

Prof. Lars Sætre
Comparative Literature
Dept. of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies (LLE)
University of Bergen
Sydnesplass 7
N-5007 Bergen, Norway
Ph. + 47 55582393 – Fax + 47 55584263 – Cell. + 47 95823232
E-mail: lars.saetre@lle.uib.no

Priv.: Birkebeinergaten 1
N-5003 Bergen, Norway
+ 47 55312216

Lars Sætre

"Duras's Space: *Agatha* (1981). A Problem Sketch"

TAS Prepublication Pool, Bergen, 2007

© Lars Sætre

The following document belongs to TAS's Prepublication Pool,* and may not be cited, copied or used in public without the prior written consent of its author.

* TAS is a designation for the international, inter-aesthetic research project

"Text, Action and Space (TAS):
Performative language and topographical patterns as converging areas
in modern drama, prose fiction and film.
An Inter-Disciplinary Approach to Aesthetic and Cultural Studies".

The project is based at the University of Bergen, Norway. Project leader is Professor Lars Sætre.
<http://www.hf.uib.no/i/lili/ansatte/Lars.htm>

Project participants are

Patrizia Lombardo (Geneva), Lars Sætre (Bergen), Svend Erik Larsen (Aarhus), Atle Kittang (Bergen) [Leader Group], J. Hillis Miller (Irvine), Erika Fischer-Lichte (Berlin), Angela Esterhammer (Zürich/London, W. Ontario), Tone Selboe (Oslo), Ragnhild Evang Reinton (Oslo), Frederik Tygstrup (Copenhagen), Niels Lehmann (Aarhus), Ingrid Nielsen (Bergen), Randi Koppen (Bergen), Margareth Hagen (Bergen), Asbjørn Grønstad (Bergen), Laurent Darbellay (Geneva), Jorunn Svensen Gjerden (Bergen), Anders Kristian Strand (Bergen), Merete Sæbø Torvanger (Bergen), Anemari Neple (Bergen), Anders M. Gullestad (Bergen).
Adm. officer: Marianne Eskeland (Bergen)

Lars Sætre

Duras's space: *Agatha* (1981)
A problem sketch

I

At first sight, Marguerite Duras's *Agatha* (1981) is an almost unreadable theatre text. In the process of work and reflexion, however, it opens up precisely for reading. The text is about He and She, an incestuously loving pair of a brother and a sister in their thirties. They have met for a final valediction in a now uninhabited family house dating back to their adolescence. The concrete setting is the topography of the Atlantic coast (Trouville in Normandy). The window lets in a "dim and misty" (3) winter light; the roar of the ocean can be heard outside. Travelling bags and overcoats are placed in different areas of a sparsely furnished drawing room. When speaking to each other, the characters lean on the pieces of furniture, and stand fixed and stiffened against the walls. This is from passion, as the narrator of the side texts formulates it (13, F19). Both characters are drawn to this meeting, to which She has asked him to come – He ignorant about anything else but that She loves him. Initially, it is her decision that this will be the terminal separation from her 4-5 years older brother. At dawn she is to fly across the Azores to the American continent in order to settle there with another, her new man.

It is important for her, in her own voice, "to tell you I was leaving" / "Je tenais à vous annoncer ce départ" (9, F14, my emph.). And it is important for her to do so face to face, by "looking you in the eye" / "face à vous, à vos yeux" (9, F14). Apparently, then, she at first fosters the notion of a conflation between *gaze* and *voice* and subjectivity. In the presence of her own, separate self, and opposite the presence of the other person, she wants to end an inadmissible relation. This, then, *could* have been, by Peter Szondi's drama definition, a "present, interpersonal event" (Szondi: 45). It is such a phenomenal intention of separation that she now endeavours to enact. What we are witnessing, *could* have been a dramatic reckoning, between self-present characters of action, in relation to an ethical (and dramatic) code. This might have brought the characters and us a form of existential insight.

II

But this is not what Duras's play is about. *Agatha* is something else than a more or less absolute drama. And it is about something else and larger than existential man. In an attempt to come to terms with it, I will shortly focus on what does seem to call for attention as the "action" of the

play: its complex and quite particular *figuration of space*, seen as a function of the play's *textual action*. But first I will try to motivate why this will be the focus of my reading.

In the play's only traditionally dramatic and existential core of action, that I just referred to, the He-character then begs her to remain and to prolong the time available for their bodies' reach to each other. He reminds her of their alternatives: solitude, pain and death, and boundless *jouissance*. In other words, He in fact thematises for their lives, on the one hand, a logics of absence, distance and substitution, and on the other, a logics of inexpressible, illimitable, encompassing cohesion. Now, a reason to focus on Duras's space is that the opposition, the paradox, between the alternative logics that the He-character presents here, seems to find its parallel in *Agatha's* complex figuration of space – as a paradox of separation and metaphoricity. That appears to be what the play is about, and I shall have more to say about it shortly. – She soon yields to his ideas about the problem aspects of the paradox, and does remain, at least till the end of the play, where she is still intent on leaving. However – on his query whether this then *will* be forever and final, She then replies ambiguously: "Yes. Until your arrival within the confines of the new continent where once more nothing else will happen except this love" (52, F66). Meanwhile, the play extends like a manifold dialogue, in which the established paradox – with reference to their lived lives – is spoken about in metaphorical circumlocutions and (endless) substitutions (story fragments of pain, passion and desire, violence, bodily unification, love, the ocean and other topographies, writing, reading, madness, delirious frenzy, etc.).

Now, a further reason to focus on Duras's space is another complication that soon emerges, and that remains in the text throughout: Starting at the initial core of traditional action, the characters themselves are figured on two different spatial horizons: Next to being individual characters, seeing, sensing, speaking and acting within a phenomenal space, they now as well appear as human bodies that *are being seen*, and that are exposed to a manifold perspectivism. In this space they appear as object bodies raving deliriously around. They *are being spoken* (ventriloquism), and are being *blindly acted upon*, and they as well *narrate blindly*. For example, just after the initially quoted passage of attempted separation, the side text inscribes a completely different relationship between consciousness, gaze and voice: The characters are "*Stiff, they are stiff, their eyes are closed, imbecile narrators of their passion*" / "*Raides, ils sont raides, les yeux fermés, récitant imbéciles de leur passion*" (13, F19) In this capacity they are also haunted by *the scream*; at intervals they scream together, blindly, in a voice that binds them, inseparably. – This textual phenomenon can be read as a separation of gaze and voice, as objects, from the characters' phenomenal presence as persons. But at the same time, the phenomenon has the

paradoxical effect of *fusing* "them"/the bodies *together*, as well. This is a second hint that the play might be about a more fundamental separation and fusion. Also the paradoxical status of gaze and voice finds a parallel in *Agatha*'s language of aesthetic form: particularly in its figuration of space. This is the actual "action" of the dramatic text. – The play, then, is not a "present, inter-personal event" (Szondi: 45), but a locutionary-performative action, a textual action that makes use of topographies to elaborate on a more fundamental, and paradoxical, spatiality. It is a theatre text of flat, prosaic-serial fragments arranged as repetitions and substitutions, as well as in frequent ruptures. But it also produces a special, almost anything-encompassing installation of localised spaces. However, the localised spaces are continuously being perforated, extended, deferred, as well as (anaclitically) grafted upon each other – in a largely serial play of cohesion and collation. In this manner *Agatha* is a paradoxical theatre text.

Scholars like Christine Bange (1987) and Nathalie Heinrich (1980) have referred to the effects of Duras's aesthetic textual action as "abgewiesene" and "zurückgewiesene Faszination": as a textual play critical of ideological traits in existential presence. Perhaps *Agatha* as well is a de-fascinating work of art, critical of the formation of ideology, whether human or aesthetic?

In what follows I will present an analytical sketch of the peculiar installation of space and spatial figures in Duras's dramatic text. My sketch is made against the theoretical backdrop of psychoanalytical reflection, which certainly also opens up for elements of interpretation in what I have to say. We now turn to what lies between the text's sparse traditional dramatic action at beginning and end (already accounted for). – First, a brief outline of the rest of the text.

III

The text takes the shape of a fragmented, narrative (story-producing) dialogue between He and She in the drawing room of the abandoned summer house. Inserted side texts furnish staging directions, but are as well narrative and interpreting voices and gazes. By the use of various pronominal positions/shifters ("one", "we", "us"), the side text gets involved in what takes place between He and She. But the shifters also perforate the stage space and open it up for the inclusion of narrator's and readers' space. Thus, a continuous localisation, de-localisation and re-localisation is – taking place. The dialogue is figured in a typically Duras'ian quizzing and challenging manner – as reciprocal urges and questions by each of them to the other, to tell and to find answers to what happened in vaguely remembered childhood and adolescence, in this and in other places they have been. – By its outer form, the structure of quizzing urges and replies in the dialogue appear Socratic. And as we shall see, *Agatha* alludes to Plato's *Symposium*.

Between the two compositional outer scenes, the narrative fragments in the dialogue have a ruptured chronology. We meet sister and brother in a great number of vaguely remembered situations from when they are 7 (She) and (He) 11, and all the way up till they met just 8 months ago. They seem aware that these memories are produced story fragments, a way of *writing*.

The images they produce arise as He and She force their bodies against the walls of the drawing room in the summer house, with eyes closed and in stiffened postures alternating with delirious trembling. Their words are intermingled with screams, their voices are superimposed, and the roar of the ocean and the dark light of the winter fog seep into the room. In this manner, they are seen by gazes and sounded by voices emanating from elsewhere, arising out of their story fragments. – The fragmented images show glimpses of them in the summer house, on the beach, bathing, swimming; we hear how they alternate at being struck by speechless fear for the other one, who – this a well-known Duras'ian motif – swims too far out into the high waves. In these narrated images they as well caress each other and lie on the beach, their bodies close when the danger is over, imploring each other never to do this any more.

Furthermore, the narrative dialogue figures them in a blend of violence and bliss in eroticised scenes in their summer house rooms. Here, brother and sister make love, the He-character's male friends sleep with her, She satisfies herself, and She – through the sound-penetrated wall – listens to Him making love to other girls in his room. – In between, in the dialogic situation, questions and comments are uttered relating to her new man – who on her part merely appears as a willed, forced attempt at deliverance from the binding love for her brother.

Further images in their fragmented dialogue narrative present them meandering along the river in the summer house region, where they also make love. They revisit a derelict hotel, where they, prior to this, have made love. Again they hear each other's sounds through ceiling, floor and walls: In this fragment (21, F29f), She is playing a Brahms waltz at the dining room grand piano, listening to his steps scanning her music upstairs. When He descends, She lets him take over at the keys. During his perfectionate playing, She moves towards the dining hall mirror. There, for several seconds, she loses the awareness of living: The music, its dance rhythm, the conjoined images of herself and him in her mirror refracted gaze, the light reflections, and further: her likeness to him and her melting together with him produced in the mirror image, the glimpse of water flowing together in the river (and running into the embracing ocean) – all of this presents itself to her as the (fractured) entanglement of their lives. And it encompasses her and them in a paradoxical illimitable totality, far beyond the monocular perspective of phenomenal consciousness.

Other dialogue narrated images figure sister and brother reading together (Balzac); they play instruments, make love; we meet them in corresponding situations in Gabon, in the colonies. Repeated references are made to the "nap time" of their parents and younger sisters and brothers: This is the repeated moment when any controlling gaze is removed, and when the two in the conflation of their sonorous screams let their bodies unite in the realisation of desire.

Gradually short fragments about their parents, particularly about mother, appear in the narrative dialogue, as well. Her figuration is utterly ambivalent. A fragment develops about her condemnation when their incestuous love was found out. Marriages for them with other partners are arranged, to hush it up. (In the dramatic present these marriages are long since ended.) However, the last narrative fragment shows a permissive mother on her deathbed, telling her daughter (51, F66): "My child, never leave him, that brother I give to you. [...] One day you'll have to tell him so, as I say it to you now, that he mustn't leave Agatha. [...] You have the good fortune to live an unalterable love, and one day to die from it."

IV

In spite of the cultural discontents embedded in the vaguely remembered and figured images in the narrative dialogue – of thematically repeated, perennial incest between sister and brother – Duras' theatre text is not primarily about incestuous sexuality. And not at all is it about any fascination with incest.

Agatha seems to be about a more basic discontent – or bliss: It seems to be about a more fundamental impurity/unchastity and paradox, figuring as *conditions of possibility* for human, existential life. To be sure, such basic conditions do affect a great number of areas in human life in the phenomenal world (not only love). Therefore, it seems important, in art and intellectual work, to try to circumscribe them. In my view, it is in the attempt to address such conditions of possibility that the persistent *focus on and the paradoxical aesthetic implementation of space and spatiality* play such a great role in *Agatha* (and in Duras at large).

In *Agatha* figuration and images are rendered ambiguously as metaphorical substitutions fused into an ever-expanding space, *and* as singular localised spaces that are literally split, fractured, separated and displaced from each other. This contradictory process installs an enigmatic topography, an ineffable¹ (but not voice- or gazeless) space. The splitting and fracturing of something that is endlessly fused may be interpreted as an equivalent of the process

¹ [ME. < MFr. < L. *ineffabilis* < *in-*, not + *effabilis*, utterable < *effari*, to speak out < *ex-*, out + *fari*, to speak, See FAME] 1. too overwhelming to be expressed or described in words; inexpressible [*ineffable* beauty] [--> the sublime! LS] 2. too awesome or sacred to be spoken [God's *ineffable* name]. – *Webster's*, s.719.

of basic separation on the boundary between the psychoanalytical Real and the Imaginary, in which separation there may appear traits of violence as well as of illimitable bliss (Lacan, Salecl, Dolar, Žižek: object voice, object gaze, partial objects). In this border zone, the voice that makes sound/speaks (me) is both the voice of another, and mine. In mature life, this may affect situations in which I spectrally hear and am sounded/spoken by a voice split from my own body, but which is paradoxically still a part of me. – Similarly, in this border zone, the gaze that sees me seeing, is both the gaze of another, and mine. In mature life, this may affect situations in which I spectrally have the vague notion of being seen by a gaze that I cannot perceive, and that is split from my own fenomenally grasping perspective, but which is paradoxically still a part of me.

These instances of a perforated space (split and fused), in early, pre-individual life, install basic conditions for human experience, knowledge and behaviour (also for the realisation of love). Understood as instances of space/spatiality they may return and haunt, but they may also be worked at, elaborated, for the purpose of possible insight. Aesthetically, performatively, Duras's theatre text seems to be working in the direction of such an ineffable space.

Pressure is continuously being exerted against the limits of this space; the limits are perforated, extended and transgressed, at the same time as those limits are being sustained as substitutional coordinates of space. It is a space, in other words, that is constantly being abandoned and that continually encompasses, embraces, surrounds. We might call it an *interfacial space*, or perhaps better: *an interstitial space, an interstice*.

As I will try to show in greater detail now –my sketch here has been inspired by a point made by Leslie Hill in her work on Duras – *Agatha installs space in images and figures of an ongoing dramatic process of literal separation and metaphorical fusion*.

V

Starting with *Agatha's* concretely shaped *opsis*, we observe that *the drawing room* of the abandoned Atlantic summer house is figured with a focus on its walls. The characters stand, backs pressed against the walls. Ecstatic and delirious, "imbecile narrators of their passion" (13, F19), screaming, attaining stiff postures, eyes closed – in this manner they exert a coercing *pressure* for transgression of the literal spatial limits of the room. It is seen by us; but prior to that, the room and the characters are seen in the perspective of *the side text's narrative voice*. As I have mentioned, by the use of shifters the narrator's voice enters the room, and opens it up towards us: We see and hear as *separated* and at a distance; however, the narrator and the readers/audience are also *comprised* by the room. – The separating limits of the drawing room are

perforated by the window, too, which opens the room up to and absorbs *the somber, nebulous winter light*. – As well, the space of the drawing room is transgressed by the penetrating roar of the Atlantic ocean. This, in turn, displaces the room's space to even another comprising element: *the ocean*. In addition, as we have heard, the ocean is included in narrative dialogue fragments of the bodily pleasures and the mortal dangers of life on the beach.

The *forms of address in the dialogue* represent ambivalently alternating speech, voice and enunciative positions, in the space between He and She. Here, the separating and distancing pronoun "vous" – between sister and brother! – is refracted against the more encompassing "tu".

In the narrative dialogue fragments the spatial limits of the drawing room are opened up towards the *bedrooms*: Their parents' bedroom is depicted as closed and separated, particularly during the afternoon nap. On the other hand, these rooms, too, are spatially perforated, as the erotic activities of He and She during "nap time" are registered by their parents. – Similarly, the screams of pain and bliss during intercourse and self-gratification transcend the walls between the rooms of He and She.

The narrated sexual activities take place at a number of different topographical locations, and so *a series of singularly separate places are connected*. The linkage of places both expand and rupture the space of the play. *Textually* there is a sequential progress of places ruptured from each other, but at the same time the locations are fused by metaphorical regress on the level of the *histoire*: Rupture and conflation are figured from drawing room to house, to beach, to river bank, to village hotel, and further to the colonies and to Africa, and towards the end: to another continent: America.

The speaking voices of the characters install a *spatiality of twin voices*: they are "fused"/"fondue" (11, F17) to each other, connected and superimposed. But at various point these voices are also separated from the characters' perceiving consciousnesses. They are spoken as object voices, by bodies. By the same token, the frequent screams that the characters utter are linked and superimposed on each other, but then again, are ruptured and disconnected from each other.

Another instance of fusion by border-crossing/limit perforation takes place in the ongoing process of *naming*. But what is metaphorically fused, are widely separated singular localities and phenomena. *Agatha*, we are told, is the She-character's name. She names herself for the first time (22, F30) after her ineffable experience of having seen – and of having been seen by – her mirror image in the hotel dining hall, and after having been united in the mirror with him during his playing of Brahms. But furthermore, "Agatha" is at the same time the name of the summer house, *Agatha Villa*, after whose name the parents have named their daughter (not the other way round).

Further, "Agatha" is in the dialogue used as denomination of the characters' *love*, as well as for the vague, indeterminable *topography* that their love is surrounded by and inscribed into. The characters as well use "Agatha" as a name for the (Atlantic) *ocean*, which embraces the river at whose banks the characters have been joined in acts of love (22, F31). But the same ocean, river, and love are fractured and separated in the *broken* images and gazes established by the mirror in the hotel dining hall.

I shall return to the paradoxically illimitable *and* concatenating performative installation of space by naming. – First, I will point out how also fragments of *images and phrases* in serial repetition perforate spatial limits, producing a Duras'ian flowspace between the drama *Agatha* and *other parts of Duras's œuvre*. Here, we meet a series of *recurring motifs* in Duras' production, such as *sexualized violence blended with limitless jouissance*; unfathomable *pain*; the phrase about a character as *the splendor of the beach* linked to madness/*folie* (33, F43; here used about Agatha, the She-character). There is the motif of the *beach itself* and the *dangerous waves* (accompanied by the characters' fear and death anxieties, as well as by erotic activities and images of encompassment, absorption and incorporation). Such motifs are abundant in the so-called India cycle, the Indochina cycle, as well as in the Europe and Atlantic cycle. – The same goes for the motif of the *scream*, of *music* (both of them sometimes used as (displaced) metaphors for erotic unification), and above all it goes for the complex motif of *swimming, waves and ocean*. This latter complex is an archetype in the imagery of Duras' works. It emerges in the middle of narrations about the endless bliss of love, and signals the ambivalence of illimitable embracement *and* at the same time unfathomable solitude and exposure to forces of death and nothingness.² – My point in referring to these scattered examples is, obviously, to accentuate that the ambivalent installation of space in Duras occurs even beyond the singular work of art, as a flowing over or overpass of singular image and phrase fragments. The limits of the individual text are pressured by perforation and displacement into the total *œuvre*: This is more than intertextuality; it is a paradoxically leaking, flowing space. – Also in this dimension, we can observe the peculiar *literal separation that undermines the metaphorical fusion* – since the gazes and voices producing the images and phrases in a sense become objects sounding and gazing at the characters in the individual text from outside.

However, it does not stop there. The installation of ambiguous, ineffable space by metaphorical fusion and literal separation extends beyond the literary text, and into *filmatisation*.

² In *Agatha* it is figured in variants in which both He and She swim into the waves far beyond the limits of negotiation with the mortal dangers of the ocean; the one remaining ashore screams and gestures, and at the

(Such doubling and multiplication of materials in a separate medium is frequent in Duras.) *Agatha*, the theatre text, has its doubles in Duras's films *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* (1981; directed by Duras, produced by Berthemont), and *L'Homme atlantique* (1981). On the one hand, this is a spatial expansion in the form of a fusion to a medial space beyond the literary text. On the other, it is a literal split between separated media with different techniques. Always intent at breaking the unity of image and figuration, to de-fascinate them, Duras works to install multiplication of and ruptures in her materials (she *herself* called her devices (Fr.) *rupture* and *multiplicateur*). This medial fusion *and* split in the spatial treatment of aesthetic materials has the effect of elaborating on the unifying aspects of gaze and voice, and of establishing them as *objects* separate from the individual character's consciousness: always another perspective, always another voice, critical of fascination. – Sometimes, border passages are as well opened up into yet another space: *Duras's own biographical life* and the circumstances of her own desire. This happens not only in Duras's literary texts, but also in her films. – For example, in the film *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* we find Yann Andrea, Duras's lover, in the male cast as He next to She, played by Bulle Ogier (b. Marie-France Thielland). In addition, it is Duras herself and Yann Andrea who in voice-over in the film read the dialogue from the theatre text *Agatha*, and in a peculiar mix of fusion and separation relate the dialogue to the filmatic images: literature, biographical life, film.

I would like to point to two aspects of the film *Agatha* that are of particular interest to us in the context of the theatre text (Leslie Hill). They relate to He and She in the hotel dining hall during his playing of Brahms. (This was shot at Hôtel des Roches noires in Trouville – which was also the location for *L'Homme atlantique*, *L'Amour*, and *La Femme du Gange*.) – First, the film's rerun of sequences, as well as its use of image-separating black/blank frames, indicate – as does the theatre text – the concern of underlining the fracturing, separating character of the gaze from any singularly represented spatiality. – Second, when the film figures the scene with his piano playing and She in front of the mirror, then the "ideological" power of the camera is broken: As the camera is panning, staying on her walking towards the mirror, then the camera gaze is broken up by the mirror, questioning the status of the objects: At first, one mirror reflects the images of both her, the camera and the crew; then all of this is reflected in another mirror as well, hanging on the opposite wall. This way, uncannily, the gaze is seen seeing (by another gaze) in an illimitable regress, and that which is seen, is viewed as installed in several renditions. On top of that, the frame of the window gets in conflict with the view of the semantically unifying

character's safe return to the shore a Duras'ian ceremonial of pleas and promises not to challenge the ocean and

aspect of the estuary and the ocean outside the room (the water being a metaphor for the fusion between He and She). In this manner, the spatial fusion is punctured, questioned, and doubted. – The film has the occasion, even more than the text, to cultivate and refine the separation of gazes and voices from depicted characters, but film and literary text do tug in the same direction in their installation of space: They open up perforating, fusing passages between characters and space, but at the same time they critically sever the fusions by underlining the distance and the separation between them. Again, we witness a border aesthetics of space, simultaneously working both to reveal and to create – by way of *literal separation and metaphorical fusion* (Leslie Hill).

Now paying a second visit and returning to *Agatha's handling of names*, I would like to point to *two further literary contexts* that *Agatha* opens up to for metaphorical fusion in the text's expanding space. In so doing, I would as well like to underline that these literary contexts (this time outside of Duras's own production) are and remain literally separate within the flat, sequential dimension of language and time. – First, *Plato*: Not only by its outer form of quizzing urges and replies in the attempt to attain knowledge does *Agatha* make us think of Plato. There is also the element when She relates to her brother that She in the face of her new lover does not name herself "Agatha", but *Diotima*. In that part of the *Symposium* (held to celebrate Agathon) where Socrates at the party retells the dialogue he had with his (leading/ guiding) teaching-mistress Diotima of Mantinea about the genealogy and the essence of love, we hear about Eros as a mediator between the human and the divine, between appearances and ideas of essence, all the way up to the level of the idea of the essence of beauty as eternal oneness. But we also hear about all the other versions of love, performatively presented by the other drinking partners – including Aristophanes's narration of the myth about the androgynous globular people who were crippled and chopped in half by Zeus, who thus turned love into a search for the other part for the recovery of people's primal nature. – It is impossible to fuse the *Symposium* and *Agatha* completely into each other within the same space (similarly, it is impossible to harmonise all the versions of love in the *Symposium*, and all those stagings, frames and figurative subtleties that the *Symposium* is made up of). But the ambiguous *perforation* of the limits between the two texts, *as well as the rupturing of the fusion* between them, still add to the theatre text a dimension which also makes it part of a philosophical problem sphere. – We should at the same time not disregard the fact of the name similarity between "Agatha" and the *tragedian Agathon* (whose victory is being celebrated in the *Symposium*). This channel between literary universes opens up for reflections on the modern tragic qualities of Duras's drama about He and She.

endanger love ever again, is repeated, over and over.

Then: Robert Musil: In a dialogic exchange between He and She about reading, She says that She has told her new lover that Agatha "was the name given to me by a lover named Ulrich Heimer" (49, F63, my emph.). In this manner, yet another metaphorical dimension of space is fused to Duras's theatre text: the relationship between *Agatha* and Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (1931, 1932, etc.). Musil's novel is about the modern condition, its rational spirit ("Genauigkeit"), and the attempts at challenging rationality by "Seele", mysticism, and "der andere Zustand". The incestuous relationship between Ulrich and Agathe (brother and sister) figure in Musil's novel as an experimental part of its subject matter. (By the way, also in Musil *Diotima* – Ermelina Tuzzi – figures, here as a parlour hostess.) Still, it is evident that Musil's Ulrich and Agathe – motif-wise, thematically, and bodily – are fused with elements in Duras's text, in which relationship similarities and parallels abound. Musil's Ulrich and Agathe and their alternative condition of melting together, souls and bodies, as well as the ecstatic transports of the characters, and the transgression of spatial limits that they are inscribed into – all of this reverberates with elements in the narrative dialogue and the aesthetic form of Duras's text. – There is also a nexus between the two works of art in that He and She of Duras's *Agatha* have read Musil in their childhood: They have recognised themselves as Musil's Ulrich and Agathe, and in their (erotic) actions. He and She have become "object embodiments" of Musil's characters by opening up a passage between two spatial universes. But this "being seen" and "constituted" by Musil's characters, as well points to a *separation* between the two pairs of characters. – Besides, the fusion between *Agatha* and Musil's novel can also be established biographically: Duras read Musil in 1980, and she wrote enthusiastically about the novel in 1982. She states that Musil's novel feels like a doubling or a repetition of subject matters, problems and narrative space elaboration within her own writing.³

VI

This brings me to my final topic connected to the question of Duras's space. It emerges from my sketch of *Agatha* (and from Duras's film subtitle – *les lectures illimitées*) that the writing of stories and, above all, reading, are widespread motifs in Duras's theatre text. (For example: "SHE: [...] You used to say in a playful way: 'These stories, we wrote them.'"; 49, F63.) The stories referred to here, are novels and narratives that sister and brother have read when they were young, but *also* the fragmented narratives that arise from their dialogue about their lives

³ *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, Jan. 1982: 16-31. – In Musil, Ulrich and Agathe are inspired from reading Martin Buber's *Extatische Konfessionen* (Leipzig, 1901/1921). And one might say that (part of) He and She's "inspiration" comes from reading Musil's novel.

(together) in the past. *Writing* stories, then, also expands its semantics into *living*, and *living the stories*. – A few words here about writing and reading against the backdrop of psychoanalysis that has informed this analytical sketch of expanding space in Duras:

Writing: The characters apparently have a sense that the stories they produce are constructed. And that their stories substitute for the conscious presence and clear memory of what has happened between them during their lives. At the same time, both express a sense that constructing stories, is a *necessity*: Only these fragmented stories can enable them to relate to the enigma they are faced with by way of the problematic relation they have to each other. – In my view, producing *fragmented* narratives (the equivalent of writing) the way it occurs in *Agatha* might be necessary for this reason: Aesthetic language has the force to elaborate on localized performatives. Duras's paradoxical poetics of space, of ever-expanding fusion and rupture, seems to be a strategy within a life tied to language. This poetics effects *possible* answers to existential enigmas. It brings forth, not the plenitude of understanding (quite the contrary). But it functions as a *reminder* of human conditions forged in pre-subjective, non-symbolic, "object" life. In bare life. *Between* the localised spaces proper (with closures), our conditions of violence and fear as well as of endless *jouissance* may return as spectres in the separating ruptures: As a non-phenomenal, invisible gaze that sees us seeing; and as a voice that sounds us in our bodies without phenomenal localization in a space of presence. Their space is comprising and separating at the same time. "In itself" this *paradoxical* space is ineffable, and can be addressed by way of rupturing metaphorical substitutions, for example in writing. Still, it installs conditions for desire, emotion, action and behaviour in symbolic, social and cultural life.

Reading: Another way to address and elaborate such a spatiality, is reading, the other "hub" motif in Duras's web of aesthetic strategy and necessity. Germane here seems to be reading in the special sense Duras is concerned with: affirmative reading of fragments that are immediately incomprehensible – that are then opened up towards each other in an ever-widening metaphorical space, but that "individually" still remain literally separated from each other. He and She of the theatre text attempt to practice this kind of reading, and at one point they are able to reflect upon it: He asks her: "HE. [That reading] you would call: limitless?", and She replies: "SHE. One might also say: personal" / "LUI. [Ces lectures-là] vous diriez: illimitées? ELLE. On pourrait dire aussi: personnelles" (49, F63). – "Limitless" and "personal": In these terms we find embedded – as an emblem – in the dialogue itself, a figure of the two extreme topographical positions, the two outermost possible localisations, of Duras's performatively elaborated spatial field: They correspond to the notions of a non-phenomenal and a phenomenal world. The limitless reading (and writing, and living), i.e. a completely open, "object", literal reading, without

coherent sense or meaning or reference, would be something taking place in *human* exteriority, where there are no localisation marks, coordinates or boundaries whatsoever. The personal reading (and writing, and living), i.e. a self-contained, subjective reading, closed-in or imploded upon itself, would be the most existentially and semantically oriented reading-for-understanding. It would be rule-ridden, and metaphorical in the narrow sense of this-standing-for-that, and it would be – “fictional”. It would be something taking place in complete human interiority, mono-perspectival, and surrounded by firm and unbreakable boundaries to an outside world. – These two kinds of extreme readings are no less than extreme performative variants of the creation of space, they are spacial enactments, they are performatively installed topographies. Also writing and reading are topographies connected to textual action. And it seems to me that *Agatha*, and perhaps Duras at large, has a tremendous concern for the cognitive (epistemological) potential in the aesthetically, performatively possible space between those two topographies of reading (and writing, and living). Precisely in the repeated juxtaposition of literal (“object”) separation and metaphorical fusion, – between exteriority and fenomenalism – in Duras on so many levels, in so many temporal and cultural zones, life forms, media and practices, lies, I think, a potential for knowledge (not “understanding”!), of the late modern human condition. It would be unfair to say that *Agatha* works to keep the extremes of limitless and of personal reading (and writing, and living) at a balance (so much other art and literature do that). Duras’s space tends to lean to the former.

Agatha is as well self-referential and culturally elaborating, and with its focus on writing and reading (as “living”) it thematises its own topographically performative aesthetics. Its focus in its aesthetic elaboration of writing and reading (as “living”), as we have seen, is on object gaze and object voice, and on the paradoxical ambiguity of literal “object bodies” in ever-extending, perforated, ruptured settings, and metaphorical fusion in semantics. I have commented upon this performative aesthetics of space on the levels of *opsis*, voices and pronominal shifters, Socratic dialogue form, narrative dialogue fragments, the stage/scenic room, other “narrated” rooms, the Atlantic topography, other “narrated” topographies, naming, image fragments and phrases in Duras’s *œuvre*, the theatre text and filmatisation (and their aesthetics), Duras’s biographical life, and other literary works like Plato’s *Symposium*, Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*.

In my reading, *Agatha*’s spatially performative strategies function in a de-personalising and de-fascinating manner; to me *Agatha* is a culturally and aesthetically counter-ideological work of art. At least against the psychoanalytical backdrop of my argument, *Agatha* raises basic questions pertaining to experience and understanding, behaviour and knowledge in the life world of late modern man. It is a reminder in late modernity of *basic* human conditions.

- Bange, Christine: *Die Zurückgewiesene Faszination. Zeit, Tod und Gedächtnis als Erfahrungskategorien bei Baudelaire, Benjamin und Marguerite Duras*, Weinheim/Basel, 1987
- Heinrich, Nathalie: "Aurélia Steiner – Marguerite Duras", in: *Cahiers du Cinema*, No. 306, Paris, January 1980, German transl. in: *Blatt 16 des 10. Internationalen Forums des Jungen Films, Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, Kino Arsenal* (Hrsg.), Berlin, 1980.
- Doane, Mary Ann: "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body", in: *October*, no. 17 (1981)
- Dolar, Mladen: "The Object Voice", in: Salecl, Renata, and Slavoj Žižek (ed.): *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, Durham og London: Duke UP, 1996, pp. 7-31
- Dolar, Mladen: "At First Sight", *ibid.*, pp. 129-153
- Dolar, Mladen: *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 2006
- Duras, Marguerite: *India Song. Texte – Théâtre – Film*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973
- Duras, Marguerite: *Agatha*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1981
- Duras, Marguerite: *Agatha; Savannah Bay. 2 plays by Marguerite Duras*, transl. Howard Limoli, Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1992
- Hill, Leslie: "Writing Sexual Relations", in: Knapp, Bettina L. (ed.): *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*, New York: Hall/Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998, pp. 159-177. [First printed in Hill, Leslie: *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp.. 137-158.]
- Knapp, Bettina L. (ed.): *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*, New York: Hall/Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998
- Kristeva, Julia: "The True-Real", in: Moi, Toril (ed.): *The Kristeva Reader*, New York: Columbia UP, 1986
- Lacan, Jacques: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, transl. Alan Sheridan, New York and London: Norton, 1981
- Laplanche, Jean: *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976
- Lukács, Georg: *Die Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik*, oppr. 1916/1920, Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand, 1974
- Reinton, Ragnhild Evang: *Marguerite Duras og lidenskapens språk*, Oslo: Novus Press, 2005
- Saemmer, Alexandra: *Duras et Musil. Drôle de couple? Drôle d'inceste?*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002
- Salecl, Renata, and Slavoj Žižek (red.): *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996
- Szondi, Peter: *Theory of the Modern Drama. A critical edition*, ed. and transl. Michael Hays, forew. Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Theory and History of Literature; 29), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987). (*Theorie des modernen Dramas (1880-1950)*, orig. 1956, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965.)
- Sætre, Lars: "Vendt bort, avventande. Om minnets fascinasjonskritiske *at* og *Savannah Bay* av Marguerite Duras", in: Andersen, Britt, og Knut Ove Eliassen (ed.): *Maskepi og maskerade*, Trondheim: Tapir, 2005, pp. 155-168.
- Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, Second College Edition, New York/Cleveland, 1970
- Willis, Sharon: *Marguerite Duras. Writing on the Body*, Urbana og Chicago: Univ. of Ill. Press, 1987
- Žižek, Slavoj: "'I Hear You with My Eyes'; or, The Invisible Master", in: Salecl, Renata, and Slavoj Žižek (ed.): *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, Durham og London: Duke UP, 1996, pp. 90-126
- Aarset, Hans Erik: *Smerten, harmen – og kunstens smil. Marguerite Duras*, Trondheim: Tapir, 2001