

I make films to fill my time. If I had the strength to do nothing, I would do nothing. It is only because I haven't the strength to do nothing that I make films. For no other reason. This is the truest thing I can say about my practice.

When I speak, I draw attention to the act of speech. When I say 'an understanding of meaning', I mean an understanding of words. And when I say 'an awareness of meaning', I am talking about a meaning that cannot be reduced, but to which one must nonetheless stay close.

-Marguerite Duras.

MARGUERITE DURAS: AN APPROACH TO WRITING IN THREE ACTS

A PLAY FOR ONE READER AND THREE ACTORS.

By Jaime del Fresno

INTRODUCTION.



Les mains négatives, Marguerite Duras, 1978

The text you are about to read does not merely aim to reason about writing; it seeks to be writing itself. In her film *Les mains négatives*, the French writer and filmmaker Marguerite Duras tells the story of an ancient man who placed his hand upon the stone of a cave, and there, his hand was imprinted upon the rock. As she reflects on the history of the man in the cave, Duras captures with her camera, from a car, images of a dawn-lit urban landscape, one in which the monotony of the images that repeat every morning is revealed—images that, for that reason, are overlooked and forgotten. Duras recounts a forgotten story, a story impossible to remember. No one remains to recall it, save for the paintings on the cave walls. She narrates how a man paints his hand and presses it against the stone. The black imprint stays on the rock; memory is transferred to the landscape at that moment. The solitary man paints his hands, the rock—out of love, out of solitude, as Duras puts it. In the film, the camera captures the early morning scenes of the city, and Duras' voice recalls the man in the cave. The man screams, but following the scream comes something worse than silence: the echo, the response of solitude. The mark on the cave wall always shows the same hand. We discover that the man was alone. He painted his hand out of loneliness. The camera shows street sweepers in the urban mist. The vehicle moves through the city, and Duras says: "*I will love anyone who hears me scream that I love you*". The voice crosses the landscape, and the landscape holds the voice. The voice transforms the landscape into writing. The voice falls silent, but there is no actual silence; the city can still be heard. Throughout the film, Duras maintains silence and repeats silence. Writing occurs within this silence, a silence introduced into the landscape. Duras falls silent, and in doing so, she introduces silence into the landscape. To write is to introduce silence into the landscape. We introduce silence into the landscape, and the landscape becomes wild, or as Michel Foucault, in his exploration of Duras' work—a theme I will explore throughout this research—put it, a '*wild exteriority*' is opened up, a space that is contemplated as it is in our absence, thus emerging a landscape that is the reverse of language, of writing, and of memory.

Silence disorients us and suspends the interpretation of the landscape; it holds and contemplates it. Susan Sontag suggests that it is a fallacy for art to have content; to require interpretation. Interpretation is, as Sontag states, the revenge of the intellect upon art. Moreover, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. We must reclaim an art that is beyond interpretation, and in this way, Sontag argues, we will restore its tragic and magical meaning to art. Interpretation

suspends silence and saves us from the silence that leads us to a void, to the horror of the man alone in the cave. Interpretation makes the world, life, and writing bearable. Duras, in contrast, invites us to turn towards silence, to a moment of suspended contemplation, where we lose our balance and lose ourselves.

In this text, I will draw on Duras' work to explore void and absence as narrative techniques, and thus propose a relationship of surrender and cessation with art and language. To this end, I engage with Peggy Phelan's notions of performative writing in which she defines it as capricious and subjective. It is writing that does not merely recount and theorize something that has already occurred but instead suggests that writing should recreate what has happened in a way that it never indeed did, thereby proposing performative processes of fusion between form and content.

In her work, Duras synthesizes her artistic research and practice, assigning the responsibility for what is being written to the act of writing itself—not to what is written. By reading her books and watching her films, we understand that writing (whether literature or cinema) is not meant to say something; instead, telling something is an excuse to write. This text will explore various forms of writing and how the reader reacts when faced with a polymorphous and unstable text. In writing this, I will not only reflect on Duras's work but also craft a text that, while reasoning through and exploring the mysteries of her writing, proposes a *Durasian* way of doing so, granting this research the elasticity and freedom of poetry.



Les mans negatives, Marguerite Duras, 1978

*I never know where I'm going, and
if I did I wouldn't write,
because I would end up,
I would be finished.*
Marguerite Duras

PREFACE.

MEMORY WITHOUT RECOLLECTION, WILD EXTERIORITY, AND PERFORMATIVE WRITING

From the work of Marguerite Duras, we possess less of her certainties than her uncertainties. So much so that in her essay *Writing*, published towards the end of a life dedicated to writing, Duras reflects on her relationship with writing and states that, despite being able to say anything about what writing means, she will never know why she writes or how she writes. Later, Duras writes: "to write despite everything, despite despair. No: with despair. What despair, I do not know its name". Following Duras' words, the relationship with writing is one of hopelessness and non-negotiability, based on an unconditional surrender, in which writing nullifies the one who writes. Writing becomes a movement toward the unknown; it is written at the apex of writing; there is no path; writing advances toward a space that the author does not know, that they sense, but that space—what Foucault called *wild exteriority*—demands more from the author than intuition, it requires faith. In this way, the author ceases to be the focus of coherence in their discourse, for they, like their characters, are unaware of the mysteries of their writing. Thus, the author, moving along with the writing, inhabits the landscape they have created. The author only knows what writing demands of them; therefore, questioning the author's will in writing offers no other answer than a sad and solitary silence. To better understand this, I turn again to Duras' words quoted earlier, where she states that she never knows where she is going while writing and that if she did, writing—and herself—would be finished. So, ignorant of the meaning of their writing, the author's words may be taken as those of a mad person. But we must not forget, as Foucault reminds us in *The Order of Discourse*, that a mad person is one whose discourse must not circulate like that of others¹.

"There is a madness to writing that exists in itself, a furious madness, but one is not mad because of this madness of writing. On the contrary". From Duras' words, we can deduce one becomes mad for writing, we lose our minds in desiring writing; madness precedes writing, the madness of thinking writing. When Duras writes, she places her trust in the pre-existence of writing, believing that writing is something that can be done, as she wrote in her essay *Writing*: "To write is to attempt to know what we would write if we wrote". What is written is not known; we know and experience the possibility of writing it.

Following the idea that writing leads us towards the unknown, writing occurs at the apex of what is comprehensible. Thus, writing is not a linear movement toward a visible horizon but a retreat into silence. Like their characters, the author becomes lost, awkwardly advancing in a dual direction: one that corresponds to progress, moving from one place to another, tracing paths in writing, and another, in disorientation, where the experience of writing is one of dispersion. In this way, the author writes by drawing closer to and distancing from the apex of sanity; to write transports us to a place where believing oneself sane is as naive as believing oneself mad².

Writing forces us to accept a double emptiness: the void before writing, before we write, we know nothing of what we are about to write, and the emptiness that follows, the void that writing leaves. The writer finds themselves between these two voids. Thus, writing is an act that demands a *madness of writing*, a furious desire to obscure oneself and surrender to discourse with the violent

¹ Some of Foucault's ideas on Duras' writing are documented in his conversation with H el ene Cixous about Marguerite Duras, *On Marguerite Duras, with Michel Foucault*. In it, both philosophers discuss the themes of emptiness, space, and memory in Duras' books and films.

² To understand this *Durasian* concept of madness, the words of Cixous are handy when she refers to the despair suffered by Duras' characters: "It is a despair that cannot even be called despair because it would recover, there would be a process of recognition and mourning". In Duras, madness is not an alteration in the access to the meaning of things but is experienced as a total amnesia of meaning itself. The characters are the containers of this loss of meaning and of the void that this loss generates. In Duras' work, madness manifests as a memory emptied of recollections, suspending the possibility of understanding and recognition, causing the characters to move through a limitless void. This movement without horizon is the void drive that activates the writing, and in activating it, the writer, like the characters, moves and loses themselves in the void. The madness of the characters is, at the same time, the madness of writing them; writing is surrendering to what is written. This radical approach to writing, which eliminates the distance between writer and writing, may provide clues about the type of 'despair in which one writes' and about 'the madness of writing' previously mentioned by Duras.

urge to dominate it. But to dominate discourse means to dominate the void; it means finding ourselves in a space that exists at the non-existent boundary between writing and *to write*. Duras writes from this juncture. For Duras, writing translates into discourse the struggles—her struggles with love, death, or alcohol³—but it is also what she struggles for and the medium through which the battle takes place. Duras maintains the struggle with writing, for writing, and in writing. The inseparable relationship between what *is* written and the *act* of writing becomes the battlefield and makes writing a performative act that shifts the writing outside the text into a third space. This third space becomes independent of its mediums; it floats, thus becoming a space without references and memory, activated through the process of writing. Duras surrenders to the struggle for writing within that ghostly landscape that emerges between writing and the act of writing, that desperate space where nothing is awaited because there is nothing in it, that space of infinite solitude where writing occurs; it is the space of memory without recollection.

Memory is a structural element in the work of Duras; we can observe its role even in her early novels, such as *The Easy Life* or *The Sea Wall*, books in which the author unfolds the same universe of her childhood that she revisits thirty-four years later in her most well-known novels, such as *The Lover* or *The Lover of North China*. Reading Duras suggests that memory is not an archive from which the material that nourishes writing is extracted, nor is it a process through which the past is remembered in a linear and intelligible way. Memory is a process of forgetting, distortion, and alienation from oneself. While many of Duras' books are autobiographical novels, and she is considered as one of the founders of the so-called 'self' narratives, 'forgettingness' functions as a significant narrative method. Duras' books present themselves as confused stories in which scenes unfold through great ellipses, turning the books into a succession of disconnected and contradictory places and situations. Thus, we deduce that, for Duras, remembering can only alienate our personhood, as it dissociates and fragments our lives. Writing can only distort and twist our memory into the abysses of oblivion. Writing is a process of losing oneself⁴. Memory spills over and overflows the writing, and in Duras' work, forgetting is necessary to write. For Duras, writing our story abandons us and turns us into orphans of our own lives.

In her most famous novels, such as *The Lover*, where she recreates her childhood love with an older man or *The Ravishment of Lol V. Stein*, centered around a woman trapped in an episode that she cannot forget yet is equally unable to remember, Duras reveals the feelings of uprootedness and disorientation experienced by those who are merely containers of memory they cannot gain access to. In her writing, Duras activates a force of oblivion and void, in which the characters' identities become fragmented and are revealed through their unique way of forgetting. This place where the characters find themselves abandoned by themselves and devastated by an inaccessible memory, on the vortex of madness and silence—is the place of memory without recollection. Only the landscape holds memory, and those who inhabit it bear it in confusion, enduring the landscape and the impossible memory it carries⁵. In Duras' writing, something has always occurred, but we cannot

³ The testimonies of these struggles are not only found in the work produced by Duras herself but also in that of her close acquaintances. To gain a closer understanding of the author's battle with alcohol and her treatments for alcoholism, the reading of *M. D.* by Yann Andrea is an invaluable document. In his book, Andrea recounts the process by which Duras managed to write *The Malady of Death*, revealing the violent paths through which Duras approached writing and the inseparable relationship she maintained between writing and drinking.

⁴ Cixous reflects on how Duras' work seems like a continuous process of loss as if the loss could never be fully reached as if there were always more losses to be done. Duras moves towards loss, writing until she loses the writing itself until she loses herself. Duras does not seek to generate meaning with her writing but rather emptiness, silence, and absence. This writing that moves towards the void will culminate in her last book, *Nothing More*, which I will discuss later.

⁵ Landscape is a structural element in Duras' work, as it is where the author places the memory and characters' history. The relationship between writing and the places in Duras' life is extensively documented in her interview book *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*. But at the same time, talking about the landscape in Duras' work leads us to discuss the colonial relationships within it. Duras was born in 1914 in an impoverished French family in French Indochina. The colonial experience and how it is represented throughout Duras' work is too vast to cover in this text, but I would not want to ignore or add further silence to such an essential aspect of her work. Until recently, there have been very few texts that connect Duras' work with the historical contexts in which it developed (and when this has been done,

remember it, nor can we forget that it has happened; we can only endure that event, which we do not understand and which oppresses us. This place of suffocating emptiness in the writing is the 'wild exteriority'.



La femme du Gange, Marguerite Duras, 1974

researchers have often limited themselves to books such as *'La Douleur'*, written during WWII). Still, it seems impossible to think about the notions of uprooting, loss, and absence in Duras' work without considering her colonial experience. Duras left Indochina at the age of 18 and never returned. She stated several times that she had no homeland and belonged to a lost land. This is all the more striking when considering that when she wrote *The Lover* in 1984—the novel that catapulted her to fame, where she recounts her childhood in the French colony—Indochina no longer even existed on maps. Her birthplace became a ghost that would always haunt her. But perhaps this spectral and symbolic density surrounding her life in Indochina allowed her to overlook, or choose to ignore, the violence of French colonial reality, turning the colony into a backdrop from which she extracted symbols and images to use in her writing.

The relationship between Duras, writing, and French colonialism, even though she openly criticized it in the books that make up her 'Asian trilogy'—*The Sea Wall*, *The Lover*, and *The Lover of North China*—becomes more complicated when considering that Duras' first published work (which is often forgotten by her biographers), *L'Empire Français* (Gallimard, 1940), is a pro-colonial pamphlet about the relationship between France and its colonies. Duras would later retract this publication several times, claiming it was a 'youthful mistake'. It is interesting to consider Duras' work, a staunch left-wing writer and an active member of the resistance during the war, from a postcolonial perspective, which will also bring new and fascinating insights into the linguistic issues in her writing. I will continue to delve into this area of research about Duras' work.

The essays *Duras and Indochina: Postcolonial Perspectives* by Julia Waters and *Postcolonial Duras: Cultural Memory in Postwar France* by Jane Bradley are very useful for deepening the understanding of colonial relationships in Marguerite Duras's work.



La femme du Gange, Marguerite Duras, 1974

Foucault referred to 'wild exteriority' as the space beyond the social and cultural constructs that form knowledge and give meaning to things⁶. We can thus understand *wild exteriority* as a space of negativity and opacity, emptied of memory and suspended in silence; this silence is not the absence of discourse but the absence of meaning. Duras' characters traverse this strange, meaning-absent space. Through her writing, Duras does not seek to generate meaning but rather void⁷.

The drive of void is not only present in Duras' books but also in the film adaptations of her literary works, such as *India Song* or *La femme du Gange*, which is the free interpretation by the author of the books *The Ravishment of Lol V. Stein* and *L'Amour*. In both the book and the film, three people move across the sand of the beach, holding a common yet unique silence. A man tormented by an insurmountable thought about death, a woman paralyzed by a forgotten memory continually remembered, and a young man who crosses the sand of the beach trapped between silence and scream. In *La femme du Gange*, the young man and the woman will accept and declare their madness; they will accept having gone mad by emptying themselves, having deposited their memory in a permanently unreachable yet ever-present place. Both have forgotten the event that caused their madness and now they move through their memories as if they were not their own, inhabiting madness as they inhabit the emptiness around them, with a calm distanced from meaning. They get lost on the beach, orient themselves, and then get lost again, and so on. In the novel *L'Amour*, the

⁶ For Foucault, thought has remained confined within specific codes and structures that have constituted and limited it. Foucault argues that the duty and responsibility of thought is to reflect the "outside" of those structures in which it has historically been situated. The "thought from the outside" is a new way of thinking that is opposed to the idea that thought serves to legitimize itself by recognizing itself within its structures. Instead, thinking must be an incessant movement outward. For this research on the wild exteriority in Duras' writing, I am interested in Foucault's notions of interiority and exteriority, drawing on the work of Maurice Blanchot. In his essay *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside*, Foucault explores the intransitivity of language and the transgression of literature—that is, thinking of language not as a communicative vehicle limited to the transfer of information, but as an experience that transgresses and challenges our understanding. Foucault rejects a form of thought with an interior, pure space in which meaning resides. Instead, Foucault points toward an *outside*; writing is the experience of language's difficulty in thinking and naming that *outside*. Thought moves toward an uncertain place, using literature to propose a language that escapes the representational mode of discourse. As Foucault holds, literature is a step toward the *outside*. That *outside*, that uncertain place of knowledge in which the reader is disoriented, where language is experienced as loss, offers an idea of wild exteriority.

⁷ The Durasian landscapes, the deserted beaches, and the empty rooms are the senseless stages that the characters traverse. They pass through them but do not inhabit them, for they neither recognize nor understand them. The landscape holds the characters' emptiness and solitude; at the same time, it is proof of their madness, as it testifies that they have forgotten everything.

author is less indulgent: the young man and the woman never speak to each other; the woman merely follows the man at an impersonal distance, trailing him across the sand of silence to the scream and from the scream back to silence.

“*Writing is telling a story that happens because of its absence*”, writes Duras in *La vie matérielle*. These words allow us to approach the author’s relationship with *wild exteriority*. If *wild exteriority* is the space where meaning moves to its limits; this space cannot be a positive presence but rather a place that, although perhaps glimpsed through the fog of writing, is always unattainable for the writer, for in it collapses the meaning of what is attempting to write. Writing, for Duras, involves the need and desire for the absence of that writing. “*To write means to write it all, even the absence of writing*”, Duras says. In this way, we can think of *wild exteriority* as the negativity of writing, an infinite space of forgetting, absence, and silence within writing—a landscape blurred by writing but which, without writing, could never exist.

Wild exteriority is traced with a constant and violent movement that recalls the images of sand shifting over the beach in *La femme du Gange*. Thus, a confusion of times is established: between writing and having written, between having written and still needing to write, between knowing and ignoring the meaning of what is written, between immersing oneself in meaning and reaching non-meaning. Writing on the edge of ceasing to write, constantly negotiating with its impossibility of being written, is ultimately writing an unfinished discourse⁸. In this way, the drive of emptiness articulates the possibility of writing and language in the *wild exteriority*, and language is also prey to emptiness and prey to memory without recollection⁹. In *wild exteriority*, Duras does not grant language any secret; it is force, resistance against oblivion. Language fights not to disappear. Thus, Duras makes dialogues the narrative support of her books. Her characters attempt to speak in the face of the collapse of memory and meaning. Books like *Love, Destroy, Says*, or *The Blue Eyes, Black Hair*, could easily be interpreted as screenplays with brief spatial indications.

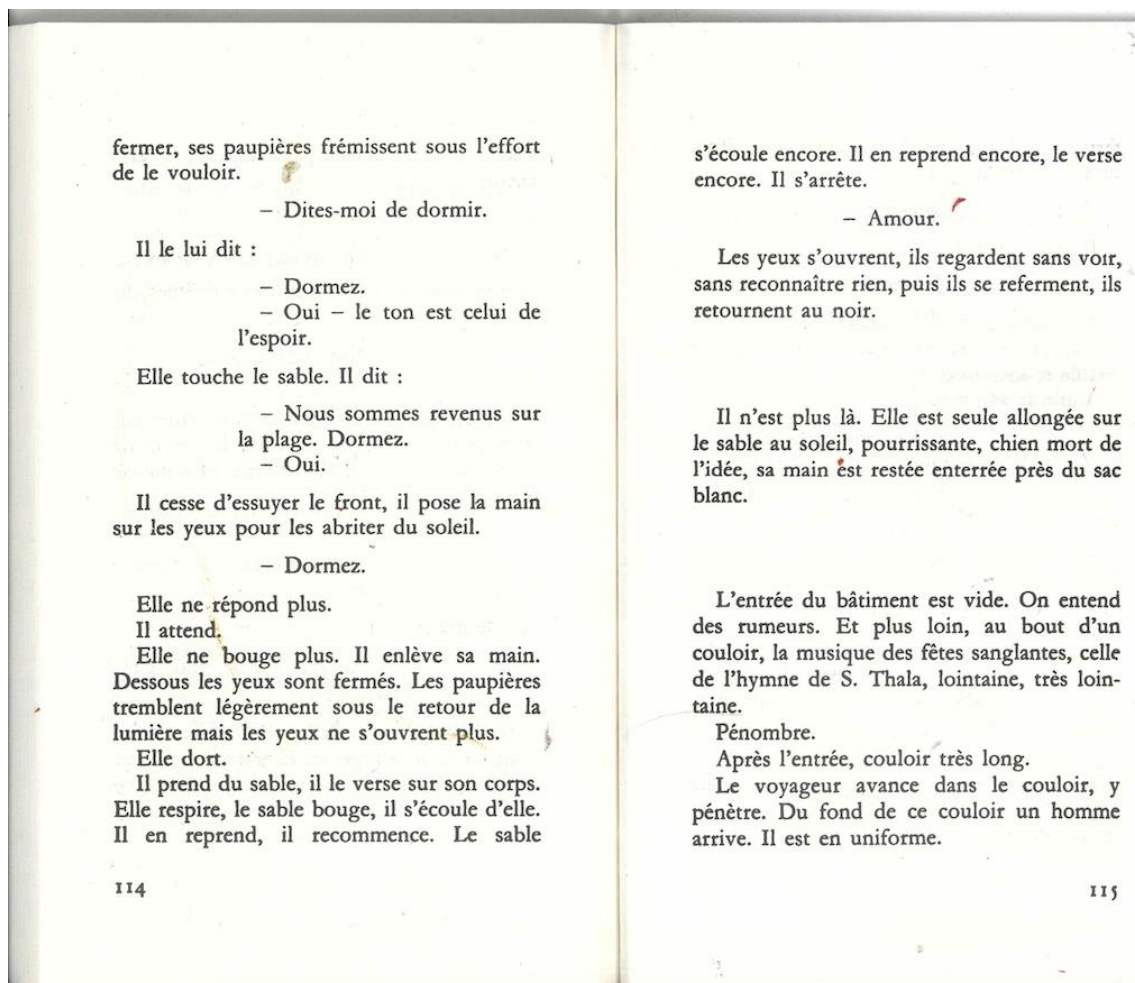
Durasian characters fail in dialogue, for they can’t sustain the discourse of the other; they are prey to a memory that fades, prey to the inability to narrate their own story. Their conversations are mediated by silence and repetition¹⁰. The characters negotiate between an excess of words and an obsession with laconicism; a force of containment greater than themselves envelops them—the oppressive

⁸ Thinking of writing as the creation of unfinished texts confronts us with the question of their comprehension. If we assume that the goal of writing is to create bridges between the meaning of its content and the reader Duras’ books can be consider a failure. Thinking of writing as a failure is particularly enticing when considering Duras’ writing, since the concessions she makes to be understood are minimal, and her writing moves towards silence and meaningless disorienting and distressing the reader. The awareness that writing is impossible, and that there is nothing to say apart from acknowledging silence and void, is not an approach to writing solely peculiar to Duras. Several of her contemporaries, such as Samuel Beckett or Maurice Blanchot, experimented with the communicative limits of writing; Blanchot even went so far as to assert that failure is inherent to writing and that what is magic and unique about writing lies in the detours taken around this failure. It is in this ‘*Blanchotian*’ notion of failure that Duras’ books should be read, in their inseparable relationship with the impossibility of writing, with the void and absence they carry.

⁹ To conceive of language as a drive and the presence of void, the concepts provided by Foucault regarding Blanchot’s writing prove useful. Foucault argues that literature is not language turning inward to examine itself but rather language fleeing as far away from itself as possible. In Duras’s work, language escapes its functions of representation and sustaining discourse, instead moving towards the loss of itself. Language progresses towards silence, not the absence of discourse, but the absence of meaning, of memory, language expresses solitude without solace.

¹⁰ Foucault notes that in books such as ‘*Moderato Cantabile*’ or ‘*Détruire, dice-elle*’, the dialogues are not bound to the plot but occupy uncertain positions within the narrative. The dislocation of dialogues throughout the text serves as a strategy to saturate and hinder the reader’s understanding. The dialogues neither clarify what is occurring nor elucidate the setting in which the events take place. They appear to be voices foreign to the landscape and the narrative. In this way, Duras attempts to achieve something impossible within a book: to separate the voices (silent, as they are rendered in printed text) from the images (invisible, since they, too, are part of the printed text). Duras takes the dissociation between voice and image to its extreme in the film and book ‘*India Song*’. As Duras herself declared, ‘*India Song*’ consists of two films: one is what is seen, and the other is what is heard. The dialogues occur far from the images we see, and the images we view interfere with and condition our understanding of the voices we hear. This strategy liberates both writing and image from their potential meaning as they collapse independently into a void, and together, they seem to dissolve into senselessness. In this way, Duras proposes that access to meaning — a moment of clarity and communion between voices and images — is arbitrary and intermittent since meaning is not found within the voices or the pictures but *outside* them. That ‘*outside*’ of the images and voices, where meaning occurs, that violent space, is the wild exteriority.

force exerted by the space in which they find themselves, the space of memory without recollection. In their dialogues, the characters reveal their intimate proximity to oblivion. They hide nothing; they cannot tell what they do not remember. Their dialogues testify to their oblivion, and their failure to remember prevents them from engaging with each other, turning their conversations into interrupted monologues. They are prey to the oblivion of their story, which leads them to the oblivion of themselves. They exist in infinite solitude, at the edge of madness. Language, thus, manifests a process of loss of identity. Language hides nothing; it has been unveiled, emptied of memory. Words only *aspire* to mean what they mean, and in their communicative failure, they become cryptic and symbolic, seemingly condensing an overwhelming meaning that sinks the discourse. Language is experienced as loss. The characters speak, and the silence of the landscape upholds their words. Durasian characters are the solitary man remembered in *Les mains négatives*. There is nothing in the space around them, and language is tasked to confirm that void, showing the very glow of void.



Scan form 'L'Amour'. In this image, I am not so interested in the meaning of the content of the words and phrases but in how they are distributed over the space of the page. Short paragraphs give the writing a frenetic rhythm and, at the same time, slow down the reading because they are independent, and the reader needs to choose between connecting them or continuing the reading. We also see very brief dialogues that try to condense a lot of meaning. In this image, the void and silence that Duras' writing is endowed with emerge on the paper. All the blank spaces that we see are also writing.

The void confirmed by language is what remains of words in the furthest place from meaning, in *wild exteriority*. This emptiness manifests in silence. In Duras's work, silence is not what is left unsaid, what the characters leave unspoken, or what the author conceals—instead, silence is the response. Silence follows what has been said and written; it is what testifies to our solitude in the void, the place from which one writes, the man in the cave of *Les mains négatives*. In silence, the writer finds the meaning of what they write, yet it is also where the loss of that meaning occurs. Silence is the glow of emptiness. These processes of encounter and loss of meaning while writing is experienced in the ellipses. In the ellipses, *writing* occurs because it happens through a force we do not understand and that overwhelms us. *Writing* would be finished if we knew where we were heading; ellipses save us from knowing the direction. The ellipses obscure the path through which *writing* advances. The ellipses materialize, in their void, the intermittencies through which the writer accesses and abandons the meaning of *writing*, showing that *writing* is accessed intermittently and elliptically rather than linearly and constantly. For Duras, *writing* is not an easy way to advance; *writing* means being willing to sustain both the moments of meaning and recognition and the moments of incomprehension and solitude brought about by the fading of meaning. Duras's writing is anti-narrative, for *writing* is not a means to tell a story, but rather, writing itself is the story told. In *writing*, the desire is not to narrate but to activate the performativity of writing, surrendering ourselves to it and making writing—both the words and the silence of void—the testimony of that surrender.

Ellipses do not function as tools to economize or inject dynamism into discourse. On the contrary, ellipses stall the *writing*, stretching the narrative rhythm almost to the point of suspension, causing the discourse to tumble into oblivion, leaving only a landscape that fades away. There is a tense negotiation between speed and slowness in Duras's writing; this relationship plays out in moments when, through the ellipses, the *writing* enters and exits silence and oblivion. The narrated scenes are dense; they stretch out in the repetition of gestures and descriptions, and in their slow, heavy rhythm, they seem to condense a meaning unsustainable for the writing itself. At the same time, the ellipses make the rhythm of the text frantic, constantly propelling it towards its end, towards its very narrative limit.

This writing, in struggle with itself, allows us to think that Duras never truly finishes her books, that her books do not end, but rather, after the writing, there follows an ellipsis from which it is impossible to escape. Ellipses are unwritten writing, and it is in this restraint that writing occurs and is made possible.

Narration and writing progress through ellipses, through moments in which the writing disappears along with the story being told. When they return, narration and writing appear increasingly distorted by silence and oblivion. Ellipses collapse the meaning of *writing* and of writing itself because they make the narrated content bear the weight of silence and the weight of oblivion. In Duras's work, ellipses sustain the advance of narration; ellipses are writing. Ellipses are a form of negative materialization of writing, and in them, the wild exteriority of writing itself manifests—the confused and inaccessible space that appears when one writes.

In this way, Duras narrates through silence; silence is where writing happens. Silence thus becomes the most performative act that the writer can execute¹¹. Silence and narrative restraint are the only tools writers have to defend themselves from the abysses writing pushes them towards. But at the same time, silence and the ellipsis shake the writer, thrusting them into the depths of incomprehension. Duras desires to hold on to that incomprehension, to stay at the very edge of meaning, at the edge of silence, so that there, she can write and fight. Thus, Duras's writing is more composed of cryptic images and landscapes that sustain the meaning of what is narrated than of words attempting to explain it. This radical relationship between cinema and literature arises: Duras is violent in literature because silence is unbearable, unimaginable; in cinema, Duras grants us the landscape and forces us to endure an even longer silence—one long enough to forget it and, once forgotten, for the silence to disappear into the landscape.

Writing exists because of everything that is not written, because of everything that cannot be written. The characters exist because of their unique ability to forget themselves. Therefore, the author can

¹¹ In *Fiction and Autobiography/Language and Silence*, Janice Morgan delves into the performative use of silence in 'The Lover', and her reflections easily apply to much of Duras's work.

only exist if she, too, disappears. The writer's disappearance is the demand of the void and the silence. The writer's disappearance is the most radical point and the final demand of Duras's writing, and this will be a struggle Duras will not shy away from. In her last book, *Nothing More*, written from the bed where she would soon die, we read: "*There is a book that wants my death*". Duras dies, and the book ends, or perhaps the book ends, and Duras dies— we will never know. All we know is the endless silence that follows the last word. The need for the irreversible disappearance of the writer is the final demand made by *writing*. The writer enters an incomprehensible void from which they will never return. Only then can the book end and the next one begin. The writer enters the silence, is introduced into an ellipsis from which they will not emerge, and enters the landscape.



India Song, Marguerite Duras, 1975

The writer enters the silence, is introduced into an ellipsis from which they will not emerge, and enters the landscape.

CONCLUSION.

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY *MARGUERITE DURAS: AN APPROACH TO WRITING IN THREE ACTS* FOR ONE READER AND THREE ACTORS

An Impossible Silence¹²

In his last stage proposal, *Marguerite Duras, an approach to writing in three acts, a play for three actors and a reader*, the transgressive director _ pays tribute to the French author Marguerite Duras with an enigmatic and poetic work that unfolds continuously for more than four hours.

The lights go out, and silence fills the room; the play is about to begin, or perhaps it has already started. We see the darkness in which the stage is set, a black box, and a landscape that stretches dark and dramatic.

The first actor enters the stage, and the play can officially be said to have begun. As stated in the room note, without further details, it features a lover, a criminal, and a child.

The first actor appears on stage wearing a black cloth covering him from head to abdomen. It will not be until later, through deduction, that the audience will discover that he is the lover. His body, wrapped in the fabric, seems integrated into the stage's darkness. A series of quotes from Duras about love are projected on the back of the stage. After the quotes, the actor begins to scream; the cloth in his mouth muffles his screams. In this way, the director conveys the suffocation the character suffers from the discourse of love. The screams begin and will not cease until the end of the play. The actor screams irregularly without adhering to any apparent rhythm, thus indicating his distance from the audience. This sense of distance and strangeness between the actors and the audience will remain throughout the entire performance, giving the impression that only the spectators are aware they are in a theatre.

An actor appears and sits at the back of the stage, facing the black wall. Throughout the entire performance, he will remain in that position until near the end when he lets himself fall forward. In this way, we discover that what appeared to be a black wall was a curtain. The upper half of the actor's body disappears behind the black fabric, resembling the actor who entered the stage covered with the black cloth.

Without any drama, the criminal enters the stage. With red chalk, he draws a silhouette and lies down on it. A long monologue begins, in which he lists the reasons that lead him to macabre and homicidal thoughts. When he finishes the monologue, after a pause, he repeats it from the beginning. The lover's screams continue alongside the criminal's monologue. The monologue is whispered, fitting well into the pauses of the screams, relaxing the audience's ear. The whispers also suggest that there is no struggle between the characters to be heard or to draw attention to themselves; instead, each occupies the stage space in their way, almost as if they are unaware of each other. The lover screams, the criminal whispers; rather than acting strategies, these seem like discursive decisions by the director to address love and death.

A male name is projected onto the back of the stage, and the third actor, the child, appears. The child repeats a sentence five times, explaining why he misses school. Just when it seems like he won't speak again, he repeats the same sentence another five times. After the child repeats himself, the character we identify as the reader collapses forward, and his body disappears behind the curtain. The characters interrupt each other awkwardly, and a great cacophony reigns on stage. Still, the audience slowly begins to realize that the different characters are not trying to overtake each other's voices; on the contrary, they seek a moment of shared silence. They try to quiet themselves at the same time, together holding a silence in which to gather.

¹² By Thomas Smith, a cultural chronicle published in *The Guardian* on the premiere of the performance '*Marguerite Duras: An Approach to Writing in Three Acts*', which was staged at the 77th edition of the Avignon Festival.

These interrupted silences are the culminating moments of the play, and at the same time, they are the moments where the audience begins to grow impatient and shift in their seats. The rhythm becomes slow, perhaps too slow, making it seem as if the play might never end, and that is terrifying for the audience.

The last part's most relevant aspect is the play's anti-narrative progression and its resistance to end. Once the characters that occupy the scenic landscape proposed by the director have been introduced, the play no longer develops further. The characters repeat themselves, interrupting each other without being aware of it, and after their first few minutes on stage, they will evolve through repetition and silence. The characters bring to the stage their unique way of expressing the abandonment and loneliness they experience. This inescapable and debilitating loneliness that the characters suffer throughout the play transports us to the feelings of disorientation, pain, and meaninglessness that structure the work of Marguerite Duras.

This scenic proposal, based on quotation as a creative engine, successfully condenses the essence of the French writer and filmmaker while also proposing a transgressive aesthetic language. By reducing the scenic elements (text, light, sound, set design, and dramaturgy) to the essentials, it strikes at the heart of the audience's comprehension, telling them that if they don't want to, they don't have to understand anything, that it is all right in front of them, even though they can't see it. This play asks everything from the audience but gives everything to them; one must be willing to see it.

Nevertheless, to the relief of the few attendees who haven't left the theatre, the play ends, or we could say we are forced to leave the theatre. Suddenly, a black curtain falls at the edge of the stage while the lights come on and the ushers open the doors. As we make our way to the exit, we continue to hear the actors' murmurs and screams. The play is considered finished when the last attendees leave the room.

What some will see as a sickening exercise in the narcissism of the director, others will regard as an Olympic exercise in aesthetic contemplation and an irreverent defense of art. With this piece, _ focuses on the pursuit of shock and disruption, offering the audience everything it has so they can fantasize.

EPILOGUE.

AN OVERBLOWN PREFACE AND A NONEXISTENT PLAY

This text is an exercise in performative writing, where the way it is written is as essential for its understanding as the content and meaning of what is written. Guided by Phelan's notions of performative writing, I have not aimed to produce a text that merely reflects on Duras' work but sought a *Durasian* way of doing so. This approach has led me to create an experimental writing piece that proposes different ways of understanding and interpreting texts.

Different ways of writing propose other ways of approaching a text and its meaning and, thus, different ways of thinking. Therefore, to imagine different possibilities for approaching the meaning of what is written, I have made use of various forms of writing, such as the essayistic (in the preface), the lyrical (in the appendix), or the cultural chronicle (in the conclusion). Like the play presented in the cultural chronicle, this text employs multiple voices to disorient the reader, thereby dismantling the hegemonic tools of interpretation, such as coherence or solidity in discourse.

By proposing different tones and forms throughout the text, I demand the reader to change their approach to reading, not allowing passivity to be a strategy in engaging with the text. Faced with a polymorphous text, the reader shifts uncomfortably in their seat, searching for the vantage point from which to read, just as the spectator moves in their seat when faced with a cryptic and opaque performance. Through its different tones and genres, this text proposes a narrative dramaturgy that the reader *interprets*; the reader is the actor in this performative text, the one who brings it to life.

The function of a preface is to provide the reader with the necessary information for understanding the following text. In this text, the preface leads directly to the conclusion. The body of the text is absent. This absence of text between the preface and the conclusion is a strategy to incorporate the notions of void and disorientation explored throughout the preface, thus merging form and content. If I have employed a seemingly academic style throughout the preface—through its reflective tone, references to various authors, the use of illustrative images, and footnotes—it is so that the reader may trust what they read and be equipped with the tools to engage with the absence and emptiness that this text proposes after the preface.

Inspired by Monique Wittig's notions on *writing perversion*, I have followed a 'Trojan horse' strategy, in which I take the form of a text (in this case, the essay, which, as the most traditionally respected literary genre in Western cultures, does not recognize poetry or orality as a means of generating thought) to subvert its form and structures from within, and with that, its meaning. Subversion strategies have included the use of an allusive writing style, in which concepts acquire meaning through repetition rather than straight confrontation with them; the use of excessive footnotes that disorient the reading; and an extensive preface that jumps to the conclusion, prolonging the wait for a text that never arrives. These strategies saturate the reading and demand an active confrontation from the reader. As mentioned earlier, the reader follows the dramaturgy proposed by the reading, drifting towards the footnotes, becoming confused upon concluding without apparently anything having been developed, and needing to adjust their reading to the different tones that unfold throughout the text.

The conclusion surprises the reader through its sudden appearance, tone change, and apparent disconnection from the preface. It doesn't seem easy to read it, then, as the conclusion to something that has already been developed. At the conclusion, the interpretive clues to this text are given. The play being analyzed has the same title as the text presented, indicating their close relationship. After reading the cultural chronicle about the work, we can think that the preface that precedes it is a preface to the work being discussed or a possible academic analysis of said work.

When reading the cultural chronicle, the reader is unaware of the play it analyzes. Again, the reader must trust the reading, as a chronicle is the testimony of something that has happened, even if it is not credible. In the footnote of the conclusion, the boundaries of the text's credibility are negotiated. The media outlet exists, as does the festival where the play is premiered, and the existence of the journalist is plausible; however, the absence of the director's name (represented with an _) suggests that something is amiss, that it is, in fact, a fiction.

What I have aimed to explore with this gap between the preface and the conclusion, with this apparent disconnection between the two, is that what links them is not the linear development of thought but rather the thought towards which both are directed. Both the preface and the chronicle lead towards an experience of emptiness and silence—the former through the readings of Duras and the latter through a conceptual play about Duras' work. What links these two parts is that they testify to researching and writing with void and absence. Reading the text activates a third experience of void: that of the reader confronting an inaccessible play. The decision not to include illustrative images of the play—images that have been easily generated with AI—accentuates the lack of support for the text, further obscures the reading, demands a higher degree of imagination from the reader, and makes us think that the play never took place. What kind of cultural chronicle would not be accompanied by an image documenting what it describes?

This writing strategy leads us to think that the essential part of this text is absent—that this text does not only reflect on the absence it addresses but has been written with that absence and that the play which titles this document (commented on and integrated into the reading) is the wild exteriority of this writing. Not only have I sought to reflect on the idea of wild exteriority in Duras' work, but I have also aimed to risk writing with it to activate, in this text, the void Duras proposes to us.

This epilogue does not aim to synthesize the meaning of this research but rather to reflect with the reader on what has occurred while reading. With this document, I have not only sought to pay tribute to and reflect on Duras, but I have also used her and her work to carry out an exercise in performative writing that defends the rapturous essence of art and language. To return art to scandal, to that which overwhelms us and we cannot interpret without surrendering ourselves to it, without losing ourselves in the process. Thus, the proposed play and this text offer different paths to approach their meaning; the reader, like the spectator, must find their interpretative strategies. As Sontag concluded when reflecting on the limits of interpretation, let us advocate for an erotic of art rather than a hermeneutics of art.

That said, the decision to follow this epilogue with an appendix, where the reader will find the stage directions for the performance *Marguerite Duras: An Approach to Writing in Three Acts, a play for three actors and a reader*, is not a decision made to reveal the play or make material what we have thus far only speculated upon. I include this appendix, considering that appendices are additional spaces in texts that contain supplementary information, not always written by the same author, to provide the reader with tools for understanding—not the meaning of the text, but how I have proceeded in its writing.

I have sought to take this text as far as I could. By proposing a performance within it, I dissolve the boundaries between my artistic and theoretical practice, suggesting a multidisciplinary form of research that expands the limits of the text.

I want this text, like Duras' books, not to end with the final word written but to continue expanding into the silence that follows reading. I desire an inconclusive ending, and for that, I conclude with poetry.

APPENDIX.

MARGUERITE DURAS: AN APPROACH TO WRITING IN THREE ACTS, A PLAY FOR THREE ACTORS AND ONE READER, BY _.

The lights shot down, the room becomes dark and silent.

The stage is black. Infinite in its darkness.

The play begins, the first actor has entered the stage. The play would have begun earlier, in the silence of the darkness in the auditorium. The play began before the first actor took the stage.

The lover enters the stage.

A black silk covers his head. Black from head to abdomen.

“When I say I stopped loving him, I mean you cannot imagine how far one can go in the absence of love” is read against the black background.

He screams.

He falls silent again.

The reader appears on stage, sitting at the edge of the background. He faces away the entire time. He gazes at the black wall at the back.

For the entire duration of the performance, he stares at that black wall.

The audience doesn't know if his eyes are open or closed.

But between looking at the black wall or the black of his eyelids, it doesn't matter.

Doesn't it?

“No love can take the place of love,” is read on the black background.

The reader does not read the projected phrase because he only looks at the segment of black wall at eye level.

The second actor appears on stage, the criminal. He takes a red chalk from inside his jacket.

On the black floor, he traces a silhouette.

He lies down.

As he lies down, we see that the silhouette and his body align perfectly.

The lover slams his hand on the floor.

No one thinks it's a consequence of the criminal's action of lying down.

The criminal begins a monologue that will not stop until the play ends. We can deduce that his monologue is a list of the reasons that lead him to macabre and homicidal thoughts. He doesn't shout, he whispers. He begins:

*For the words you don't say to me
For your hair
For your mouth
For your eyes
For your gaze
For your ass
For your fingers
For the afternoon wind in your hair
For your closed mouth
For your open eyes in the afternoon
For the night over your house
For your lipstick on the glasses in the bars
For your lipstick on the glasses in the bars
For your elbows on the bar counters
For the storms far from your house
For the children who die far from your bed
For the cold tiles in your bathroom in the morning
For the narrowness of your body
For the youth of your years
For the clear hole in your ass
For the stockings that slip down to your ankles
For your little fingers
For the roundness of your shoulders
For the red of your lipstick
For seeing that red
For seeing that red
For seeing that red
For your ass
For your mouth
For your veins
For seeing that red
For seeing that red
For seeing that red
For your lipstick on the glasses in the bars
For your lipstick on the glasses in the bars
For your lipstick on the glasses in the bars
For the red of your stockings
For the piano lessons
For the solfège lessons
For the violin lessons
For the repetitions of piano
For the repetitions of piano
For the dogs at the doors of the shops
For the dogs that bite children
For the dogs that bite children
For the children bitten by dogs who contract rabies and die
For the children who will never grow again
For the children who will never grow again*

The monologue is not interrupted, and the third actor enters the stage.

The child enters the stage.

On the dark background of the stage, we read, in giant letters: ERNESTO

An Italian love song begins to play. In that song, a man sings of having killed his brother after discovering him in bed with his wife.

It is a beautiful song, so beautiful that even without understanding the lyrics, it moves you deeply.

*The child repeats the following phrase five times:
I don't want to be taught things I don't know*

Then he keeps repeating it.

By this point, the audience has forgotten the presence of the reader in the back of the theatre.

From this moment on, the play begins to end with increasingly longer moments of silence.

*The lover's screams become more spaced out.
The criminal's monologue grows quieter.
The child takes longer to repeat his phrase.*

After a while, silence becomes the dominant presence on stage.

The lover covers his eyes with the palms of his hands before letting out his final scream.

The criminal spins on himself, continuing to whisper his monologue now against the black floor.

The child repeats the phrase one last time and smiles.

*The reader falls forward. What seemed to be a black wall is in fact a black curtain, his head
plunges into the black of the fabric.*

*For a moment, the movement of his body falling shakes the curtain.
After that moment, the fabric stops moving, and once again it looks like a wall.
The black fabric falls around the reader's neck.*

*The audience sees his neck collide with the blackness at the back.
Since the play is being performed in France, the audience thinks: guillotine.*

The reader is now in the same circumstances as the lover.

They keep screaming, they keep looking for a silence together.

*A huge black cloth falls at the edge of the stage.
Before the lights come on, the audience begins to leave the theatre.
When did the play end?*

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