

## The Anthro(s)cenography of Ricardo Monti's *Marrathon*

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In 1980, Ricardo Monti's play *Marrathon* premieres in Buenos Aires.<sup>[1]</sup> In this play, the Argentine playwright presents the self-destructive specter of fascism as the effect of ideologies with a long historical trajectory. In 2000, Dutch scientist Paul J. Crutzen proposes the use of the term Anthropocene to emphasize the destructive effects that human action is having on the earth's geology and ecology.<sup>[2]</sup> These two events share a need to come to terms with deep-seated delusions about the benignant course of history—the ingrained collective belief that modern history has set us onto a path towards a universal progress. Paradoxically, the Anthropocene does not negate history but appears to propose a new universality that is more inclusive, in this case, of earth processes and life as objects, if not subjects of history. This new universality presents a dramaturgical problem, of having to retell history by incorporating the new actors and giving a language to relationships that have been hitherto ignored, like the relationship between industry and climate, between development and indigenous culture. The play *Marrathon* shares a similar paradox when having to retell a national story of socio-political impasse from the point of view of a longstanding dependence of peripheral modernity to the ideologies of the center. The play has a single main action, which is an ongoing dance marathon event set in a 1932 dance hall, during the so-called “infamous decade” of the 1930s under Uriburu's ultranationalist dictatorship. The dramaturgical problem of a new universality is solved in this play with the suggestion of an action of long duration (the marathon) and the placement of the dancers as being on the same boat: they all compete for the same “unknown price” regardless of their social standing. This basic structure is relevant to what we imagine the Anthropocene to be: an epoch that puts all of humankind in the same long-standing block of planetary history. *Marrathon* has in fact a complex dramaturgy that is tantamount to an anthro(s)cenography that also reveals some of the Anthropocene's ethical and political challenges.

Climate change scientists have proposed the concept of the Anthropocene to define an epoch of marked geological impact by humans on the earth, on non-human life, and on humans themselves. The concept is generally understood to push for a paradigmatic shift away from our understanding of history as homocentric. The Anthropocene is a geo-political event (the “geo” has here an added connotation) because it is a new condition for the earth as well as for human beings. Boneuil and Fressoz write in *The Shock of the Anthropocene*:

“[If] the climatic stability of the last 10,000 years of the Holocene made possible the rise of cultures and civilizations on five continents, the end of this epoch and the entry into a new one will not be a smooth and steady process for human societies. Global warming means that people will die and countries disappear. The food situation already faces an uncertain future: the climate change of the last few decades has caused a shortfall of 4 to 5 per cent in world wheat and maize production in relation to 1980.”<sup>[3]</sup>

The apocalyptic tone of this statement cannot be dismissed, for it reinforces the fact that we are facing a

reality for which our current forms of historical consciousness and behavior are not prepared. This reality demands a reassessment of our relationship with, and conception of nature; it challenges our ingrained acceptance of the myth of progress, and of a neo-liberal global order; and it complicates our struggles for justice. The concept of the Anthropocene responds to this crisis of history by proposing an incorporation of ecological and heterogeneous temporal and spatial frames that would correct a homocentric perspective.

If the Holocene is the geological epoch that precedes the Anthropocene, this last one reimagines recent history as the beginning of a new geological epoch. Framing the Anthropocene as a re-imagination of history allows me to segue into the critical narratives that contest Eurocentric histories of modernity. Historical re-imaginings of coloniality, capitalism and globalization, for example, already tell stories of violence against nature, both human and non-human, even if not recognizing the “terminal” nature of such assaults. Some current theorizations of the Anthropocene build on the study of coloniality and the critique of capitalism. Jason Moore, for instance, prefers the name “Capitalocene” and has it started in the long Sixteenth century. This periodization allows him to trace the process of capitalism’s environment-making “which has served to liberate, then fetter, then restructure and renew capital accumulation.”<sup>[4]</sup> A Latin American work like *Marrathon* can enlighten us about the Anthropocene through its representation of environment-making from the point of view of colonialism, imperialism and dictatorship.

*Marrathon* was the second play (the first being *Visit*, in 1977) by Monti, presented during the years of military repression, or the so-called “Process of National Reorganization” (1976-1983). As Graham-Jones remarks, in 1980, “after four years of dictatorship, the Argentine people were exhibiting signs of a collective anguish, and [*Marrathon*] tapped into both this ongoing suffering under repression and a growing critical awareness regarding what have been called the guiding fictions that had led the country to such end.”<sup>[5]</sup> *Marrathon* begins with the Emcee introducing the spectacle of a marathon dance, which is already taking place, perhaps for days, to the attending or arriving spectators. On the stage, doubling as the dance-floor, dancing couples are participating for a yet unknown prize, under the watchful eye of a bouncer. The dancers are described as exhausted and desperate characters whose blind faith keeps them on the dance floor. Homer the poet is with his “muse” Helen, while Vespucci the immigrant bricklayer and Hector the unemployed office worker are with their wives Asuncion and Emma. A younger couple comprised of Tom Mix and Anna D participates with assumed names, and Charity the prostitute is with Mr. X the bankrupt industrialist. The Emcee addresses the dancers as he makes them follow the strict rules of the marathon, and takes every opportunity to ironically harass them while interviewing them. The characters are shown as failures and the contest seems to enhance our view of them as a pathetic spectacle. This grotesque collective is presented as the expression of stubborn faith in modern ideologies. Some scenes show the dancers in a sleep state, having visions or nightmares. Bodily signs of illness and exhaustion are shown as effects of lengthy exertion and/ or refer to a historical character.

The exertion and exhaustion of bodies are a condition for the revelation of myths. These are expressed by some characters in some of the scenes in a half-sleep or dream state. The myths, numbered from 1 to 5 are, according to Monti, those of the Conquest, of Independence, of pastoral America, of industrial progress, and of fascism, all represented in a chronological order.<sup>[6]</sup> The myth of fascism, near the end of the play, signifies the brutal execution of a “history [...] written by the rulers.”<sup>[7]</sup> It is as if arriving at the conclusion were also a repetition of history advancing on its own momentum. Therefore the spectacle of *Marrathon* is made to continue after the myth of fascism towards an uncertain future, as we hear the Emcee’s words: “if it weren’t so ridiculous, it would be a tragedy.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Fascism is shown in the play as the dark side of politics, usually put outside of the repertory of historical dreams. After the enactment of fascism the dancers become increasingly restless: the poet Homer dies, Tom Mix decides to leave the contest, Vespucci attempts suicide and the Bouncer tries to kill the Emcee. In spite of this crisis of continuity, the marathon continues beyond the terminal point of fascism, as if insisting on the fact that history continues but the very impulse of history needs to be reassessed. The recurrence of authoritarianism in Argentine politics gave intellectuals a sense that the very logic and continuity of history was flawed, and that modern myths were inherently destructive. Monti's 1980 play represents this realization and therefore begins with full blown fascism expressed in the metaphor of a coercive marathon dance —and proceeds with a look at the retroactive “fascisms” of previous modern politics. This consciousness of history as beginning with the end is also characteristic of the Anthropocene and its dramaturgy.

The threat of imminent destruction gives an existential trait to the Anthropocene, forcing a reassessment of the ethical foundations of our society. A consciousness of the Anthropocene begins with an ethics because it repudiates the current foundations of politics. Such an ethical stance characterizes for example Dipesh Chakrabarty's call for an epochal consciousness. Chakrabarty frames this issue, of what I consider a re-imagination of history, “around a split between the homo, humanity as a divided political subject, and the anthropos, collective and unintended forms of existence of the human, as a geological force, as a species, as a part of the history of life on this planet.”<sup>[9]</sup> Epochal consciousness begins now, when the Anthropocene has reached its “homofascistic” moment with the imminent threats caused by climate change, and the power of climate change deniers. Chakrabarty, for instance, implies that the tension between homo and anthropos is an ethical tension that is new to political discourse and may not have a resolution for a while. Quoting from the philosopher Edward Jasper, he suggests that epochal consciousness “takes stamina” and “calls for endurance in the tensions of insolubility.”<sup>[10]</sup> Like Monti's *Marrathon*, Chakrabarty acknowledges that the momentum of the epoch is too strong for us to be able to change its course in any drastic and short-term way. Consider, for example, Crutzen's reminder that “because of the anthropogenic emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, climate may depart significantly from natural behaviour over the next 50,000 years.”<sup>[11]</sup> Stamina is needed to both survive and to find a political transition from the homo to the anthropos.

Thus far I have established a similar relationship between dramaturgy and ethical concerns in the Anthropocene concept and in *Marrathon*. Another level of relationship occurs between the physical structure of the play's performance and the Marxist critique of capitalism that it deploys. This structure comprises a site defined as continental, and characters treated as biological bodies ideologically compelled to consume their energy on this site. The grounding of ideology on a continent results in a specific critique that is in this case postcolonial. This critique produces a genealogy of capitalism beginning with the imaginary and then economic expansion of Europe into colonial land. On the other hand, the exertion of bodies invites our consideration of a *practice* of embodiment that seeks to make up for our alienated consciousness, which has lost touch with its relationship to the land, biological processes, and the planet's life. This is a critical practice aligned with Moore's project of moving his critique from “capitalism *and* nature to capitalism-in-nature” by placing “human bodies as sites of environmental history.”<sup>[12]</sup> Therefore, in *Marrathon*, momentum of ideology and critical embodiment form a physical structure that constitutes the play's anthro(po)s cenography. I will look at this structure to elaborate on how *Marrathon*'s critique of modern myths prefigures and adds to our understanding of the Anthropocene and its ethico-political tensions.

To describe *Marrathon*'s dramaturgy as anthropo(s)cenography is also an opportunity to improve on existing assessments of Monti's play. Most approaches diminish the relationship between structure and content in the play.<sup>[13]</sup> The author's use of metatheatrical elements is not merely part of an avant-garde aesthetic;<sup>[14]</sup> nor should the political aspects of *Marrathon* be obscured by an emphasis on absurdist and metaphysical elements.<sup>[15]</sup> There are no studies that see in the play the representation of a concrete lineage between colonialism, capitalism and a relation to nature. This critique may have escaped the reception of the play because of its fascistic setting and the historical context of performance. Nevertheless Monti was building at the time from an existing tradition of ambivalence about Argentina's modern identity, represented by writers such as Domingo Sarmiento in the Nineteenth century and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada in the early Twentieth century, as well as critiques of capitalism and neocolonialism in the 1960s and 70s. The physical structure of the play provides Monti a platform to explore this history in terms of both ideological and concrete relation to the land. The staging of dancing bodies that are at the same time identified with the land allows Monti to retrace the origins and development of Argentina's modernity and capitalism in a serial fetishization of nature, or "America," through the already mentioned myths of progress. These fetishizations, I will argue, correspond to the [hidden] capitalist strategy identified by Moore, of making nature capable of delivering larger and larger quantities of unpaid work/ energy, or Cheap Nature.<sup>[16]</sup> Monti's play does not take Cheap Nature as an initial hypothesis, but by reading the anthropo(s)cenography of the play we may reach such a conclusion and learn from Monti's own perspective. In this respect I will focus on Monti's critical strategy of establishing a structural tension between an ideological separation of humans from nature and the embodiment of nature by the character's bodies. In order to discuss this "structure of tension" I will introduce the concept of tectonics.

Tectonics is used in theorizations of architecture to refer to the relationship of a building's structure and ornament to its physical and visual setting or surroundings. The architect Kenneth Frampton uses the term to advocate for an architecture that would resist "megapolitan development," which represents "the victory of universal civilization over locally inflected culture."<sup>[17]</sup> Frampton's "critical regionalism" is premised on an opposition between world civilization and world regional cultures. It therefore opposes the "technocratic gesture which aspires to a condition of absolute placelessness" by engaging in the act of "building the site" of regional culture.<sup>[18]</sup> Frampton argues that with such engagement it is possible for the history/culture of the region to become "inscribed into the form and realization of the work."<sup>[19]</sup> Frampton's tension between megapolitan and regional cultures mirrors in some way the tension between homo and anthropos while embodying it as a structural site. Tectonics can thus be applied to building a critical awareness of "homo" settlement on or disruptions of local/global "anthropos" and Holocene processes. For example, Frampton explains tectonics in terms of an architectural inscription with "many levels of significance, for it has a capacity to embody, in built form, the prehistory of the place, its archeological past and its subsequent cultivation and transformation across time."<sup>[20]</sup> Tectonics offers the Anthropocene a physical model for sustaining the enduring question of nature as "the matrix within which human activity unfolds, and the field upon which historical agency operates."<sup>[21]</sup> It can thus embody a concept of Humanity-in-nature (oikeios) "where nature matters to the whole of the historical process, not merely as its context, or its unsavory consequences."<sup>[22]</sup> The site specificity of tectonic architecture is not rendered by place or location alone, but by structural and aesthetic elements inlaid in a location to give it memory and historical endurance. With this in mind I will look at the tectonics of *Marrathon*.

The autonomy of *Marrathon* as built form is prefigured in the anomalous spelling of the play title

(“Marathón” in the original Spanish). Monti purposely adds the letter “h” to the correct (Spanish) spelling of the word to signify a metaphoric tension between the physical marathon of performance and the mythical and historical dimensions that it embodies.<sup>[23]</sup> Another layer of autonomy is intended between the mythical/historical embodiment and the physical site—it is at this level that the action will be “physically” inlaid on the site. The point of maintaining the autonomy of structural/aesthetic elements is precisely to enhance our experience and cognition of a particular site. The site is constituted by the metatheatrical identity of the 1932 event in Buenos Aires and the moment of the performance in a theater in the same city in 1980. This last element was further confirmed with the premiere of the play in the facilities of Teatros de San Telmo, still in construction, which offered “a central dance floor made of concrete with steps on one side, a balcony wrapping around other steps, and a circular stage allowing multiple view points.”<sup>[24]</sup> The contemporaneity of the “metatheatrical” event was also implied by the inescapable parallel between the Argentine dictatorships of 1932 and 1980. The character of the Emcee contributes to this site specificity by addressing the other characters, or the imaginary spectators of 1932, and, the contemporary audience of the play. The existence of a site/event establishes a location of the built form but not yet its tectonics, which is constructed by the action of the play.

In *Marrathon* the myths come to life through the utterances of the characters who play “themselves” in 1932, project their exhausted bodies in the present of performance, *and* channel their historical alter egos in their half dream state. In this process of enactment, the setting also becomes multiple while signaling a hemispheric American location. In *Marrathon*, then, the setting becomes a changing or unstable site that, like the bodies, is a material and living expression of the myths. The unstable and living relation of body to land is reflected in the multivalent names. For instance, temporal and spatial “fractures” are inscribed in the composite names of the characters-- Homer Starr, Helen Garci?a, Peter Vespucci, Tom Mix, etc-- names that identify the characters as historical and/or contemporary, as foreign and/or local. Vespucci, for example, is an Italian working-class immigrant who in the 1930s was consolidating his own American/Argentine identity. His contemporary “Americanization” has already been embodied hundreds of years ago by his namesake Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian cartographer and voyager who was a precursor to Columbus’s discovery and therefore to colonization. In Scene Four Peter Vespucci enacts the first myth, that of the Conquest. In his words we recognize the body of Vespucci, apparently sick with tuberculosis, as channeling the body of Pedro de Mendoza, the Spanish Conquistador who founded Buenos Aires and later died of syphilis in mid-ocean during his last voyage to the Americas. In the process, the setting has been transformed into a much vaster spatial and temporal site, a site to which the character’s long durational bodies also belong. In Monti’s play, tectonics is evident in the multilayered spatio-temporal event that maintains the autonomy of a built form in relation to the scenographic “1932 dance marathon.” A universalizing allegorical impulse is resisted in favor of metaphors that inlay the action more precisely in the “nature” and history of the American continent.<sup>[25]</sup> Through tectonics, the built form is also a place-form.

Autonomy of form resists scenographic identifications in order to create a critical awareness of its grounding within the particular existence of the place or region. In *Marrathon*, for instance, the dancers are already onstage, having “beaten all records” in time when the Emcee greets the audience and introduces them. The play’s tectonics force the audience to interpret the very site they occupy and produce with their theatrical spectatorship. The critical awareness of the spectators is engaged by the insistence of the play in the act of embodiment. The current life of the myths is embodied in the dancing and the unknown prize, and the failure of the myths is embodied in the failure of the characters and their exhaustion. A similar effect was extended to the whole theatre, when the director planted mannequins

throughout the auditorium as surrogate spectators who could embody the tectonics of the play by the mere fact of being “bodies” in the theater.[\[26\]](#)

Theatrical constructions are analogous to metaphors since they rely on a semantic tension between “place” and spatial “form,” between “setting” and embodied “event.” Monti’s tectonics takes advantage of the semantic distance between 1932 and the time of the performance in order to produce its embodiment of history and myth within that gap. This means that the play maintains a positive correlation between the enigma of the metaphor and the “truth” expressed through theatrical embodiment. Paul Ricoeur would say that tectonics builds a “live metaphor,” in the sense of resisting its death in the simile or the allegory.[\[27\]](#) A reading of tectonics through metaphor will point more directly to what is being embodied in the play.

In “Myth One,” Vespucci sets the Conquest in a narrative of failed return and failed payment. The character suggests himself as Pedro de Mendoza, who is dying of syphilis. His historical “marathon” ends in mid-sea where the land of “America” is the undelivered prize of his journey.[\[28\]](#) Vespucci’s destiny, within the myth, fractures the mapping of Conquest with a mid-ocean line dividing the myth between the idea of the American Promised Land and the European Christian fear of final judgment (when Anna D plays the whore of Babylon). The setting/event of the map is a live metaphor that continues to produce meaning as in the spectral relationship between the bricklayer Vespucci’s mortgaged house and the Promised Land that he expects (when embodying Pedro de Mendoza) will finally “rise up from the sea.”[\[29\]](#) Here we may read the metaphor as “my house/property is a Promised Land rising up from the sea.” In this instance the myth persists as a macroworld as well as a microworld.[\[30\]](#) In the enactment of the myth, Vespucci inlays his wish, to finally own a house, in the conquistador’s dream of reaching the colonial territory promised to him by the Spanish king. The last words of the enactment are telling in this respect: Vespucci/Pedro de Mendoza describes this land as “my abode, my land, my *home*.”[\[31\]](#) The composite dream can be mapped according to a double matrix, one spatial, looking towards the “Promised Land,” and the other temporal, depending on “future” payment of the mortgage. In the context of a genealogy of Cheap Nature, Myth One shows the colonizer creating “nature” and making demands on it because of his situation of exile. This “nature” is internalized by Vespucci, who accepts his salaried work (an exhausting form of demand) as part of his “exile” (the mortgage) from “home.”[\[32\]](#)

Back in the realm of the dance marathon, the scenes function as transitions between one myth and the next. There is a scene where Hector and Emma denigrate their own marriage, making a pathetic spectacle out of their emotional codependency. A short “sleeping” scene follows, which is interrupted when the Emcee orders all the dancers to move about and change partners. Some of the women react by seeking the attention of young Tom Mix. The bouncer separates the women from Tom Mix who is then interrogated by the Emcee. The grilling focuses on Tom Mix’s carefree attitude and on his taking his own sexual magnetism for granted. This focus on Tom Mix’s happy-go-lucky attitude (in contrast to Hector and Emma) gives a context to the character’s enactment of the myth of Independence.

Tom Mix’s “myth” is a speech addressed to South Americans, preceded by the character’s suggestion that he has been taken prisoner and is about to be killed. He could be an Independence warrior, a victim of Spaniards or pro-vice-royalty creoles. The first part of the speech condemns Spaniards’ disregard for the life of Indians when used as forced labor. The second part laments that the utopian newness of America has been overshadowed by the suffering caused by colonialism, yet affirms that this “new” America of “immortal children” is still there waiting “in her splendor, infinite.”[\[33\]](#) Metaphorical tension

consists here in the simultaneous acknowledgement of colonial tyranny and a utopian blank slate. This “enchanted” site repeats the colonialist vision of natives imagined as “children” while seeing the promise of utopian development emanating from a dreamy vision of the land.[34] At the end of the speech “Tom Mix falls down as if executed by a firing squad.”[35] The independence warrior’s death underlines the dependence of the dream on pure territoriality and futurity, as if the land didn’t need the body to produce the “agency” of the modern independent subject. Tom Mix’s carefree attitude of the previous scene, then, might reflect a gratuitous confidence in the manifest destiny offered by the land. In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger can enlighten us about the tectonics at work here.

Heidegger questions the causality of modern machines as simply being the application of modern physics and argues that the essence of modern technology comes historically earlier than machine-power technology. If modern technology reveals nature through a challenging forth of its energy, then both nature and machine end up revealed as a “standing reserve, inasmuch as [they are] ordered” to ensure the permanence of their being on call for duty, that is, for providing energy, for realizing their function.[36] Heidegger calls this demand, for nature and technology to be orderable, a rule of enframing, which is very different from the idea of a functional application of science. From a tectonics perspective, the modern subject who uses technology is inlaid in a space already enframed as standing reserve—that is, a land already endowed with a “technological” use. *Marrathon* partakes of a similar tension by tacitly defining the standing reserve that is America, and *then* attributing that utopia to the independent subject. The myth of Independence shows “America” to already be a machine that produces/reproduces the futurity of the modern subject. *Marrathon*’s tectonics indicates that Modern History is a territorial destiny machine. This insight could be added to a Marxist historical materialist critique by considering this fetishized nature/ destiny as part of modern modes of production.

The scenes that follow illustrate the workings of the territorial machine within the petit bourgeois environment of the characters. The Emcee invites the poet Homer Starr to the side, and interviews him about his reason for participating in the contest. In the process, we learn that the small ambitions of Homer and Helen are redeemed in the spaces offered by culture and society, creating their own micro-territoriality. For instance we learn that Homer as poet defends “a lady’s honor” as his own poetic territory, while he characterizes his relationship to Helen as a form of repayment for a lost sexualized youth, in his old age. Helen, on the other hand, accepts her relationship as an egalitarian reward for her cultural work as a librarian. Helen’s service to Homer, of typing his poetry, is in turn perceived by the poet as a privilege of his cultural rank (to pay her would be “like paying a prostitute”).[37] These petty forms of territoriality reveal an enjoyment of small advantages and privileges rather than expressions of independence. When the Emcee tells Charity, the prostitute, that it is her turn to come to the “historic stage,” Charity, feeling humiliated, refuses by saying that she doesn’t “have any history,” she “is only a body here.”[38] In the context of the previous micro territorialities, we could say that it is Charity’s body that doesn’t have a history. Her reaction, we’ll see, raises our awareness of culture as already enframed in a culture-nature standing reserve or machine.

Charity’s words can be read ironically, as her wanting to separate her body from a culture system that doesn’t acknowledge her. “Owning” her body is like rejecting the petty territorialities produced by culture. Charity’s “body” also contrasts with Homer’s poetic disembodiments in the word, and on the page. Furthermore, Homer’s poetry produces the normativity of bodies in society, according to a male gaze. In this context his alluded payment to prostitutes appears to be a way to keep the non-normative prostitute away from the privileges of culture. In other words the prostitute is made to forfeit her right to

participate in culture. Culture allows Homer, for example, to have sex with Helen without paying her. To this, Charity retorts: “If it had been with me, Old man, I’d have cured you of any desire of getting it for free.”<sup>[39]</sup> Charity jokes out of resentment, perhaps not realizing the implication that culture has the capacity to use bodies, and, by extension, use nature for free. These various readings point to an inlaying of culture on bodies while creating a dichotomy between culture and non-culture. This is to say that nature is simply what has not been colonized-- nature disappears in non-culture. If to be “only” a body is to not have a history, that body is absent in history. This means that Homer’s art and discourse reproduces a colonizing culture while denying the inlaying of culture on a collective body and nature. Meanwhile, the “pure presence” performed by Charity’s statement, puts her for a moment outside of this culture machine—in this instance, Charity is not yet “Cheap Nature” but simply non-culture. This allows us to understand the payment to the prostitute as a gesture of “non-cultural” appropriation for a *subsequent* “economic” transaction—in the form of sex. In the genealogy of Cheap Nature we must therefore include the fetishization of nature as property, which is the legal form of the land as destiny machine (this last defined in the myth of independence). For instance, property can “exist” without the presence of the body of the owner, yet offers itself to its owner, and makes itself the owner’s “destiny” or “standing reserve.” It is appropriation that gives the owner the illusion of being an “independent” agent while reproducing the destiny machine. *Marrathon*’s enactment of a “pastoral America,” as well as the scene leading to that myth, develop a more complete picture of the modern machine.

In Scene Eleven an elegant character named Woman enters the ballroom and goes to the dance floor languidly.<sup>[40]</sup> Her brother, Man, also arrives (they have been walking all night) to tell her that their boat is leaving soon. Woman insists that they should join the marathon and Man finally pays the Emcee for them to do so. The entrance of the couple performs a separation between the cultured Europeans and the collective of bodies that they see dancing. Their incorporation into the collective signals a switch of focus from individuals to the collective. Yet their late incorporation signifies the advantage they are taking within the collective because of their cultural and economic “superiority.” In Myth Three the dancers become a herd of cattle in a “wild” land, and Man anticipates in his dream the fencing of land for cattle-raising and a meat exporting business. The play thus draws a seamless transition between cultural transactions that use the body and the economic use of the land that exploits labor and land for high profits. That transition is contained in the description of America as “one motionless, thick, grimy mass of land. An immense, pregnant woman. Ceaselessly giving birth to sheep, cow, horse.”<sup>[41]</sup> In the transition from Charity to the Argentine Pampa, the “female body” goes from offering sex to offering offspring. “She” is the Argentine Pampas where intensive cattle raising for meat exports is initiated in the Nineteenth Century by English investors and rich landowners, with the help of immense slaughterhouses and refrigerated ships.<sup>[42]</sup> This new economy demanded the exploitation of the countryside’s inhabitants’ (gauchos) cheap labor in their new status as rural peons. The labor of the gauchos, embodied in the people-cattle of the marathon dance is thus incorporated into the natural “wealth” of the pampas. The transition can then be defined as going from culture to economy to production. The signaling of culture by the French speaking siblings suggests that culture and economy have become one and the same, or rather they always were. The difference is that, in the world of international capital investments, production, and trade, the language of economy takes over, and culture becomes obsolete for human transactions.

Man’s speech (said while the dancers move in circles like cattle) does not exalt the export economy but focuses first on the skill of the gaucho in catching the cattle, and then on the brutal destiny of the cattle in the slaughterhouse. In melancholic tension, between the rationality of the economy and the violent assault



on the cattle's flesh, we may locate the pastoral dream whose loss is lamented in the enactment. The pastoral dream is presented through its negation, as if the utopian impulse of modernity were redirected toward the past (the traditional gaucho culture). From this perspective the pastoral points to a mechanism of modern temporality that consists in "dreaming" the past as the ideal "future" site of rational Man. The pastoral is therefore an impossible dream of a "rational" nature represented by a state economic policy that rationalizes the use of workers and land (profit producing Cheap Nature). The dream of the rational seeks to eliminate the culture/non culture dichotomy by imagining economics as a pseudo natural *and* a pseudo cultural system.[43] This is equivalent to a fetishization of nature as a producer of both culture and wealth, or nature drawn in the image of the State as guarantor of Cheap Nature.

The pastoral contains *Marrathon*'s rationalizing machine between two dreams, one past and one future. Such tension is enacted and resolved in the scenes that follow. The Emcee proposes to dim the lights for the dancers to rest, but the dancers are anxious and resist the idea. The bouncer suggests that the theatre protects the dancers not only from the cold outside, but also from the anxiety of seeing an emptied auditorium in the middle of the night. The reasons he gives is that, in this theatre, time and exhaustion are the real spectacle, therefore they should keep dancing after all, even if tired. The theatre thus quarantines the dancers in a place where a new temporality protects them from the past/future threats of nature and of an unfinished competition. The dancers become their own spectators of a time that consumes them. In the following scene Homer offers a romantic poem about a woman who falls in love with a stranger who leaves after promising to marry her in a year. The woman, still a virgin, has fallen ill by the time the lover returns. The story ends with the woman dying in the lover's arms. In this story the woman stays in the same village to experience her love, and the stranger appears from nowhere, with no past or future, to fulfill the woman's romantic experience. The threat of "natural" irrationality coming from romantic passion is tamed by the woman's containment in one place. The scene partakes of the same temporality as the quarantine in the theatre, abstracting time from history and nature and resolving pastoral melancholy with the production of a single "place" and a single time. Here nature is rationalized in the form of exertion (or the patience of a woman's love), which is akin to the dancers' expenditure of energy rendered intensive by the spectacle of a clocked time—*Marrathon* is now a work-producing machine. This is the spectacle of labor in the world's factories, and of the abstraction of nature's energy from its "future" exhaustion. Work is imposed on both nature (exhausting its energy) and humans (consuming nature's and their own energy) through a quarantine that "temporalizes" space in the present, away from the threats of "irrationality" (that is, non-work) coming from the past and the future. The spectacular present of *Marrathon* tectonically inlays the American pastoral dream in an "inexhaustible" human and natural "work."

The spectacle of the factory is the realization of a non-melancholic pastoral dream. It improves on the functionality of the standing reserve which relied on a subject-object relationship to the dreamed land, by making reality a totality "at work" for its own "economic" reproduction. In this respect I propose to identify Work as the condition of Cheap Nature.

Moore defines Cheap Nature's condition as "the periodic, and radical reduction in the socially necessary labor-time of these Big Four inputs: food, labor-power, energy, and raw materials." [44] Work is by definition cheap, because it is the appropriation of "uncapitalized natures," which include human and non-human elements. As Moore puts it, if "the endless accumulation of capital is the ceaseless expansion of material throughput, [...] this can only occur if food, labor-power, energy, and raw materials prices can be contained." [45] In other words, Cheap Nature, or Work, is the effective economic control of exhaustion

by a socialized time. Work creates Cheap Nature by imposing an economic time. In this sense “Work” is semantically close to “labor,” which in Marx’s critique of capitalism is also related to a rationalization of time.

Work, as I’ve defined it, initiates the historical possibility of not going back to nature (the site of past and future) and envisioning a global present for modernity (or post-modernity). In *Marrathon*, the incentive to continue dancing without rest points to the logic of inertia giving this machine its momentum. Inertia transfers *Marrathon*’s spatial tectonics onto the kinetic. It consists of the friction between the synchronic time marked by the ticking of the clock and the diachrony of a historical relation to past, present and future. Here the clock keeps time anchored in a naturalized “present” of factory production, and global markets. The “objective” prize that the dancers are competing for exists in an eternal “global present.” In reality the elusive prize is being produced *and* consumed by the kinetic inertia (Work) of their dancing. The dancers are Cheap Nature through the simple fact of being there—Work is simply (but not easily) to be ready to be put to work.<sup>[46]</sup> Work is the existential condition of modern “nature.”

The meaning of this “present” differs, of course, if one is a worker or a boss. The boss’s time relies on a correlation between productive time (the economy) and profits, that is, the time of capital growth. The factory, nature, time, markets, and capital are, on one hand, piled up onto the present of productive time, where workers are located as part of a global labor market. The enigma is that the time of profit for the boss is not part of this global time. The boss is not really in this “present” but appears to straddle on the “past” and “future” sides of the present, corresponding to capitalist investment and return.<sup>[47]</sup> Investment and return enter and leave production and the market as if by magic. Therefore the global world of production and the capitalist’s world exist on different time frames. As the play nears the enactment of the myth of Industrial America, a scene between Charity and industrialist Mr. X tackles the enigma of the capitalist’s time.

Charity suddenly appears flustered because her watch has stopped. Her gesture is a challenge directed quite appropriately at Mr. X. The stopping of the watch is suggestive of the collapse of past and future in the capitalist cycle, and therefore can reveal the irrationality of capital accumulation. At the same time a stopping of the watch may shatter the monolithic time of the capitalist factory-machine where measuring time benefits the capitalist in spite of himself. The implicit double threat is accompanied by Charity’s reminder that *her* “time is of some service” to him. She thus calls attention to the simultaneous existence of two time frames, *hers* being the one that serves *his*. Charity’s gesture plays on her previous one, when she presented herself to the Emcee as a body only. That “body,” she says, is not there “just for the hell of it” like the bodies exploited in his factory.<sup>[48]</sup> Her “time of service” may refer to her sexual services, but in the context of tectonics we are reminded of the spectacle of time in the previous scene. Charity is thus ironically allying herself to the collective present of *all* workers and “working” nature and presenting her body as that unpaid “surplus time.” Charity first protests Mr. X’s non-payment of “the other five [hours] from before these that are up at seven,” to which Mr. X responds that he is on schedule with his payments to her. Then Charity specifies that what she is charging for is “the time, whether I’m horizontal or vertical, of *services* rendered.”<sup>[49]</sup> “Horizontal or vertical” continues to use sexual innuendos to suggest a more absolute time of all bodies, hers and the “bodies” of workers and nature. This time cannot be clocked because it is already there in the present of all bodies— and that present has never been included in the capitalist’s payments. The “time of service” is revealed as a euphemism for “the service of *time*” to the capitalist cycle. The service is the time of borrowed bodies (or bodies of borrowed time) for the *subsequent* extraction of “work time” in the “present.”<sup>[50]</sup> “Borrowed time” allows political economy to

focus merely on the management of the time of reproduction of Work without considering the long durational cycles of reproduction in ecological relationships.

Charity's protest allows us to see the real nature of Mr. X's participation in the economy: he borrows diachronic time and turns it into a synchronic global present that *is* his investment. Mr. X puts time in the bank, so to speak. This borrowing explains the now virtual collapse of past and future in the capitalist cycle. This situation is shown when Charity threatens to leave and Mr. X surrenders to Charity's demand by desperately paying for her mere presence, while refusing to acknowledge that he owes her anything. The scene reveals that the capitalist indefinitely "borrows" the time of nature to turn it into his own "investment." To recapitulate: a) Mr. X's performance consists in keeping his payments on schedule as a way to separate individual work time while hiding the present of global economy that provides him with workers and nature; b) The borrowing of the time of all bodies and nature is forgotten in the capitalist payment to each worker, hence Charity's reminder. c) Charity's performative challenge reveals the illusion of the collapsing of past and future in the capitalist cycle, and forces the capitalist's symbolic payment of a debt that cannot be really be repaid. The tectonics of the scene may be summarized as "Mr. X's capital investment and return is inlayed in a time that he has "borrowed" to fashion a "present" economic machine.

The borrowed present of production serves to theorize the limits of Capitalism's project of creating a world "in which all elements of human and extra-human nature are effectively interchangeable."[\[51\]](#) This global system of industry and markets, become a world, has refashioned nature in the image of Capitalism— as when Mr. X sings about his mythical dream of industrial America: "Chimneys and petroleum, rivers of electricity, and mountains of tall ovens against the gray sky of industry."[\[52\]](#) Borrowed time shows that this is more than an analogy, since the present is a banked time that effectively allows for a capitalist cycle to exist on the side. For this reason, Moore can consider nature, in the condition of Work, a "historical nature" proper to Capitalism. This project, he says, "seeks to reduce the time of life to the time of accumulation."[\[53\]](#) This results in a systematic loss of time that the character Emma expresses when mourning her dead child and saying that she, Emma, was only alive for those two months that the child lived.

From the perspective of the Anthropocene, borrowed time means that human beings have tampered with the long duration frame of the Holocene by enframing nature as modern destiny and as the present of production economy. *Marrathon*'s myths show the origins of such enframing to reside in the colonialist/racist imagination of the land/people, temporalized later in an economic system that erases the diachrony of anthropos relationships between past, present, and future. *Marrathon* exposes a continuum between the vision of the "new" American land and the straddling of the present by the capitalist cycle. In both cases there has been an advantage taken on nature by a rule of enframing that created the "destiny machine" of the modern "homo" subject and the capitalist. From an anthropos perspective that advantage is illusory, for we all suffer from the destructive power of the system.

As *Marrathon* nears the enactment of the myth of fascism, the elegant Man wants to leave the marathon, thinking it is his privilege. Woman stops him saying "we're trapped. Don't you see our bodies there, in front of us? They're dancing. And where would we go without our bodies?"[\[54\]](#) The two contradictory destinies of the modern subject are contained in her statement: she needs to have bodies/nature at her disposition to maintain her privilege; and she also is part of this collective of bodies and nature that is being exploited. In the Anthropocene the losers have been culture and nature, whose past and future have

been pushed into an economic present. Human action's (culture) inlaying in nature has been refashioned into an economic pseudo culture-nature that has no interest in anthropos processes because it lives in a borrowed time. Epochal consciousness needs to acknowledge that climate change, species extinction, and ecological impoverishment do not matter to the "present" of capitalist economy because the prize of economy (formed in the cycle of capital) is not grounded in any place. The colonial inheritance of capitalism indicates that an ethics for the Anthropocene must have a peripheral location, as the one rehearsed by *Marrathon*. The reason for this is that it is in the colonized land that homo dreams his modern identity and settles the economic machine. In this land the inertia of the Anthropocene can be embodied in ways that a Eurocentric subject, still enthralled by his own utopian destiny, may not. In the periphery, the marathon is made to continue because only through embodiment can culture and nature be recuperated and homo find his/her way to the anthropos.

The tectonics of the play allows us to recognize that in the deep history suggested by the Anthropocene both the planet Earth and humanity are being embodied.<sup>[55]</sup> It is not possible to abandon deep history as we would leave a scene from a play, or a stage "setting," unless we reject or abandon our own corporeality. Towards the end of *Marrathon* Homer dies and the Emcee tries to dismiss the gravity of the moment saying that Homer lives in his works. Tom Mix has decided to leave the marathon to keep his utopian dream alive. These exits are possible because they are disembodied as dream, negation or death. When Tom Mix asks Hector if he is staying, he answers positively, for the sake of Emma who says she still wants to make up for lost time, "have servants [...] see the ocean."<sup>[56]</sup> We can read in her words an ethical perspective for the Anthropocene if we consider her desires as being transformable through her continued embodiment of anthropos in the dance—it is an ethics of becoming that, having gained awareness of the marathon that is her anthropos life, is able to embrace desire while questioning its existing tectonics.<sup>[57]</sup> How do our desires reproduce the fallacies of the Promised Land, the Standing Reserve, and borrowed time? Where does our anthropos identity lie? Charity may be pointing more directly to an Anthropos politics when she mocks Mr. X's suicidal thoughts by pointing to her sex saying it is "the only hole that matters to [her]."<sup>[58]</sup> Charity's statement makes sense in the context of the tectonic layers of the prostitute's body as standing reserve, as Work and as a presence emptied of past and future. The hole typifies Cheap Nature's revolutionary class position, as the Anthropocene's proletariat, whose life needs to be refilled, through a practice of critical embodiment, and a political struggle for restitution of anthropos life, that is, a human/historical life inlayed in the natural life of the planet.

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[1] Ricardo Monti, *Marrathon*, in *Reason Obscured: Nine Plays By Ricardo Monti*, ed. Jean trans. Graham-Jones (Lewisburg PA: Bucknell UP) 133-83.

- [2] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene E. Stoemer, "The 'Anthropocene,'" in *The International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) Newsletter* 41, 2000: 17-18. ([accessed March 14, 2017](#)).
- [3] Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* (London: Verso, 2016) 24.
- [4] Jason W Moore, *Capitalism In the Web Of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015) 11.
- [5] Jean Graham-Jones, "'A Broader Realism': the Theater of Ricardo Monti," in Ricardo Monti, *Reason Obscured* 17.
- [6] Ricardo Monti, interview with R.G. "Con 'Marathon' vuelven Monti y Kogan," *Clari?n*, Buenos Aires, 18 June 1980. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Spanish are mine.
- [7] *Marrathon* 171.
- [8] 181.
- [9] Chakrabarty, "The Human Condition In the Anthropocene," in *The Tanner Lectures in Human Values, Yale 2014-2015*, 173-174. ([accessed December 12, 2016](#)).
- [10] 174.
- [11] Crutzen and Stoermer 17.
- [12] Moore 26.
- [13] More to the point Jean Graham-Jones asserts that the play "interweaves and fuses levels of daily existential, subconscious and collective experience into one human experience." See Jean Graham-Jones, *Exorcising History: Argentine Theatre Under Dictatorship* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000) 78.
- [14] See Peter Podol, "Surrealism and the Grotesque in the Theatre of Ricardo Monti" *Latin American Theatre Review* 14.1 (1980): 65-72; Julia Elena Sagaseta, "La dramaturgia de Ricardo Monti: la seducción de la escritura," in *Teatro argentino de los 60: polémica, continuidad y ruptura*, ed. Osvaldo Pellettieri (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1989) 227-41; and Jorge Monteleone, "El teatro de Ricardo Monti," *Espacio de crítica e investigación teatral* 2.2 (April 1987): 63-74.
- [15] See Osvaldo Pellettieri, "El teatro de Ricardo Monti (1989-1994): La Resistencia a la modernidad marginal," in Ricardo Monti, *Teatro, tomo I* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1995) 9-13.
- [16] Moore 62-63.
- [17] Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Al Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press,

1983) 17.

[18] 25-26.

[19] 26.

[20] 26.

[21] Moore 35.

[22] 35-36.

[23] See Ricardo Monti, note 89, *Maratho?n*, in *El Teatro Argentino. 16. Cierre de un ciclo*. ed. Luís Ordáz (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de Ame?rica Latina, 1981) 130.

[24] As Ricardo Monti remembers, the director Jaime Kogan “had been looking for another space that would put the spectator in the situation” of the 1932 dance marathon event. In this space, the performance is the occasion for “the 1932 ballroom” to become the contemporary event. Thus, both actors and spectators are possibly made to be complicit with this transformation of setting/action into site/event. See Ricardo Monti, in interview with Celia Dosio, quoted in Celia Dosio, *El Payro?: Cincuenta an?os the teatro independiente* (Buenos Aires: Emece? Editores, 2003) 95.

[25] See Frampton 28.

[26] See Celia Dosio 96.

[27] See Max Statkiewicz, “Live Metaphor in the Age of Cognitivist Reduction,” *Monatshefte* 95.4 (2003): 548.

[28] *Marrathon* 142-143.

[29] 143.

[30] As Monti explains, “there is a relation between that marathon, lost in a corner of the universe, and the place of the myth [in America and/or the World].” See Ricardo Monti, interview with Zully Ruiz Moreno, “Una gestacio?n de dramaturgos,” *La Opinio?n Cultural*, Buenos Aires, June 27, 1980.

[31] Emphasis in the original.

[32] According to Una Chaudhuri, the realist stage environment gives a home to characters who feel homeless, through narratives of arrival, departure, homecoming, and travel. She understands the reification of homelessness as “exilic consciousness” from the point of view of “geopathology,” a long struggle with the problem of place. *Marrathon*’s tectonics, I suggest, grounds this struggle in a mythical historical reality. See Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) 1-20.

[33] *Marrathon* 150.

[34] Mignolo explains the relationship between geography and modern temporality with the fact that “it was during the eighteenth century and the European Enlightenment that people outside Europe began to be located in time. The secular idea of ‘primitives’ replaced that of the ‘infidels.’” See Walter D. Mignolo, “Enduring Enchantment (or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here),” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2002): 943.

[35] *Marrathon* 153.

[36] Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 7-8.

[37] *Marrathon* 155-156.

[38] 158.

[39] 157.

[40] Woman’s brother, Man, who comes behind her repeatedly sings “London Bridge is falling down...” but the two siblings speak to each other in French.

[41] *Marrathon* 161.

[42] Esteban Echeverría wrote the short story “El matadero” [The Slaughterhouse] (c. 1838) as an allegory that accused the violent dictatorship of General Juan Manuel de Rosas.

[43] We may anticipate a connection between the pastoral dream and right wing and fascist cultural politics.

[44] Moore 53.

[45] 124.

[46] Kinetic inertia can be related to the development of systems theory where a simulation of nature consists in defining organizations as “flexible, dynamic ‘organisms.’” This allows the performance management of organizations under the premise that, like “nature,” they have “natural” tendencies characterized by feedback loops. Jon McKenzie marks the use of systems theory as a paradigm shift in performance management, from “Machine Thinking to Systems Thinking.” See Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 69-73.

[47] It is worth noting here that “straddle” is a stock exchange term defined as “an options strategy in which the investor holds a position in both a call and put [option to buy and to sell] with the same strike and expiration date, paying both premiums. This strategy allows the investor to make a profit regardless of whether the price of the security goes up or down, assuming the stock price changes somewhat significantly.” The straddle intuitively makes sense if we understand the notions of “strike,” “expiration

date” and “premium” as equivalent abstractions in a compressed present of the capital cycle. See [\(accessed January 9, 2017\)](#)

[48] *Marrathon* 166.

[49] 166.

[50] From a Marxist perspective, “borrowed time” *produces* the time of reproduction of labor force which, in the present context, should be called Cheap Nature force.

[51] Moore 204.

[52] *Marrathon* 158.

[53] 235.

[54] *Marrathon* 172.

[55] Chakrabarty 183.

[56] *Marrathon* 181.

[57] For a discussion of Monti’s work as site of becoming, see Milton Loayza, “Planes of Immanence: Deleuzian Assemblages As a Mode of Thought In the Theatre of Ricardo Monti,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 30.2 (2016): 79-99.

[58] *Marrathon* 167.

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