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"Powering Textual Action:
Duras's Space in *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches* (1980)"

TAS Prepublication Pool, Bergen, 2008

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I Research trajectory – Preliminaries

My analysis of Marguerite Duras's *Agatha* (1981) focuses on the theatre text as *textual action* basically concerned with the figuration of an ever-widening *paradoxical* space.[1] The argument of my analysis leans on a two-fold theoretical backdrop – on the one hand, psychoanalytically oriented contributions to the theory and the analysis of art, mind and culture (Jacques Lacan, Renata Salecl, Mladen Dolar, Slavoj Žižek), and, on the other, poststructuralist Duras scholarship (Christine Bange, Nathalie Heinich, Leslie Hill, Sharon Willis, Bettina Knapp).[2]

      Central to the psychoanalytical fabric in my approach are concepts referring to the primary separation between the Real and the Imaginary, in which separation there are traits of both violence and illimitable bliss. I refer to the border zone of "being-encompassed" and "being-separated", and to the emergence of two paradoxical partial objects: *the object voice*, and *the object gaze* – both of which are imbued with qualities of being "not mine" and "mine" at the same time. Those partial objects may spectrally haunt and figure in the mature life of the individual and in culture as well as in art: The voice that makes sound/speaks (me) is both the voice of another, and mine; I hear and am sounded/spoken by a voice split off from me, but which is still a part of my body. And the gaze that sees me seeing, is both the gaze of another and mine; I have the vague notion of being seen by a gaze that I cannot fully apperceive, that is split off from my own grasping perspective, but which is still a part of me (Lacan, Salecl, Dolar, Žižek). – My major interest in Duras criticism rests in the attempts made to circumscribe a "de-fascinating" or de-humanizing vein in the aesthetic language of her *œuvre* (Bange, referring to Heinich). Highly important are as well the rhetorico-psychoanalytical approaches to Duras's dominant paradoxical figuring of images, things and characters – as the processual installation of a contradictory space of *literal ("object") separation* and *metaphorical fusion* (Hill, Knapp, Willis).

      As textual action *Agatha* makes use of topographies and images to elaborate on a peculiar spatiality, more fundamental than the immediate topographies and images themselves. By way of extensions, graftings, repetitions and substitutions, this space is made up of frequent *ruptures*

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[1] Lars Sætre, "Duras's Space: *Agatha* (1981)", in: TAS Prepublication Pool, 2007.
[2] References in Bibliography.

between *as well as* of an encompassing *extension* of localized spaces (*Fr.* "rupture" *and* "multiplicateur").[3] Duras's space, then, figures as a perforated, leaking and flowing space, in a serial play of metaphorical cohesion and literally disruptive collation. It *includes* (into a phraseable, fused wholeness), and *discludes* (onto an enigmatic, ineffable otherness) at the same time.

My reading of *Agatha* traces this perforated space as textual action in the text's ever-expanding series of localized performatives and in the figuring of topographies and images: From the dramatized depiction of the fragmented dialogue between He and She, the text "acts on" to rendering the side-textual narrator's space, and to addressing the reader's/spectator's space, conflating *and* opposing different gazes and spatial perspectives. From the two characters as individuals in discourse, the text "acts on" to the literal separation of gazes and voices from those characters' bodies. Furthermore, from the *opsis* of the drawing room, the text installs *and* undermines the link to the nebulous Atlantic winter light outside. Discursively, in the narrator's comments and in narrative memory fragments in the characters' dialogue, the text extends across separated localities, from drawing room to bedrooms to beach, to river bank, to neighbouring village hotel. Further (in name-giving and in story fragments) the text includes – by a topographical linkage that is simultaneously ruptured – the spatial trajectory from the Atlantic Ocean, to Africa and the colonies, and to America. In fragmented local images, motifs, names and phrases (and screams!) the contradictory figuring movement extends to other parts of Duras's literary *œuvre*, but also to Duras's films, and to filmatizations of the film sets. Further, it flows over into Plato's *Symposium*, and from there to Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. From all of these localized spaces, the figuring movement of ever-expanding metaphorical fusion *and* literal ("object") rupture goes on to encompass-*and*-split off as well the spaces of artistic writing and the process of reading: These spaces are rendered as phenomena both disruptively "limitless" *and* "personal" (the latter is in the dramatized dialogue thematized as the semantically oriented, "encompassing" reading-for-understanding).

Duras's configuration of space as textual driving force actively works on signifiers and semantics by disrupting and recasting them, turning them into a performative paradox of textual action. It transpires as a space paradoxically extended between exteriority *and* fenomenalism, between the juxtaposition of serial, literal "object" separation *and* metaphorical fusion. My

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[3] With notions like "multiplicateur", "rupture" and "découpage" Duras herself often commented on this quality of her creative power, referring not only to drama and prose fiction, but also to film and to the filmatizations of shooting films on the sets – as well as to the inter-aesthetic relations between her art works in various genres and media. Cf. e.g. interviews conducted in the 1970's by Xavière Gauthier, Michelle Porte, and Susan Husserl-Kapit, as

analysis of this configuration of space concludes with a view of *Agatha* as an aesthetically and culturally counter-ideological work of art. In its de-personalizing and de-fascinating operations, it reminds late modernity of basic human conditions of possibility, of a *beyond*: So it does by questioning phenomenal life world categories of experience and understanding, behaviour and knowledge. Obliquely, it installs the possibility of alterity, as well as the dream of difference. The animating traits of this aesthetics produce an ever-expanding, encompassing figuring linearity, in which, on the other hand, images, motifs, phrases, partial objects, things and localized topographies are freed, by disruption and suspense, from conventional encodings. All of these entities are enabled to become visible and to speak their (hitherto) silent language as objects, now unfettered from a representative system of *human* action. This *textually* acting, *aesthetic* language offers representation to muted and unseen objects, images and spaces – to those of the *inter-dit* (those that are forbidden, inter-rupted, and which must speak in the interstice, or from outside or beyond).

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By extended analytical work (in the present chapter, a reading of Duras's *Véra Baxter*) informed by crucial categories in Jacques Rancière's reflections on the dynamics of aesthetic images and art, the investigation of Duras's configuration of space as animating force of textual action can be deepened and taken a step further. In the linkage of localized sensorial *things* set free, with a *linear phraseability* set free from conventional hierarchies and encodings, things are enabled to release other visibilities, and to obtain an altered, "unmuffled", phrasal sayability.

With reference to Rancière,[4] we may say that what is represented in Duras's textually acting space is unfettered from a *representative regime of art*. Art works of the representative regime are normatively structured with hierarchical importance rendered to narrative plot and character action, to wholeness, verisimilitude, and decorum – all of which elements in their intrinsic totality turn representative works into "fiction". In this regime, the sensorially visible (raw, material *pathos* and things) is suppressed in favour of the sayable (the elements of *mythos* and *logos*). In such works, affects are permitted only to the extent of the representatively delimited segment of reality (i.e. to the fictional plot/character/conflict-nexus). – Opposed to this, and clearly emulating with Duras's aesthetics of space and textual action, stands *the aesthetic regime of art*, the art works of which break with those normative rules: In representation within

documented by Sharon Willis in *Marguerite Duras. Writing on the Body*, Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987, pp. 15 *et passim*.

4 Central to this study are Jacques Rancière's *The Future of the Image*, London and New York, 2007; *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, London, 2007; and "Prologue: A Thwarted Fable", *Film Fables*, Oxford and New York, 2006, pp. 1-20.

the aesthetic regime, the elements, on the one hand, of *pathos/opsis/anagnorisis/katharsis*, and, on the other, of *mythos/logos* are set free. The two series of elements are made equivalent, and any phraseability is open to be used. Visibilities and affects are made equivalent with sayabilities and phrasing, which means that sensoriality and the apperceptible materiality of things may emanate (powerful) emotions and affect. Things and images are not muted or left to remain unseen. In Rancière's wording of the aesthetic regime as an unfettering equivalence of *pathos* and *logos*, *pathos* stands for a sensorial, material presence, for the visible, and for the ruptures and suspenses caused by the impact of that presence. On the other hand, under *logos* are subsumed the distancing, mediating, re-encoding, significatory dimensions of the work of art, the dimensions pertaining to the establishing of meaning and to the reading/readability of the work of art, as well as to the syntactic, "story"-molding of raw sensorial presence.

The link that my study establishes at this juncture between Duras's animating space and Rancière's analyses of aesthetic images and art seems to be as important as it seems obvious. It offers the possibility of a crucial, both deepened and broadened perspective on the qualitative layers and strands operative in Duras's peculiar installment and transformation of space as the animating force of textual action: Such layers and strands are e.g. the psychoanalytical, the affective, the sensorial, the material, the rhetorical, that of the language of aesthetic form, that of the image, the linguistic, the significatory, the semantic, the aesthetic, and that of the converging and conflating of genres and art forms, as well as of art and culture, to mention some. Some of these layers are established objects of analysis in Duras scholarship, some have so far been ignored and will have to be studied in closer detail in the time ahead.

In the present study, by way of Rancière, a closer look at the material, the affective, the image-producing and, not the least, the linguistic dimensions of Duras's textually animating space is aimed at, as a broadened embedding and an extension of a still psychoanalytically and poststructuralist informed approach. Textual action in Duras, energized by the paradoxical space of literal (object) separation *and* metaphorical fusion, comprises forces that emulate with the powers operative in what Rancière calls *the aesthetic sentence-image*. This image is the linkage of *the phrasal power of continuity* and *the imaging power of rupture*. The language of aesthetic sentence-images arises out of this linkage as textual action, and offers representation to muffled and unseen objects, images and spaces.[5]

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[5] Such a language is inscribed on the sensorial, material bodies of things, images and spaces, in two manners (thus constituting a double poetics): One, by working on an emotional, affective mutedness and invisibility of the first degree, meaning that textual action "liberates" existing objects into being open to *new* encodings in *aesthetic* images and space (working on, but also liberating creative dimensions of, what Rancière calls "silence 1"). Two, and more radically, the language of the sentence-image may be inscribed on the bodies of *any* things, images and spaces as the

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The conclusion – summarized above – to my analysis of how the textual action of *Agatha* elaborates a paradoxical, perforated space will resonate with analytical elements in my present reading of *Véra Baxter*.[6] That said, *Véra Baxter* is in the perspective of space and action (and perhaps as a work of art) even more complex than *Agatha* and *Savannah Bay* (two theatre texts certainly complex enough in themselves). In trying to get hold of this more complex structure to the relationship between space and textual action in *Véra Baxter*, there are two things that motivate to a special degree the reference to Rancière (and behind him: to Foucault) in this study.

One of them we have touched upon already: If Duras's space is extended between exteriority *and* phenomenalism, between object separation *and* metaphorical fusion, then such a poetics of space – as I have indicated – obviously emulates with (Foucault's and) Rancière's discourse-analytical focus (in the analyses of regimes of art) on the historically conditioned relationship between the sayable and visibilities, and between these and knowledge. A working hypothesis in the present study is that *Véra Baxter* in its complex structure carries elements of both a representative and an aesthetic regime of art. Leaning on Rancière might facilitate the investigation of elements of such regimes, as well as the relationships between them.

The second factor that motivates references to Rancière's work is tied in with the prevalence in Duras of the converging of genres, discourses, art forms and media. For one, *Véra Baxter* as well as *Savannah Bay* and *Agatha* converge with other versions in the same genre and/or another medium within Duras's *œuvre*. What will be a focus in the latter part of the present study, however, is to substantiate the hypothesis that the converging between genres,

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processual carriers of unheard-of, unseen, and *illimitable* sensorial agonies *and* blisses of sublimity, i.e. in an ineffable language of epistemological mystery (creatively working on what Rancière calls "silence 2").

Further descriptions by Rancière of the aesthetic sentence-image and of the language of textual action which it gives rise to (from *The Future of the Image, op.cit.*): "[The aesthetic sentence-image is] the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically – that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image. [...] The sentence-function is [...] that of linking. But the sentence [...] links in as much as it is what gives flesh. And this flesh of substance is, paradoxically, that of the great passivity of things without any rationale. For its part, the image has become the active, disruptive power of the leap – that of the change of regime between two sensory orders. The sentence-image is the union of these two functions. It is the unit that divides the chaotic force of the great parataxis into *phrasal power of continuity* and *imaging power of rupture*. [...] As sentence, it accommodates paratactic power by repelling the schizophrenic explosion. As image, with its disruptive force it repels the big sleep of indifferent triteness of the great communal [and commodified] intoxication of bodies. The sentence-image reins in the power of the great parataxis and stands in the way of its vanishing into schizophrenia or consensus" (46). "[...] The power of the sentence-image is thus extended between these two poles, dialectical and symbolic [montage]; between the clash that effects the division of systems of measurement and the analogy which gives shape to the great community; between the image that separates and the sentence which strives for continuous phrasing" (58).

[6] My work on Duras also includes a psychoanalytically informed analysis of *Savannah Bay* (1982) with a special focus on memory and dramatic form, published as "Vendt bort, avventande. Om minnets fascinasjonskritiske *at* og *Savannah Bay* av Marguerite Duras", in: Andersen, Britt, and Knut Ove Eliassen (eds.): *Maskepi og maskerade*, Trondheim: Tapir, 2005, pp. 155-168.

discourses, art forms and media – theatre text, prose, film and the art of painting – is particularly prominent in *Véra Baxter*. The relevance of Rancière in such an analysis is that I think the question of converging may be better posed when discussed as aspects connected to the upheaval of a representative regime of art and the appearance of an aesthetic regime. Such a perspective covers all relevant genres, art forms and media, also in relation to their historical conditions of possibility – from the 17th Century up till today, as Rancière sees them.[7]

II *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches*

The *Véra Baxter* version that I have selected is a theatre text (it is also referred to as a screenplay).[8] *Véra Baxter* figures in three French versions. It first appeared as a more conventional drama under the title *Suzanna Andler* (1968, published in Duras's *Théâtre II*[9]). Subsequently, it appeared as a film under the title *Baxter, Véra Baxter* (1977).[10] And, again rewritten and recirculated, now as theatre text, play, and screenplay, it was then published as *Véra Baxter ou Les Plages de l'Atlantique* in 1980.[11] – Leaving to the side the scrutiny of minute similarities and differences between the three versions, this study focuses on the relationship between space and textual action, as well as (towards the end) on questions pertaining to genre and media converging. My main reference is the English translation of the 1980 publication; other versions will be drawn in when natural in order to further substantiate my argument.

Now, these are some of the problems that need to be posed and analyzed: In what resides the animating force of, the driving energy in, the alignment of textual action and topography or space in *Véra Baxter*? Where, and how, can the link between space and textual action be located? As what, in what, is the link between textual action and space acted out? In what way, or how, might the abundance in *Véra Baxter* of converging between crucial elements at large in the

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[7] According to Rancière, all of these genres and media – drama, prose fiction, film, and the art of painting – seem to possess representational structures installed by way of an *aesthetic* rupture occurring historically further back in art and in the discourse on art than merely in the course of the last fifty or sixty years that are covered by a reasonable use of the term late modernity. If this is so, then the basis questions of the converging of genres and media in terms of topographies and textual, performative action may be better posed – when central elements of late modern art are simultaneoulsy discussed as aspects connected to the upheaval of the representative regime and the appearance of an aesthetic regime of art, e.g. in terms used by Jacques Rancière. He argues that the aesthetic regime was introduced in the prose fiction of the early 19th Century, and that it has, by way of the discourse on art in the 19th and 20th Centuries, important preconditions in the Classical age of (genre and family) painting already in the 17th Century.

[8] *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches*, in: *Drama Contemporary: France*, ed. and transl. (1985) Philippa Wehle, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, pp. 19-41. This is a translation of the Albatros edition and publication from 1980; cf. footnote 11.

[9] Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

[10] Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA), 1977. Directed by Marguerite Duras. With Claudine Gabay, Noëlle Chatelet, Delphine Seyrig, Gérard Depardieu and others, and with Duras herself as Narrator (voice-over).

[11] *Véra Baxter ou Les Plages de l'Atlantique*, Paris: Albatros, 1980. To abbreviate I refer to it by and large as *Véra Baxter*.

genres, art forms and media of theatre text, prose fiction, film, and painting be related to the identification of the animating force in the space/textual action-nexus? These, then, are some of the basis questions reflected upon and inflected in my following sketch of a reading of *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches* (1980).

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An almost mid-life lady, filled with desire, but also with care; mother of three, faithful as mother and wife by her own self-esteem — and a thoroughly *un*faithful, wealthy, travelling and gambling-addicted husband: Those are some of the character traits of the *personae* in dramatic conflict in this theatre text, which — to be Duras — at a quick glance might seem unusually trivial, and as if collected from the excessively quotidian.

There are other conflict relations, as well. One is between Véra and The Stranger – a man who finally makes her try to formulate a usable story of her plight, and to reshape something of an identity. – Another conflict relation is between Monique Combès and Michel Cayre, and a third between them and Véra. Monique is one of Véra's husband's lovers; Michel is the man whom the husband (Jean) has paid to make Véra take and stay in a rented, Atlantic Coast summer house during the season. As well, the husband has paid Michel to make love to Véra (in order, as the dialogue speculates, for the husband to regain love for his wife). Both Monique and Michel, in other words, are in Jean Baxter's service in the deception of Véra. – Among the immediate themes of this five-scene play, then, are desire and a wrecked marriage, truth and deception, faithful- and unfaithfulness, as well as faith as personal belief and commitment, next to lies and untruthfulness.

The play certainly possesses rudiments of plotted action; these are to be found in the framing of Véra, and in the *anagnorisis*-rudiments of her identity remake. – However, at the same time the plot-and-character unit has a lot missing to it, and the themes of limitless desire and death, as well as of truthfulness and lies, are disseminated onto and connected to *all* the characters. They are all, it turns out, imbued with desire's, love's and lying's ambivalences and contradictions, just as Véra is. Although a very sympathetically disposed interpretation *might* find Véra (and Monique and Michel) underway to a better life in the end (an end which, even so, is very open), such a narratively oriented reading would leave out the greater part of the text.

That greater part, namely, disrupts the plotted *mythos*, and so transgresses a representative regime of art. That greater part of the theatre text are images and things in space formations, and those images and things are not sayable as integral elements in the rudiments of character action that may be identified. The central movement of the play clearly belongs to those images and things in space formations. That movement is connected to the peculiar way in which those

objects are rendered as visibilities in spaces, and are made sayable in the text. It seems, then, as if the animating force of the play rather belongs to an aesthetic regime of art. Images, objects and spaces seem to be freed out and unhinged from the *mythos*/character-bond. It appears they are at work to find a phrasing for their own sensorial or material qualities *outside* the narrative story-line, in order to "speak" their own "muffled" language. They need to be accounted for accordingly.

III First spatial segment

First and foremost, *Véra Baxter* is a complex arrangement of images, things and spaces. The reader of the text is struck and in his reading arrested by three spatial segments – that are moving next to, in between, and onto one another in the flow of the text. Let me account for them one by one.

The first spatial segment enables us to see how space certainly *may* function at the service of the narrative line of the story. There are hints about how Véra is framed, and about the plotting to make her decide to take a summer house and a lover, both of which have in effect already been hired for her. These few rudiments of emplotment *could* be said to lead up to the formation of a personal insight in Véra, and to her possible identity remake at the end (where, when leaving the summer house, it is not all all clear what Véra will do, whether she and The Stranger will venture on a mutual relationship, whether she returns to her husband, and so forth). This story-line of character action, it must be stated, is extremely vague in the play, but it *is* there. As a rudiment aligned with the first identifiable spatial segment in *Véra Baxter* this story-line is fused to a tripartite structure of space, where, on the one hand, there is *a stable, unchangeable and impenetrable space*, and, on the other, its opposite: *a space without borders*. In the middle, the play figures *a space of ambivalence, of indecision, and of possible change*.

When read in this way, the play figures Véra's husband Jean Baxter in the stable, impenetrable space. He speaks, we are told, with a voice "*emerging from a kind of thick silence reminiscent of the thick silence of a soundproof room*" (30). He is characterized by the others as unchangeable. His life is at one with the rules of circulation of the commodity and consumer world. He is stuck in his inability to love, to show empathy and emotion. He is an automaton of the world of money and sex. – Likewise, descriptions and self-characterizations place the *former* Véra in a structurally similar space: Her commitment and faithfulness know no exteriority. These characters know nothing but the one thing that they are good at. They inhabit a space of sheer identity and sameness.

At the other extreme lies the space without borders, that the *present* Véra is exposed to. This space is characterized by the boundlessness of the Atlantic Ocean and its beaches, the open French windows of the huge summer house, the largeness of the garden and the surrounding darkness that it extends into, the blurring effects on her of alcohol, the sounds and cries of invisible surrounding parties, and so on.

In between these thematized spaces figures a space of possible change – exposed to both boundlessness and impenetrability. In this topography the possible identity remake of Véra, as well as of her plotters Monique and Michel, *might* be said to be going on. Above all, this space is figured in Véra's discourse. Her speech is inconsistent and ambivalent. It has recourse to truthfulness as well as to commitments to children and husband. But her speech also favours the effects of drink and dissolution, of the blurring of time orientation, and she admits to lies and deceptions: It turns out that also Véra has indulged in personal affairs with lovers (whether initially framed to do so, or not). Into this middle space The Stranger enters, too, with his double standard of rational language and aroused desire for Véra. He tries to elicit a story from Véra in an attempt to have her re-orient herself through the formulation of words and so to provide the possibility for her to re-establish an identity; however, he is at the same time drawn to her by a desire which he finds hard to control. He, the onlooker – who initially is introduced in the side-text as the "*privileged observer of the story*" (23) – seems drawn into the same, middle space of processual ambivalence.

These three space dimensions, then (unchangeably impenetrable; borderless; and ambivalent), constitute the first spatial segment of *Véra Baxter*. This segment figures the plot-related and theme-embedded spatiality of the play, and it functions at the service of narrative story and character conflicts. It is the space of a possible remake of identity in the life-world. It is established in terms of mimetic representation of plot and characters, and is mimetically recognizable. Although it can be identified mereley as a rudimentary spatial grid in the text of *Véra Baxter*, it does figure, and it stands in the service of the normative requirements pertaining to representative art. It finds its motivating and driving force in character action and narrativity. In this first spatial segment, then, images and objects do not speak or make themselves visible in a sensorial and material objectness of their own. Being subsumed under the hierarchical prevalence of narrative plot and character action, wholeness, verisimilitude, and even theatrical decorum (all of which in their intrisic totality produce an artistic fiction), here they function merely as "props".

IV Second spatial segment

The operating mode of *Véra Baxter*'s two other spatial segments is quite different. There, the sensorial quality of objects and images certainly comes to bear – as the emergence of *another* space, obliquely beyond that of the first segment.

Before I proceed to analytical examples of the second and the third spatial segment in *Véra Baxter*, a general introduction may provide motivation for and facilitate the approach. In both of these segments, the images and objects uncanningly demand attention to their own sensorial visibility. They make us feel that we have seen them before, at the same time as we feel that they are separated from the characters and us, as well as from a mimetically recognizable life-world. The reader starts wondering: What is this? Where is this? And then starts asking: Could perhaps not this also be related to me; cannot this space also be mine?

In the emergence of this kind of spatiality, objects and images *act* in and on language in textuality. They act in a way akin to the manner in which several modern thinkers have indicated that the aesthetic image operates, *viz.* by way of a double poetics (Sartre, Bachelard, Blanchot): On the one hand, the image negates the world, takes leave of the thing as we know it; this negation is animating, it gives life to an imaginary space which is distanced from the life-world, and this space can be formulated in language. On the other hand, this image is presenced to me, materially, sensorially, affectively, emotionally, but it comes near me merely as a reduplication or repetition (*de-doublement*) of *itself*, in ruptures. It is separated from my life-world, and makes itself, and the space that it engenders, seen or heard in my life-world merely by impact, and so it challenges and traverses language's phrasal power.

Some kind of double negation is at play, two kinds of powers, as *textual* action. The image challenges and activates *the phrasal power of continuity*, while it at the same time negates my world by *its imaging power of rupture* (Rancière). This is a paradox in aesthetic art that is made possible by and comes into being as a paradox by the equality conceded to and established between *pathos* and *logos*, between *opsis* and *mythos*. At the same time this operative paradox is what makes possible a redistribution of the sensible (Rancière), and of what can be made sensible. The clash between *pathos* and *logos* may reorganize the structure of what can be seen, and of what can be said. Something different may come near me to be seen, and may be apperceived as working to be heard speak, to be phrased.

This, by the way, is the kind of textual action of things, objects and images in space that I found in Duras's *Agatha*, where textual action is empowered by the ongoing production of a perforated, leaking, flowing space. This space keeps making metaphorical fusion between objects – objects that, on the other hand, are materially and sensorially presenced only by their literal

separation from each other, by ruptures: They are there merely as themselves, as things. – The same phenomenon can be apperceived and analyzed also in the second spatial segment of Duras's theatre text *Véra Baxter*. I will now proceed to giving some examples of this second spatial segment.

The *opsis* of the play *Véra Baxter* consists of two separated object locations: the hotel bar (two first scenes), and the summer mansion "The Collonades" (three last scenes). However, the *one* leaks into the other by way of heavy traffic between them: Characters sit in one location waiting for those of the other; in one location the other one is talked about; and the side-text narrator tells us that characters move between the two. So far, this is still a simple structure. But the perforation of the localities into one another occurs by way of their particular material elements. These elements figure in *both* locations: alcohol, emptiness, darkness, luxuriousness, the sound of dancing, music, laughter and shouts. – Now, *this* is already a representational sideways slide (to the margins of *diegesis*), it is a distancing side shot (away from the existential, phenomenally recognizable character action as well as from the space – the first spatial segment – that it is aligned with). This opens up an imaginary/metaphorical space. The side shot presences the *objects* by reduplicating them sensorially, as themselves, over and over. On the one hand, then: the fusion of two rooms, but on the other: the foregrounding of the literal separation from the rooms of the objects that are found in them. The space *fusion* comes into being by a *rupture*: the presencing impact of the sensorial elements. Quite apart from the story-line of character action, this *textual* action is produced by objects and images that make themselves free by breaking away as an independent, emerging space. The textual action becomes a sensorially inter-rupted "story".

This fused-but-suspended space extends as well into the topography of mediation: The reader's/spectator's perspective on localities, characters and dialogue is interrupted, all the way through the play, by an unusually active narrator's or commentator's perspective in the numerous side-texts. He speaks interpretatively and addresses the playing *as well as* us. Thus, reader's gaze is fused to narrator's gaze. However, what is linked in this series, is at the same time refracted and disrupted, and foregrounds the material presence of the gazes *as gazes*. – This spatial trajectory, by ruptured linkage, from the play's *opsis* to the reader's gaze to the narrator's gaze, extends even further: In the side-text it includes as well The Stranger, who is named "*the privileged observer of the story*" (23). In the conversations, this Stranger picks up, comments upon and elaborates on the thematic problems of desire, power, untruthfulness, dissolution and death wishes, as well as on the different positions in the framing and plotting game that Monique and Michel (and Jean) are directing at Véra. A quick and superficial glance might tell the reader

that among the characters The Stranger is the knowledgeable consciousness of the play, the one who – somehow – will set things right.

However, this turns out not to be so and is not what happens (on the level of character action in the play). This Stranger is drawn into precisely the same thematic problem field; he gets just as affected by and engulfed in it as a character. What is foregrounded, therefore, is not his phenomenal/existential "understanding" or any possible ability on his part to "solve", ameliorate, or even to redeem and mediate for reflection the problems of the play's thematics. What is foregrounded is something quite different and oblique – his "privileged gaze" *as gaze*: His gaze *breaks away* from "content" or insight, and it stands forth in its mere material quality as a gaze onto the other gazes (he sees them seeing). At the same time, the reader and the narrator see *him* seeing, and he sees *us* seeing. In other words, the gazes break away as a space of gaze-ness. In addition, a further slide foregrounds the acting *characters'* gazes; in a series of instances side-text and dialogue foreground *how* they are seeing, not the "contents" of what they see.

In other words, the sensorial qualities of localities extend into and fuse with the objectness of gazes, and *vice versa*, thus creating a space of imagination that is freed out and breaks away from encoded signification, and which is presenced and opened to be phrased anew by the power of continuity. *In* the localities and *in* the gazes the focus of interest is obliquely shifted onto their room-ness, their seeing-ness, and this separates them literally, by affective impact, from the rooms and the sights. Importance is attached not to signification and meaning, but to sensorial materiality. In the space that we (so far) have seen arising out of the extension from and fusion of localities to gazes, the object-ness of the things that figure in the linkage is highlighted: darkness, emptiness, luxure, intoxication, sounds, cries; and gazes focusing, widening out, seeing, being seen seeing. An unusual, oblique linkage occur – of material entities that are literally separate as well as broken apart from everyday, phenomenal use, encoded signification and meaning. This actually occurs – happens – as textual action. And this action is powered by the sensorial installation of this segment of spatiality, which allows for something distant to emerge, spectrally, into presence.

This second spatiality of *Véra Baxter*, furthermore, extends as well to other regions. Linked to this ever-widening space is the movement into cities, villages, landscapes and continents. As device this movement is trivial. It is the reference, in the characters' dialogue lines, to other places where Jean – and Véra – have eloped with their lovers, and where they might be going with them in the future. Still, it is the sensorial qualities of these locations that break away and stand forth as a spatially fused visibility. The space-extending movement separates out and links the materialities of Thionville-en-mêr (where the play is set) with those of

– Paris, Chantilly, Bordeau, Arcanges, Venice, the Balearic Islands, Cannes, and on to the Atlantic beaches, and to California. An ever-widening spatiality (obliquely away from the character/story-nexus) emerges by the power of fusion and phrasing, into continuity. The stress is on the visibilities of these landscapes and places – the desertness, dryness and vastness of California, the weather of Chantilly, the heat of Cannes, and the coldness and darkness of the Atlantic Ocean and its beaches. – This fusion then goes on, now into Duras's *œuvre*, where the same or similar torn-out objects and their linkages, connect the *Véra Baxter*-text to the topography of Duras's whole lifework of living, art works, agony and bliss. – The sensorial impact of the space emerging out of the fusion of these separated object-images turn the qoutidian, tellable trivialities of the phenomenal life-world – of faith and unfaithfulness, truths and lies – into parentheses. The vastness of the impact of this materiality plays a central textual role.

Also names play an important role and are included in the paradoxical, flowing extension of this emerging space. Let me first comment on the name of the title character: Véra Baxter. Etymologically, the name-image of Véra carries the archaeological-sensorial elements of faith/faithfulness, truth, care and identity stability. A person named Véra sees, and (supposedly) believes what she sees. Now, these elements are in the image of the character's *full* name fused, by rupture, to those of their counterpart – the name-image of Baxter. "Baxter", quite contrary to "Véra", carries the archaeological-sensorial elements of the folk etymology of the backer's, or the baker's, i.e. the baker's child. The folk etymological elements of Baxter, then, are the illegimitate one, the one whose identity is genetically unaccounted for, the one who is without stable roots. The name "Baxter" speaks of one being exterior to any fixation of a stable, personal identity, the one who is seen without quite being seen, or who sees without quite seeing (who she is). The name-image (in full) of "Véra Baxter", then, carries the paradoxical sensorial qualities of the one who knows herself *and* of the one who does not quite know herself.

Furthermore, in the obliquely emerging space of materiality in the play the name elements extend to include the names in the titles of the two other works in this Duras "cycle": the film (1977) and the first play (1968). The film title figures a series of name images – *Baxter, Véra Baxter*. Foregrounded first in that title, is the archaeological quality of "Baxter" as the illegitimate, the one unaccounted for, the disrupted, the one who does not know herself, the one being-seen-without- herself-seeing. The series then proceeds, by rupture, to foreground the elements of "Véra", the one with faith, who sees and believes what she sees. The series then ends, by way of another rupture, by a material switch back to the name-image "Baxter": the one who is seen (by another gaze) without herself seeing that gaze. In this manner the sensorial rupture in the

name-image is underlined in the film title: *Baxter, Véra Baxter*, which shifts back and forth between the archaeological-sensorial qualities of the name-image.[12]

The name-image of the title of and the main character in the first play of the cycle, *Suzanna Andler*, has a similar sensorial archaeology: "Suzanna" ("lily"), the archaeology of which name goes back to an anecdote in the Book of Daniel and extends through the entire history of art, carries the same aspects that we find in "Véra", of truth-steadfastness-faith in the world one sees.[13] – On the other hand, and in similar fashion to "Baxter", the name-image of Andler has the material archaeological quality of being seen (by another gaze) without oneself seeing that gaze. It plays on "Antler" (the deer-stag's horns), which derives from and literally means *ante ocularis*. Andler/Antler, in other words, obliquely speaks of that which resides before or in front of the eyes, that which cannot – or can only hardly – be seen by them, but can be seen by another's gaze. – Also the "full" name-image of Suzanna Andler, then, is connected to the emerging second spatiality that I am analyzing here. That name-image paradoxically fuses archaeological sensoria that are literally disrupting within the same fusion. – Against this background we now also better realize how the play, in its obliquely emerging material-sensorial spatiality, can link the spaces of localities and landscapes ("that which is seen") to the complex topography of gazes ("that which is supposed to see").

In sum, in *Véra Baxter*'s second spatial segment, localities are fused to gazes, which are again fused to more widely scattered landscapes and to other real-life places, as well as to name-images of the central character of the cycle of art works, and, again, by way of those names, to other art works by Duras and others. However, it is a fusion which is established by material

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[12] The one who has a stable, self-reliant outlook on the world, and the one who cannot see but is seen seeing: this interrupted linkage back-and-forth in the name-image foregrounds precisely the textual operations of the second spatiality that we are discussing – the operations in which locality topographies extend into gaze topographies and further into other place topographies, by way of their sensorial, material elements: The constitution of topographies we have faith in, and the constitution of the topographies of how we *apperceive* what we have faith in – these constitutions are questioned in the fusion of localities with gazes into an ever-extending imaginary space. These constitutions are questioned because, in this imaginary space, the singular sensorial elements are foregrounded by disruptions in the fusion (the locality-ness, the gaze-ness). Thus, the materiality of localities and gazes in this imaginary space is freed to be seen and to be heard, and perhaps eventually, even to mean differently. The singular and separated materialities of this ever-extending space is freed for apperception (as locality-ness, as gaze-ness), freed to be constituted as different meaning hereafter. An emerging space of new visibilities and sayabilities is made possible, by redistributing the sensorial traits of what human space is made up of, and of what human apperception is made up of.

[13] The archaeology of the name Suzanna goes back to an anecdote in the (apocryphic) Book of Daniel, in which virtuous and faithful Suzanna, who bathes naked, is accosted by two elders-as-voyeurs, who threaten to claim that she was making love to a young man unless she makes love to them. The young man Daniel interferes, and saves her from death. In "Suzanna", the sensorial element of steadfastness, honesty and faith in and to what one sees and what one is rooted in, again figures. Examples of the weight which this element in the name Suzanna carries in the history of art extend e.g. from a painting by Francesco Hayes (about 1500), into a poem by Steven Wallace ("Peter Quince at the Clavier"), into music by Dominique Argents (US) and Gerald Berg (Can.). Händel wrote the oratorio *Susanna* about these qualities in ancient Suzanna, and Carlisle Floyd (US) has rendered them in the opera *Susannah*.

disruptions, by literal, sensorial object separations. These objects and images merely keep redoubling and multiplying themselves *as nothing but themselves*. It is as if they were saying: we make ourselves visible and sayable by freeing out the sensoriality embedded in our archaeology. This second spatiality, then, animates and functions as a generator of textual action, in that it opens up for something to be seen and to be heard by performative impact – *not* by *logos*, *mythos* or narrative story-line. It is a paradoxical spatiality; it is a space that animates the phrasal power of continuity by the imaging power of affective, performative breaks, suspensions and ruptures. In this way, a redistribution of the sensible, of visibility and of sayability, and thereby of knowledge, is made possible by this second spatial segment.

V Third spatial segment

Leaning on Jacques Rancière's theory of image and space formation as *sentence-images* in art of the aesthetic regime, is helpful in the investigation of how images create spatial structures which generate textual action in *Véra Baxter*. Textual action seems to be driven by disruptions affected by aesthetic images concatenated as spatial structures. Their *imaging power of rupture* frees subdued sensorial, material elements from rule-ridden representation. Thus, representation is turned into wonder, affect, pathos and emotion as performative impacts occurring in writing (as well as in reading and interpretation) under the *phrasal power of continuity*. This concept of the aesthetic image and space basically belongs to a poetics of linguistic orientation. It understands the animating work of images and objects in space as a textual action which joins a *combinatorics* with the *affects of the impact of suspense and ruptures*. Rancière's theory is helpful, then, because it accounts for the emergence, installation and transformations of space as textual action. It is helpful also because its basic linguistic orientation actually enables it to account for the textual animating force of images emerging as space – not only in literature and theatre, but also in a variety of other art forms, media and genres. In this respect it is an inter-aesthetic theory, and so, importantly, it as well opens up for the identification of and the study of elements of converging in, and between, art forms and genres.

So far, and in relation to my initial basis questions, I have in rudiments identified the dynamics of aesthetic images and space as driving forces of textual action (as well as their differences from images and space as dominated by character-action and story-line, to the limited extent such elements of a representative art regime do figure in *Véra Baxter* (cf. "III First spatial segment", above)). Let me in this section substantiate this dynamics in a reading of what I delimit as *Véra Baxter*'s third spatial segment. I will as well attempt to formulate some comments relating to the final basis question that I posed initially – how phenomena of converging in *Véra*

Baxter can be related to the identification of the animating force in the space/textual action-nexus.

The third spatial segment of *Véra Baxter* is definitely the most radical one in the play. Typologically (or structurally), however, it is clearly of the same kind as the second spatial segment, that we have just looked into. The motivation for sorting out a third spatiality, though, is – first – its force of impact, its "weight" in the text, i.e. the sensorial prevalence of the images and things which make it up. Second, the images at work to establish this space and to make it emerge, mostly belong to the world of natural phenomena. Finally, images of this spatiality are those that most clearly contribute to making *Véra Baxter*'s textual action converge with other genres, art forms and media. – We will proceed to some examples.

The turbulence: Throughout the play, both side characters as well as Véra and Jean, in their discussions keep searching for reasons why they lead a life of deception and lies, why they are enmeshed in framing and plotting, why their desires cannot be curbed, and why such a life causes pain to the point of the wish for death and demise. Interspersed into these exchanges, the text repeats and multiplies, from beginning to end, *the powerful image of turbulence*. The image merely keeps reduplicating *itself*, and the linkage of the presences of this reduplicated thing-image makes an ineffable space emerge. This emerging space is modulated in a number of ways: It consists of sounds coming and going (music, laughter, screams; 21, 26, 29, 39); it figures as gusts of air, as a storm, and as wind (22, 35); it is presenced as vibrations, and as light coming and waning (36, 41). Quite importantly, the turbulence image is presented in the text as an entity coming from an outside (or more precisely: obliquely from the side) and trying to establish itself as a space in the inside phenomenal world, to which it represents a critical threat: "([*It is*] *coming and going, as if trying to enter, to find a place somewhere: a strange threatening presence, a potential contradiction*)" (22). Also quite importantly, the movement of this powerful thing to become a space is accompanied by another impact of the same image: Its disruption of the immediate life-world has the quality of something which is trying to become sayable, to utter itself, as a challenging, critical, and rectifying contradiction: "(*The outside turbulence grows more audible, harsh, ironic, it is commenting ironically on the "truth" in question*)" (22).

The multiplied turbulence *thing*, then, undertakes an operation, in which two aspects stand forth: First, it figures as an imaging power of rupture, the impact of which installs a space in *Véra Baxter*; this power equals a sensorial, material visibility which is previously unknown. Second, the suspenses made by the sheer impacts of this imaging power of the thing, is at the same time acting to become phrasable, to become sayable, to become a speech and a language, out of which something could be re-formulated as "stories", as *other* stories. The textual phenomenon at hand

is a striking example of how the insisting rupturing and phrasal power of the aesthetic image installs space as sentence-image. That is to say, how space and its images do create animation and movement, and can be a textual driving force in a work of art. Space and its images become textual action when they call upon the phrasal power of continuity: Textual action in this case, comes into being when the image, the object, performs impacts which search for phrasing, for formulation, to become a different, new "story". Textual action, then, is a joining together of the *sensorial impacts of suspense and rupture from images in a space*, with *a phrasal combinatorics*.

Furthermore, the turbulence complex is also a telling example of how a phenomenon of generic converging (in this case the prosaic, novelistic "flatness" of dedramatized representation) installs itself – in the theatre text – as a corollary precisely to the textually powering engine of the rupturing and rephrasing qualities in the space-engendering image. We can observe in this example, namely, how the images and the emerging space that they work to install, on the one hand slow down the progress of character action to the advantage of a hightened stress on durative textual action (even marked in the narrator's side-text as: *"Feeling of great slowness"*, 33). The intruding space as well spills over into the dialogue, which gives increasing attention to the strangeness of the emerging space, and defocuses from the recognizable conflicts and themes of the character action. In addition, and on the other hand, the installment of an emerging space and its search for textual phrasing definitely introduce an obliqueness in the work of the text. The textual action turns its representative focus away from a conflict-action-plot-oriented regime, and onto the action of the text which consequently figures as a slow, dedramatized representation.

There are several other such powerful thing-images in *Véra Baxter*, and they seem to operate in the same way. Above all they dedramatize representation, and achieve attention (also in the dialogue) as strangeness and mystery. Towards the end a more detailed survey will be given of the various representational modes subsumed under the phenomenon of dedramatization in this (dramatic) theatre text – all of which by extensive converging inflect *Véra Baxter* towards other genres and art forms (prose fiction, film, and painting). Importantly, though, generic and medial converging as a rule occur as corollary graftings onto the sensorially rupturing and textual phrasing qualities and powers of the thing-images that are at work to make the Duras'ian space emerge. Converging seems to be a function of the typically Duras'ian ever-expanding, paradoxical fusion-*and*-separation of things and images as space.

Also here, the movement goes from the separated-off sensorial materality of one image-space to the next, by perforation, leaking, flowing, and spilling over into different concrete topographies. As textual action, the thing-images presenced as space turn the text's attention obliquely to the side of phenomenality, signalling that there might be something prior to, beyond

or to the side of plot/character-action and conflict – something that might be of greater importance. Next to dedramatization, therefore, such a textual mode can also be called a lateral or a pre- or post-diegetic mode (that obviously converges with other art forms). – Some of these thing-images in *Véra Baxter* are the reduplications (as "themselves") of the *Atlantic wind*, the *Atlantic Ocean* and the *Atlantic beaches*. They are elaborated as material elements from outside of the characters' immediate, human life-world, working to a find a place as space on the phenomenal inside of the text. This spatial movement also extends to the surrounding *landscape of Thionville*, and not the least to the *topography of light* in this landscape: It figures as dimmed and waning, then flares up again, in numerous modulations rendered in side-text as well as in dialogue, where it gets attention as mystery and strangeness. Such attention slows further down the already quite rudimentary and minimal (dramatic) character action, in that narrator's side-text and characters' lines tend to linger on the ruptures of the sensorial impacts of the space-engendering thing-image. Moreover, the *topography of sound* is added (in images of distant music, laughter and screams) – a space-creating thing-imagery that may, as may the space of light, just as well be categorized as a *topography of rhythm*.

The rhythmical and musical qualities and modulations of Duras's depiction of emerging space are quite unique, and make up an especially material-sensorial image-area whose rupturing impacts connect with linguistic phraseability – for a re-formulated, redistributed apperception and vision. – Therefore, what semantic qualities would such a reformulation have? All of the so far mentioned natural phenomena-images that labour to emerge and to be installed as a space, challenge the characters' life-world, they are "scary", they "contradict". Still, the space they emerge as also has the quality of a reminder, of an "invitation" to be engulfed or encompassed (e.g. 22), to be included into their limitless space. Their space is strange (and not overtly violent), it activates wonder, mystery, even redemption and bliss. This space, intruding from the side (and in that sense as if from an outside), is not just "not mine", clearly it is also, or can be made, "mine".

Not so, apparently, in the case of the last image-space in the third spatiality to be commented upon here; in semantic terms it figures as pure negativity, even as violence. Among the many powerful, reduplicated images that make up this third spatiality of exceptional sensorial prevalence, is the impact of the powerful image of *the terrible grounds* leading down to the beaches around the summer house. – Now, the turbulence-image's exertion calls, as we remember, for the combinatorics and the continuity of textual action in order to emerge as a space intruding from the side, from a scary-but-mystical "exteriority" into the interiority of what can be recognized as the phenomenal life-world of the play (22). It exerts the affective impact of the

feeling of an invitation to join. The thing-image of the terrible grounds, however,[14] is merely sheer exteriority. It excludes human life; it figures as something that apparently is "not me". In spite of its reduplications in the dialogue, it initially does not emerge clearly as a territory that could take hold on the inside of the play's phenomenality and transform it: It only produces fear in Véra, and it figures as pure negativity. In relation to the other natural phenomena-images that open a space of wonder, and even bliss, "the terrible grounds", until the final pages of the play, install themselves as an outside territory of violence. – Even so, this image-space obviously *does* bear a relation both to the textually productive and the creative textual action of the play.

The images of the "terrible grounds" are initially unphrasable; these images and their enigmatic space are rendered by way of gaps and disruptions in Véra's and The Stranger's phrasings. The character discourse is broken staccato, by way of massive stammering, ellipses, and exclamations: "**Véra Baxter:** [...] . . . but (*stop*) . . . the grounds here . . . it's terrible . . . terrible, I think . . . (*Long silence.*) Maybe we should have changed towns . . . everything . . . everything" [...] . . . and then the grounds . . . so deserted . . . " (30f); "**The Stranger:** (*Softly.*) The grounds are dark now. (*Pause.*) But the beach is still lit up; so is the sea . . ." (37); "**Véra Baxter:** [...] (*Pause.*) The grounds are frightening. (*Pause.*)" (39). – Significantly, however, when Véra and The Stranger all the way at the end of the play finally attempt to formulate a discourse about the "terrible grounds", their discourse attains a peculiar shape of alterity. Their discourse figures a series of ideas and speculations about an originary, encrypted ground, obliquely beyond or to the side of this beach landscape, on which an originary event and act of violence, and a violent separation have taken place. Each of them puts forward their own short, staccato narrative version of their apperceptions of this originary, exterior space. It arouses agony and fear in them. But still – interestingly, and, by all measures, textually productively and creatively – they are conduced to circumscribe this material ground and its sensorial space in narratives, thus commenting upon the affective impact of the terrible thing-image, and of the frightful space that they apperceive, and which they feel encroaching upon them.

Véra 's narrative version of "the terrible grounds" relates her sensation of fear and agony to the owners of the summer house that she inhabits, and to the near past: "They're more or less separated. They had it built and then . . . (*Rather long silence.*) Something must have happened here, a few years ago . . . I can't remember too well . . . the wife tried to kill herself, or else someone tried to kill her . . . (*Stop. She falls silent. Silence.*)" (40). In spite of the awful separations and the mortal violence that she reports, she still produces a rudimentary textual

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[14] It figures only in the two last scenes – but in a number of instances – in Véra's phone conversation with her

narrative out of the impact imparted to her by the void of the space of the thing-image, and of her fearing agonies.

The Stranger's narrative version places the originary event and space in the distant past, during the Crusades, when women (one of them with Véra Baxter's name) were living alone in the forest on the Atlantic Coast while their men were away. These women in their separation and solitude – so The Stranger's narrative – started dealing with and handling their separation by generating discourse: "[...] they began talking to the trees, to the sea, to the animals in the forest . . ." (40). And *we* might add: In doing so, they simultaneously – as does *Véra Baxter's* textual action today – outlined the ever-extending contours and the co-ordinates of an ever-widening, emerging and created topography (but inhabitable, a *new* home, a space of alterity). – This topography, evidently, was constructed around the frightful (or blissful, or sublime) sensorial impacts of natural phenomena. And it was fused by the continuous powers of phraseability into the frail and paradoxical, but all the same actively productive material-separation-and-metaphorical-fusion of things that – still, in late modern art – can be made "mine" and generate alternative, "oppositional", new and liveable meaning. A meaning which, in a sense, stands forth as critical of and liberating from that which – bogged down to apparently unsolvable and seemingly irremovable quotidian trivialities – was and has been. But at that time – the violent part of The Stranger's narrative goes on – they were burned for it, as witches. (40)

J. Hillis Miller[15] can help us put these – emblematically meta-poetic, undoubtedly textually productive and creative but strange – instances into perspective. He reflects on the generating and animating force for textual action – a power that resides in such a space, in the space of what he calls "the preoriginal ground of the ground", and the space of "an unplaceable place" (7). He speculates that phraseability as well as narration and story-telling in art is a way of handling and dealing with the originary, violent separation from such a phenomenally groundless place and placeless space. In fact, with any material, object separation. In that perspective, we may say that phraseability in art is based on such a disruptive – and literally, materially and sensorially – performative act in a space-about-to-become – a space which turns what is "not me" into something that *could* or *can* be "me".

Such a primary separation can be said to be the driving force of all discourse and, to be sure, of all textual action proper. But in art, the fusion and combinations in discursive action also show the ruptures that are traces of the violence, or bliss, of this unnameable outside, where the separation must have taken or is taking place. In art, then, the exterior sometimes returns as

husband Jean, and in the lengthy exchange between Véra and The Stranger (30, 31, 37, 39, 40).

sensorial, material suspense, with the possibility to create an alternative space and a reorganized discourse in the phenomenal world. In this exterior lies a condition of possibility of human life and of language. *The atopical* is the name Hillis Miller finds for the place and the space of this primary separation of the originary performative event.

Even in its pure negative variants, then, like in the text *Véra Baxter*'s initially unphraseable "terrible grounds", and in spite of its production of agonizing fears (or blisses) — still, as I said, the sensorial and material thing-image and the space that it seeks, clearly bears a powering relation to textual action and creativity.

VI Converging phenomena in *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches*

We have identified a crucial generating and animating force for aesthetic textual action in the creative combinatorics of the affective imaging power of rupture pertaining to image-things and spaces, and the phrasal power of continuity. This textually powering force has also proven to emulate with findings in earlier analyses (in psychoanalytically and poststructuralist informed Duras scholarship and aesthetics), in which, it will be recalled, Duras's peculiar "textually acting space" is viewed as a combination of literal/material object separation of, *and* metaphorical fusion of, images and topographies.

We have also related some elements of generic and artistic converging to this powering force for textual action: It seems to be precisely to the textual action of the rupturing and rephrasing qualities of the space-engendering image that the converging phenomenon installs itself. — It remains, in some greater systematic detail, to point out the variety of converging instances in *Véra Baxter*.

As we have touched upon, it seems to me that the sensorial and affective exertion of Duras's images in this textually acting combinatorics in order to make the oblique, ever-extending, perforated space emerge, is fundamentally dependent upon one important quality in the continuity dimension of the play: *slowness*, linked to *duration*. This quality is so prevalent, that one might be tempted to imagine "Slow, dead slow!" as a dramatic credo or slogan underlying the whole adventure of the — dramatic! — theatre text *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches*. Naturally, this is not the case, no such slogan exists; still, some might find it a handy phrase to characterize the textual progress in *Véra Baxter*. In this *dramatic* text, paradoxically, slowness is one of *the* prime movers in the representational mode, for the sensorial impacts of the images to be able to be phrased or stated, *i.e.* to reach a level of sayability (which then allows

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[15] Hillis Miller, J.: *Topographies*, Stanford: SUP, 1995.

them to perform textually their exertion for a changed visibility). As a quality marker of mode, however, slowness alone does not suffice in this case. Equally important is the other prime mover in *Véra Baxter*'s representational mode – primarily to the benefit of such changed visibility: *obliqueness*.

Now, reduced velocity in the sayability dimension of the text (in its continuity, or syntatic or syntagmatic dimension) opens up for alterity/for something *other* to be *said* and formulated. This prime quality is combined with the other prime quality of the theatre text's representational mode: the sensorially (or affectively, or materially) hightened apperception in the visibility dimension of the theatre text (in its likeness/unlikeness dimension, that is to say, in its difference- or paradigmatic dimension) where it moves into the *oblique*, *i.e.* into a twisted or sideways turned vision, which opens up for alterity/for something *other* to be *seen* (in a visibility that goes awry).

Reflecting in such terms on the prime qualities of the text's representational mode – slowness/duration and obliqueness – is not merely a play with words. It shows that the changed visibilities and sayabilities for which *Véra Baxter* prepares the conditions of possibility, first, are closely linked to the immediate qualities of theatre text's representational mode (slow and oblique). Second, it shows that the alterity installed by the visible and the sayable in Duras's aesthetic practice in *Véra Baxter* is closely related to Jacques Rancière's theoretical reflections on the dynamics of aesthetic art in the exertions of the aesthetic image and space as *sentence-image*. Third, it underlines the point I made earlier that Rancière's theory of the sentence-image in aesthetic art (as a combinatorics of the imaging power of rupture and the phrasal power of continuity) is an aesthetics of basically linguistic provenance.

And – most importantly – fourth, these considerations point to the fundamental fact that the immediate qualities of *Véra Baxter*'s representational mode (slow/durative and oblique) are precisely the dominant qualities of the series of *converging* representational modes that this theatre text prompts for use. The dominant qualities of the series of modes in which *Véra Baxter* creatively installs separate and separated images and space into continuity, *converges* with those of representational modes characteristic of other genres, art forms and media (and *vice versa*). (Which again underlines that the phenomenon of converging tends to graft itself onto precisely the textual action's crucial moments of rupture and (re)phrasing.) The reason why this is so, it turns out, is that the prime qualities of these converging forms are precisely the combinatorics of *stating/"telling"/writing/presenting slowly and at length* on the one hand, and *showing beyond/behind/below/to the side/askew* on the other. – Let us look briefly at the major modes in question, of which all variants entail that the reader not only focuses on what the single phraseal

variant statingly represents, but also, and very importantly, also starts searching towards the margins of the represented, for what the represented might make visible, obliquely.

Typical of the representational mode of *Véra Baxter* are the two following sequences (there are many of the kind), one from the beginning and one from the end of the play. This is how the text begins:

> (*Three o'clock in the afternoon. Wintertime. White light. The place is large, empty, dark, luxurious. Three people, three men. Behind the bar, a bartender. Seated at the table in the room, the hotel guest: "The Stranger." Seated at the bar, a third man: Michel Cayre. A rather long pause. Then a telephone rings* [...]). (21; my underl.)

The following is a scene towards the end, from the conversation between Véra and The Stranger, in which the latter feels the pain connected to his desire and to his realization that Véra has come to desire's end:

> **The Stranger:** It's strange . . . that pain . . . when you were talking . . . "there". (*He puts his hand on his chest. She says nothing.*) As if I too had just lost you. (*She doesn't answer. Silence everywhere. Silence as if it were an event. Then an outside "incident" – a boat going by, shouts, song of the TURBULENCE – then everything falls silent. He is in pain:*) The light's getting dimmer. Look at the sea. (39; my underl.)

Quite contrary to the immediate impression these isolated examples might render as "straight stage directions" tuned to underline a mimetic character/story-line/scene representation, the silences and the pauses *pervade* the text in all kinds of dialogic or side-textual segments. The same goes for the active narrator's numerous rudimentary attemps at interpreting them, and describing them in relation to other phenomea that *invade* them (like light, sounds, and "*THE TURBULENCE*"). As fundamentally germane to the representational mode, the silences and the pauses slow down the textual progress and phrasing, repeating themselves in merely slight variants of formulation. They also slow down the progress or development within the slice of represented reality. And they clearly – also both on textual level as well as in represented reality – install a temporal dimension of vast duration.

The first scene, and a great number like it, figures – with a converging element that *Véra Baxter or The Atlantic Beaches* shares with the art of *painting* – as a *tableau* (of characters). The time of the tableau is emphasized, "*a rather long pause*" (21). This means that before, and irrespective of, any dramatic action, *represented time* is radically slowed down, and the image and the space represented are retained for the working of sensorial affect: In our continued reading, and in our further reading of its variants and repetitions, we keep looking at the image and its emerging space, and start looking obliquely, to the side of the image retained, for visibilities in the margins. And again, by the same token, *textually presented* time (in which no

character action occurs) is prolonged and made to last on, durationally. Allowing for their minimal variations, then, even the textual signifiers in a sense are "slowed down" and made to linger before our eyes. It seems to be this double effect, of both represented image and presented phrasing slowed down and enduring, that contributes to the impact of and the oblique coming-to-sight of a peculiar space.

The second scene, aside from the sounds of the intruding space of the image of the turbulence at the end, again slows down the represented time of the reality fragment by an overwhelming silence. More than that: Pervading silence, the slowing down of represented time, emerges not primarily as a side effect of dramatized action, but in its own sensorial right, as an occurring *event* (39) represented in the text. Silence in a sense performs itself, sensorially. But also here, now on the textual level, the duration of the signifiers is made to linger on, and so their sequentiality is "slowed down". This happens in that the (initial) difference between silence and sounds is blurred, and both sounds and silence, now as signifiers, perform themselves as "events" or "incidents", *i.e.* as presencing repetitions of the same: of themselves. The effect of the peculiar phrasing is that represented images, *as well as* "images" as presented signifiers, are permitted to be gazed on and apperceived at length. The consequence of this is that we are drawn to look obliquely to the side of or beyond the images, towards an unheard-of and unseen space that they make emerge. There are also numerous instances like the one commented upon here, in the play.

Another frequent representational mode is that of the *postures of gazes* – which figure as a converging element again shared by the play and the art of *painting*. Also the postures of gazes figure as presencing repetitions of themselves, with merely slight representational *and* textual variations. Sometimes the gazes of two characters meet and are retained like that. Sometimes tableau-like postures figure, as when a character's gaze goes in one direction (and sometimes, as it happens, two characters' gazes look in different directions), and another character's gaze is directed against the one looking (sees the one seeing):

> (*Silence. The customer is looking at them. They are looking at each other*)" (23);
> (*They leave the stage. Silence. Véra Baxter's and The Stranger's steps can be heard. Feeling of great slowness.*) (33, my underl.);
> (*They come back onstage. They stop. He looks at her. She looks outside.* [...] *Silence*). (33)

Again, we start looking, not only at the represented postures and gaze directions, but also towards the margins of the posture (or of the tableau), for what such a retained posture makes visible obliquely, at its margins. However, also the repeated textual presencing of the postures as phrased signifiers make us look beyond or to the side for something else, to an unseen space that is allowed to emerge precisely by the foregrounded sequentiality of the repeated material signifiers.

What is turned into textual action, performative eventness, in the manner of these examples, then, is an obliquely emerging space, to the side of the slowed-down, retained tableaux and pervading stillness. These numerous instances at the same time figure as, and could be termed, _dedramatization_ of character action, _mythos_, or "story-line" – in a theatre text with the paraphernalia of drama. In the capacity of dedramatization the theatre text figures in a representational mode – shared with the "flatness" of _prose fiction_ of both the 19th and the late 20th Centuries – which foregrounds the duration and the slowly developing continuity dimension of represented slices of reality _as well as_ of the textuality of signifiers, respectively. However, this representational mode, to be sure, at the same time allows for the sensorial impacts of the objects, things and images as well as of the textual signifiers to perform their work. The double-levelled repetition of both represented reality _and_ presencing textuality throughout, allows for an ever-expanding, alternative space emerge.

In a manner that slightly differs from the exertions of the tableaux and the postures, but which is still a clearly dedramatizing mode, _Véra Baxter_ converges with elements of _modern film_ (e.g. Michelangelo Antonioni) and of the _modern novel_ of the _nouveau roman_ movement, George Perec and the Oulipo group, in sharing the representational mode of the _temps morts_. The _temps morts_ mode is frequently described also as post-diegetic representation, but could, at least in connection with Duras, just as well be referred to both as a _lateral- and pre- and post-diegetic mode_. In film it frequently implies the shot lingering on a space, a landscape or a scene to the side of or beyond characters and after the "action" has finished or moved on, giving "the background" or "setting" a performative life of its own. Obviously, the topographically affective visuality and the pictorial interest of things and objects are particularly enhanced, as "textual" action, at the cost of story-lines and narratively arranged character actions. Several of Marguerite Duras's films are well-known to possess this quality. In the micro-realism of the _nouveau roman_, textual time moves slowly on, and forwards things, again at the expence of plot, character and story time. In film, the camera lingers on or wanders along the materialness of objects, signs and gazes, with the affective consequence of alternative visibilities appearing, obliquely off those in the service of emplotment and characters.

The emergence of an alternative space in _Véra Baxter_ is coupled to slowness and obliqueness in textual continuity also in such representational registers. The most telling examples of this kind of converging would be the presencing of material elements in sections of the theatre text that we have already looked into in my reading of the second and the third spatiality. There, the typically flowing, perforated Duras'ian space emerges in the fusion _and_ the simultaneously rupturing, literal/material separation (from each other and from a humanly

motivated life-world) of localities, gazes, landscapes, names, other art works, as well as in the powerful natural phenomena: The shifting of focus onto these sensorial traits (away from what these various topographies fused together "mean" or "signify" in a holistic story of the representative regime of art) – this shifting to the side of narratable-ness and narrativity in the textual continuity, opens up precisely for the lateral/pre/post-diegetic space of the *temps morts*.

Finally, the slowing down of continuity, and the obliqueness of what is represented as well as textually presenced (to the benefit of something *other* being seen and said), is also achieved by probably the most extensive phenomenon in Duras's theatre text: the pervading presence of *ellipses*. In almost every line of the dialogue and of the conversations appearing in *Véra Baxter*, the representational quality – slow and oblique – appears in the form of innumerable disruptions by ellipses (three dots). Perspectives, contexts, motifs and themes related to the rudimentary plot/character story-line, are continuously being suspended, shifted, and altered. The powerful images of localities, gazes, landscapes, names, other art works, and natural phenomena (that we have analyzed) – they appear in dialogue as well as in side-text – are given time in the textual continuity dimension to emerge as a sensorially affective, alternative space, obliquely to the side of the plot/character action.

VII In conclusion

In my analytical sketch I have looked into three segments of space installation in *Véra Baxter*: One in the service of plot-character-conflict representation; and two segments of aesthetic space (with varying degrees of sensorial prevalence and force). We have studied how these two latter aesthetic space installations, as opposed to the first, contribute to the driving/animating power of textual action. Literal object separation *and* metaphorical fusion in aesthetic textual action, makes me experience a space that is both "mine" and "not mine" at the same time. In this way, Duras's peculiar space offers, by its scope, its magnitude, and its powerful impacts, a critique of ideology, of frozen truths, and of trivialities in our life-world of the quotidian. This space *happens* – in the manner of another emblematic meta-poetic image-thing embedded in the theatre text, affectively working its way into a space of alterity: that of the powerful "*outside turbulence [which] grows more audible, harsh, ironic, [and] is commenting ironically on the "truth" in question*" (22). Duras's space challenges us to obliquely reflect upon basic conditions of possibility: upon what is – and what can be made – visible and sayable; upon what is "not mine" and what could be, or can be "mine".

The otherness to which a sensorial and phraseable redistribution exposes us, does not necessarily chain us even stronger to violence, pain, grief and melancholy, in addition to the

sadness of the quotidian (as some tend to think about Duras's art). The sensorial exposure to Duras's peculiar space is also a highly constructive otherness, which is the basis, even, for the emergence of a possible, blissful realization of dreams. The ideologies of truths and lies, faith and deceit certainly do regulate the human life-world. When they become unbearable to live within, to the extent that they might ruin our lives, they find powerful challenges to be reformulated by a texually phrased and acting space in which sensorial materiality matters. In such a space, things and images around us, that we have categorized, instrumentalized and repressed, first, are made to be seen, and, second, to be formulated afresh. In face of the rule-ridden spaces of commodified narratives, this seems essential. The sensorial emergence of a space of images-as-things/objects represents an alterity – for things have no will or intentions or plots. When phraseability is free, the "story" will have to be made – differently. Materiality matters.

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