

Jeffrey R. DI LEO, Christian MORARU (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, ISBN 978-1-5013-6194-4, 510 p.

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The “worlding” lens in theory can help us understand the intricate networks created by flows of capital and ideology between countries, regions and larger geographical units as binding the local and the global together in world-systems. It has also proven to be intensely productive in understanding and further theorizing the realities which the human and the non-human must navigate. Although this theory is not exactly new, recent contexts, such as the one generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, have contributed to accelerating the process of “reading” the globe as one multilayered system, or as multiple systems colliding. The effort of understanding miscellaneous glocal contexts – or worlds, for that matter –, along with the historical legacy they derive from, has generated the necessity of operating with a shifting scale that could easily zoom in and out, and be applied to diverse, quite contrasting fields of knowledge.

Such a methodological pursuit represents the starting point of a larger process of “worlding” theory that is undertaken in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory*, the volume edited by Jeffrey R. Di Leo and Christian Moraru. In the introductory chapter, titled *World Theory in the New Millennium*, the aforementioned authors encapsulate the various realignments of theory areas to a world-scale of their focus in a “*paradigm shift*” (1) of the strategies of viewing and correlating various dimensions of planetary existence, from all aspects of human sociocultural and political structures to those of non-human life. Central to the transformation of this framework is a dual procedure of reshaping discourse(s) of and about the world, which involves, on the one hand, a more accurate characterization and apprehension of the world and its ongoing crises, and, on the other hand, forwarding this analytical apparatus for the reframing the mechanisms of knowledge production. Thus, an awareness of the transnational structures of the ever-

consolidating world-system is both formed and laid at the heart of the ensemble of World Theory that is taking shape.

One of the key questions that guide the chapters of this volume regards the definitions and interpretations of the “world” presumed in the processes of worlding. While each contributor gives their own input on the matter, it is worth noting the perspective the editors outline in the introductory part, as a broader understanding that plays the role of a mediator between the diverse vantages the book comprises. Covering multiple implications, “world” spells both the notion of a shared spatiality, a “geographical totality” and a “non-spatial, ontological dimension of world” (3). This second gist of the concept of “world” fathoms the material existence not just as passive materiality to be wielded by humans, but as a realm of inherent potentialities. Along these lines, «This possibility is revealed as transformative relationality – not a calculable presence that is already, but a co-presence that remains “incalculable” and virtual.» (3)

The volume is structured in four main parts that work together to cover as much as possible of the knowledge areas: Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, The Professions, and Natural and Formal Sciences. Each part further elaborates on specific research fields, thus providing for considerable spectra of facets of the world. Such a broad coverage succeeds in bringing together plentiful types and areas of knowledge, with each of them contributing through a different standpoint to the creation of a fluid body of theory. Hence, from a meta-methodological perspective, the book aims at worlding theory both by encompassing multiple subject matters, and by including numerous authors with varied conceptualization of what “worlding” involves for their specific research line. In the chapter titled *Worlding Comparative Literature*, Christian Moraru points to the fact that one cannot simply evade the partial character of their own insight and, as a matter of fact, one should not necessarily do that. What is imperative, on the other hand, (in reference to World Literature, but the point can be extended), is to merge the “variety of entry points, directions, coverages, and foci” (103) into the construction of a world-scale network of conceptualizations. A multiplicity of partialities manages to balance the latter in generating a panorama of simultaneous fragments complementing each other. That is also the case for the volume in itself.

A cluster of cognate terms such as “planet”, “globe”, or “earth” can be correlated with “world” when trying to analyse the distinctive processes of worlding

that take place concurrently. The nuances of meaning, however, become far-reaching and configure a web of concepts that render these terms as hard to use interchangeably. In other words, each of them denominates a particular type of worlding, with a specific set of trademarks. In this respect, the volume does not impose a consensus on the usage of the terms, but rather allows each contributor to add their own interpretation to the map of meanings.

In the already mentioned chapter, Christian Moraru traces a firm paradigmatic distinction between the theoretical semantic dimensions of “globe” and “planet”. The world viewed as “globe”, and, consequently, worlding as globalization, convey an image of a “closed system” (111) in which the potentialities of the world as immeasurable existence are reduced and channeled into one single, politically defined and definitive structure, sprawled over the spatiality of the globe with the naturalized effect of boundlessly replicating itself. Moraru continues: «Redolent of the “centering” and “smoothing” technology of control, command, and monitoring that went into its making, the globe is a controlled system and a containment fantasy, a disciplined panopticon and a limit.» (112) To such a universalizing and reductive worlding, the author opposes the “planet” paradigm, for «“planet” is not an accomplished oneness, a structured, coherently administered, and quantifiable geopolitical expanse» (112). Finite in only one of its semantic components, namely that of „Earth”, a space with limited resources, the concept of “planet” reveals a system with an unrestricted shifting architecture of interrelations that cannot be bordered by strategies of exploitation and control. Moraru pleads for understanding the world as a planetary open construction:

The planetary system is, then, partially systemic in its extensity and loosely systematic in its intensity or functioning. Because it is not a totalist whole, the planet geomodel can be, geographically, culturally, and philosophically, many worlds or parts of worlds, “nested” inside each other rather than hierarchically (“vertically”) organized, and it can be so in one place no matter how small. (113)

In the chapter titled *Worlding Theater*, Gina Masucci MacKenzie operates with a slightly different terminological apparatus. While defining globalization similarly to Moraru, MacKenzie proceeds to use the “global” determinant as a rather positive term, intended to mark the productive aspect of worldly influences in theatre. On the one hand, globalization is depicted as a process of erasure or dilution even when it

strives to bring forward voices of the marginalized and peripheral, as it shifts away from the aim of enlarging the audience to converting itself into a commercial advertisement. Such a practice of worlding through globalization “is done at the risk of the elimination of the authentic voice of those in the culture being marketed as global” (152). On the other hand, the global character of a theatrical work can be understood, according to MacKenzie, as a means to create a “new world stage” (157) where multiple voices can be articulated in a conglomerate of influences. In an effort to make theater move beyond various binaries of race, ethnicity, class, gender, or geography, the performance can be reconfigured into a “Third Space” (MacKenzie is referencing Homi Bhabha), distinct from the actor or the audience, which would result in a hybridization of theatre. It is through this hybridity that MacKenzie understands the “global” as both an effective force of worlding and a drawback, depending on how it is integrated in the theatrical work:

Hybridity is the result of worlding gone wild, which is not an exclusively negative reaction. It is a sophisticated version of the melting pot and is a beautiful danger. Hybrid theater presents performances with global influences. It is not of one culture or another, not from the colonized or colonizer, not from the dominant or marginalized culture. That mixture can be the spectacular creation of something entirely new that presents its own new world and truth, or it can be a diluted mixture that presents only a shadowy simulacrum of the artistic vision of any group. (153)

Bruce Clarke brings yet another outlook on which sort of world is implied in a world-systemic theory. Falling under the heading of Natural and Formal Sciences, his chapter, *Worlding Systems Theory*, finds its foundations in the *neocybernetic systems theory* (NST). In his contribution, the multiple and the oneness coexist in a larger understanding of the structure(s) of the planet. In this design, the function systems (meaning an array of subsystems: economic, political, legal, educational, scientific, media, and art) communicate with each other and constitute a *world society* (446). The integrity of the world presumed in world society is to be understood not as a singular material assemblage overlapping the planet, but as “an empty plenum necessarily generated as the outside of the autopoiesis of world society” (450). What results from this calibration is “*a world where many worlds fit*” (451), a construction large and flexible enough to contain multiple worlds and their subsystems. This world is not, therefore, a vacuum, as it involves communication and

correlative operations, nor is it a unitary material body to be employed by a single universalizing force, such as the Global North.

In a certain way, the world society conceptualized here contains the multiplicity of the planet, as described by Moraru, in a graspable representation of the world that constitutes the subject and spatiality of worlding. For this representation to be accurately wide-ranging, in other words, to include the non-human existence of the planet, Bruce goes one step further and poses Gaia as the counterpart to world society, that is, “as the planetary autopoietic system” (454). There is somewhat of a mirror effect between the two types of “worlds”, with one of them more elongated in its coverage than the other:

In short, the comparison is now between two different *systems-theoretical* worlds. One is the world we have explored in this chapter, understood epistemologically and in its simultaneity as the indistinct or unmarked environment beyond the autopoietically closed operations of psychic and social systems. The other is an autopoietic conception of the Gaian system itself, emerging in cosmological time from planetary couplings of physical, material-energetic dynamics to self-producing biological and ecological processes. (454)

When piecing together the theoretical positions forwarded in the volume one can observe that the conceptual dimension of the “world” is rather vast and not always thoroughly defined, which stands in itself as proof for the interconnected multiplicities of networks and foci that map the human and non-human existence alike. There are numerous understandings of the structures and webs that construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the world, whether globally, planetary, or otherwise. One of the main strength points of the book consists in decentralizing the frame of reference and allowing individual viewpoints to meet across research fields in order to compare, correlate, contrast, overlap divergent portrayals of the world. What results from simultaneously looking at them from above is a panoramic conceptualization that stands for an essentially immeasurable world, boundless in its ontological possibilities and heavily intertwined in its material articulations.

*The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory* functions as a skillful tool for addressing the issues that the worlding of knowledge involves. At the same time, it represents an ambitious proposal to create networks between research fields still often perceived as separate. Naturally, the chapters do not aim to exhaustively cover

the field of research they address, but each of them functions as a subunit designed to launch lines of inquiry and propose an angle that can always be multiplied, extended and modified according to one's position across variables such as space, time, race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation. Moreover, the terminological contribution that the volume brings should not be forgotten either, as it creates a common space of operation, in which knowledge can be shared and correlated inter- and transdisciplinary, thus facilitating the circulation of ideas in the cartography of the world through theory.