only focus on that part, which makes it a strong focus. And then, we appear to be very good at it. So if we give our attention to it and we take it seriously, we appear to be very good at it, and I think that's also something that we have forgotten in the Western world. Which is already a very problematic term... but I think that is something that can surprise ourselves, that we feel like – Wow! I can really trigger this focus. I can really pay this attention. And I can really connect to water in so many ways. To the water I felt, I experienced as a child, to the scientific information I have about what water is, to what I read in the newspapers, to the moment I experienced this, to the water that is in my body... there is so many in me that can connect to water, and it's nice to have a moment in which you allow yourself to only be busy with that, and that's I think what it does... And that also counts for – do you want to represent the father of the copilot that killed himself and 144 other people? And then if you say 'yes,' you, with everything you are, connect to that. So you don't become it, you don't start future telling, you don't know actually what happened to the men, but you do know what within you connect to him... what within you connects to being your father, what within you connects to the fear of losing a child, what within you I don't know, whatever...

If you do that, in Dutch we say *Ik verplaats*, so I replace myself. Which sounds a bit like I step out of my own place, there is something that you can fear or you can think I shouldn't, I shouldn't step out of myself and into another, it's maybe also not fair to the trauma of this other, but I think you never step out of yourself but you step deeper into yourself. And in the end, you don't learn anything about this other, but you learn other places within you that normally are covered with all these other roles and representations, and functions, and forms... because you allow yourself to drop all and to only focus on one. So, I don't think it is about re-placing yourself... this also connects to this question of empathy – do you really go into the other, or are you really with the other, or are you more with yourself? There are many problematics also around this...

But I think or perceive it, and this is also what I mean with this 'diaphragm,' I think you focus on specific parts of yourself.

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